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Posthuman and Anthropocene Interpretations of Richard Powers's *The Overstory*

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***Abstract*—*The Overstory,* a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Richard Powers, explores contemporary ecological fiction through a sustained portrayal of environmental concerns and the relationship between humans and nature. Powers's storytelling brilliantly joins the human with the nonhuman and dismantles anthropocentrism. This paper applies Posthumanism, Anthropocene theory, and Eco-wisdom theory to examine the novel's narrative complexity and its nuanced portrayal of nonhuman worlds. Together, these theories reveal how Powers challenges anthropocentrism and reconstructs the relationship between humans and the environment. Drawing on the theories of Haraway (2016), Braidotti (2013), and Chakrabarty (2021), this paper argues that Powers unsettles species boundaries by representing trees as sentient planetary agents. *The Overstory* envisions compassionate, humble, and mutually sustaining relations that align with the emerging field of environmental humanities. Finally, *The Overstory* builds a planetary consciousness and urges readers to think beyond the human.**

***Index Terms*—environmental humanities, eco-wisdom, posthumanism, Anthropocene, climate justice**

I. Introduction

The ecological crisis of the 20th century had a profound impact on literature as attitudes to nature shifted. Novels like *Hard Times* (1854) by Charles Dickens and *North and South* (1855) by Elizabeth Gaskell engaged with capitalist structures and technologies in the early industrial novel. Mid-century literature, such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), brought environmental concerns to public discourse, heightening moral awareness. In the late 20th century, a second wave of environmental literature challenged the enduring impacts of industrial modernity on ecological and human well-being. Authors such as Annie Dillard, Barbara Kingsolver, and Margaret Atwood reconsidered the environment as a narrative force. This convergence is reflected in works such as Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* (2016) and Richard Powers's *The Overstory* (2018), which weave literary narrative, ethics, and ecology together, as outlined by Heise (2008) and Chakrabarty (2021).

A new genre of literature, known as climate fiction, allows more people to learn about the climate crisis than traditional presentations of the issue. Rather than using statistics or theories, Ferguson et al. (2025) argue that climate fiction places readers in scenarios that allow them to grapple with contemporary climate change and envision other, more desirable outcomes. This is why *The Overstory* is such important literature; it transforms the inevitable devastation of forests' future from an abstract future into something emotionally and personally vital. It makes the climate crisis intellectually, ethically, and emotionally engaging.

There is an increasing amount of literature describing the development of new storytelling that is more relational, more attuned to the world, and less focused on humans. Traditional narratives are giving way to stories that invite the participation of active voices among animals, plants, landscapes, and entire worlds. Heise (2008) suggests that climate

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fiction is an effective form of eco-cosmopolitanism, challenging not only anthropocentrism but also extending ethical responsibility to all forms of life on Earth. Chakrabarty (2021) argues that climate disaster collapses the boundaries between the human and natural history, calling us to reimagine ourselves not as isolated individuals but as a species bound together with the living world in the Anthropocene. The novel integrates science and activism to emphasize the intertwined existence of individual beings among the larger web of life on Earth. Through the perspective of Thoreau, Powers (2018) writes, "Old trees . . . are our parents, and our parents' parents, perchance. If you would learn the secrets of nature, you must practice more humanity" (p. 11). He has extended the interwoven time spans of his characters to touch the long lives of trees. This creates a narrative world that includes trees and encourages his readers to grapple with the planet.

II. Literature Review

The Overstory has gained considerable importance in the fields of Posthumanism, Environmental Humanities, and Ecocriticism. Morio and Mirbahar (2026), drawing on Garrard's (2011) concepts of dwelling, apocalypse, wilderness, and nonhuman agency, argue that Powers successfully elevates the nonhuman to the status of a moral agent. Their research further suggests that the novel promotes an eco-centric balance between humans and nature.

Seymour (2021) approaches the novel through the lens of climate justice, where activism is seen as an ethical response to ecological crisis. The radical actions of the characters, including tree-sitting demonstrations and self-sacrifice, can be interpreted as efforts to reconcile their moral consciousness with the urgent need to respond to the ecological crisis. Simultaneously, he also highlights the emotional labour involved in bearing witness to extinction.

Oppermann (2022) sees *The Overstory* as an instance of planetary storytelling, in which narrative transforms scientific and environmental-ethical concepts into a lived, song-like experience. She highlights the novel's polyphonic form and reveals how it links human lives, trees, and all living beings as active participants in the process of meaning-making. By bringing together tree time and human time, Powers creates an eco-cosmic parable that challenges readers to move beyond human-centred viewpoints. He also suggests that the novel expands human imagination by foregrounding forests' transformative power, where entangled space and time produce an apocalyptic experience beyond human limits.

More recent criticism situates *The Overstory* within broader debates about narrative structure and ecological theory. Caracciolo (2021) argues that contemporary ecological narratives challenge anthropocentric perspectives by representing the interconnected 'mesh' of human and nonhuman existence. Through a nonlinear narrative structure and ecological entanglements, *The Overstory* fits within broader debates about narrative structure and ecological theory.

III. Methodology

In this study, the methodology primarily relies on qualitative methods, including **close textual analysis** and **thematic interpretation**. However, to make these methods more concrete, this study employs the following approaches:

1. Close Textual Analysis:
   This research analyzes selective passages from *The Overstory*, focusing on particular events in which the author imagines trees as sentient, communicative structures, particularly those involving the 'Wood Wide Web.' These fragments are examined to determine how Powers distributes agency beyond the human and reimagines ecological interdependence. Through his choice of words, images, and the overall structure of the depiction, he quietly dismantles the assumption that only humans think, feel, and matter.
2. Thematic Interpretation:
   The novel is also read thematically, navigating how ideas of eco-cosmopolitanism and ecological empathy surface across its many storylines. Through the lens of posthumanism and Anthropocene theory, the novel invites readers to see themselves reflected in characters like Patricia Westerford and Nicholas Hoel, people whose lives become quietly inseparable from the forests around them. By drawing on both scientific knowledge, such as tree communication, and ethical reflection, such as human responsibility towards nature, Powers builds a narrative that reimagines humanity's place in the ecological world.

This paper analyzes *The Overstory* from the perspectives of posthumanism, Anthropocene theory, and eco-wisdom, focusing on the novel's indictments of anthropocentrism alongside its notions of planetary ethics and ecological mindfulness. As Haraway (2016) and Braidotti (2013) illustrate, posthumanism rejects anthropocentrism and recognizes that human and nonhuman communities, along with the biosphere, shape their common ethics and narratives. *The Overstory* considers trees, fungi, and forests as beings with their own timeliness and agency, synonymous with that of a human being. This depicts a posthuman perspective that moves away from a human-centred perspective and, as a result, cultivates ethical and narrative meaning among the species, disrupting the anthropocentric worldview of human supremacy.

Chakrabarty (2021) and Morton (2013) describe the Anthropocene as an active force shaping the planet's transformation. *The Overstory* brings this entanglement of time and space to life through the interwoven lives of its human characters and the clear contrast between fleeting human existences and the long-lived trees. Powers highlights the need to recognize the unity of the biosphere rather than human domination, drawing attention to how deeply species and natural

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systems are interconnected. In this way, the woods in the novel foreground the ethical and existential consequences of human actions for the health of the planet.

Eco-wisdom, posthumanism and Anthropocene theory invite ethical intellectual engagement with the nonhuman world, leading to empathy, mutuality, and sustainable relations (Oppermann, 2022; Kimmerer, 2013). The novel's branching narrative formally enacts the interrelation between ecosystems and humans, proposing ethically informed human actions in the Anthropocene. Combined, these theoretical frameworks elevate *The Overstory* beyond a simple 'tree story' into a posthuman, ethical, and ecological novel that redefines notions of human agency, responsibility, and identity.

First, this theoretical framework provides a comprehensive lens through which *The Overstory* functions as both a literary and a moral intervention, one that imagines how literature can help cultivate planetary consciousness and eco-wisdom in the face of the climate crisis. Second, eco-wisdom as conceptualized in this paper, does not imply a nostalgic return to nature; rather, it articulates a relational ethics grounded in ecological interdependence. Drawing on Kimmerer's (2013) concept of reciprocal ecology and Oppermann's (2022) notion of planetary storytelling, eco-wisdom situates people within a biotic web of more-than-human entities. Such a framework aligns with posthuman ethics of distributed agency across species and Anthropocene thinking about collective planetary responsibility.

IV. Results and Discussion

A. Trees as Posthuman Entities

Richard Powers's *The Overstory* describes trees as living, sentient beings. This challenges anthropocentric views that restrict meaning and sense-making to the human mind. Powers (2018) states that "trees have been attempting to communicate with humans for a long time, yet they do so at a frequency too low for most people to perceive" (p. 404). In Powers's view, trees remember, have a personality, and evolve, producing a narrative that approaches posthuman ecology, in which agency is distributed across species. Westerford's work, which estranges her within academia, draws attention to the idea of humans depending on nonhuman intelligence. Powers (2018) claims that "everything in the forest is the forest" (p. 112), which demonstrates the interconnectedness and interdependence of beings, and encourages people to see that we, too, are part of a greater whole. Westerford, too, calls the forest a kind of language and thus, a kind of democracy; this perspective of the forest as a democratic system of being subverts anthropocentric hierarchies.

Simard's (2021) exploration of mycorrhizal networks places a powerful scientific framework on this understanding of forest intelligence. Davies (2025) describes the forest as not a collection of trees. Instead, it is a profoundly interdependent community of trees, a finding Powers translates into narrative form with a remarkable fidelity to ecological reality.

The relationship between Nicholas Hoel and the chestnut tree illustrates the bond between two beings that span multiple generations and species. The chestnut tree fulfils multiple functions; it is an ancestor, an archive, and a record. It shows the impact people have on the world that is handed down to them. When Hoel envisions his future descendants, "one day, my children will shake the trunks and be free to eat..." (Powers, 2018, p. 12), he is not dreaming of an abundant World. He is making a time-bound promise, aligning with Braidotti's (2013) concept of zoe-centred egalitarianism, which holds that value extends beyond the human species. A human life flickers briefly compared to the lifespan of a chestnut tree. Powers uses this contrast to challenge the notion that meaningful time is relative only to the human species. *The Overstory* creates a new way of thinking about human-nonhuman species interaction. Through metaphor and narrative that create consciousness of trees, Powers encourages the reader to think about the environment in a new, ethical, and cultural way. The text transforms literature into a post-human ecosystem, a tale that serves as a medium of ecological cognition.

Powers's novel suggests that trees are not merely symbols of endurance and beauty but also agents of change, whose silence reveals the foolishness and destructiveness of human actions. In other words, it is an alternative to the industrial and extractive logics that see trees merely as resources, rather than as living communities. Powers urges a moral and ontological shift in how we see the world. The profound transformation described above resonates with Latour's (2004) notion of political ecology, in which nature is no longer an external object but an actor in collective affairs. Nevertheless, *The Overstory* signals a 'posthuman' turn for the environmental humanities, dismantling anthropocentric systems of knowing to see trees as agents of history and meaning. By merging scientific realism with a certain mythic reverence, Powers envisions trees as conscious, agentive, and morally significant beings and further reconfigures the novel's form to re-orient our ecological imagination.

However, it is worth acknowledging that some critics have questioned whether Powers's representation of trees risks romanticising nonhuman agency, potentially oversimplifying the complex and often indifferent processes of ecological systems. Such critiques remind us that posthuman ethics must be grounded not only in empathy but also in scientific rigour and critical self-awareness. Powers himself navigates this tension carefully, grounding his arboreal imagination in the real science of mycorrhizal networks and forest communication rather than pure metaphor.

B. Anthropocene and Temporal Consciousness Ethics

The Overstory embodies philosophical and ethical dimensions of the Anthropocene, a term coined by Crutzen (2002) to describe an epoch in which human life begins to shape geological processes. The Anthropocene concept suggests a paradoxical dimension to human progress. The advancement of technology has not only improved human life but also polluted the environment and destabilized Earth's fragile balance. The story of people and trees explores humans' right to existence in a world dominated by industrialization and climate change. The merging of deep ecological time on long

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timescales resembles Chakrabarty's (2009) argument that the Anthropocene blurs the distinction between natural and human history.

The novel also contrasts the long life of trees with the short life of humans, thereby portraying the moral implications of consumption and environmental degradation. Human systems tend to be immediate and extractive, whereas trees exemplify slow, regenerative ecological systems. Therefore, Powers invites readers to view the world ecologically, from a perspective that is no longer human-centred but that recognises ecological continuity and a temporal dimension. In this way, climate awareness arises from a humility toward the timescales of natural processes. The novel offers glimpses into transformations in humans that emerge from an awareness of reliance on the global biosphere. Characters such as Olivia Vandergriff and Adam Appich undergo profound changes in perception. Olivia's near-death experience does not return her to ordinary life, but opens her to something larger. She does not use rational thinking to undergo this transformation. Instead, she draws on the natural world's rhythms and patience to navigate her journey. As Powers (2018) describes, this integration with the natural world dissolves destructive boundaries: "You cannot see the forest without thinking of the trees; you cannot see the trees without thinking of yourself. You see everything, myself in it all" (p. 205). This passage demonstrates how one begins to see the self within everything, erasing the separation between observer and environment.

Building on this, in the Anthropocene, it is necessary to be aware of the interactions between human decisions and ecological, social, and economic systems. Adam attempts to answer these questions as a scholar, and his scepticism toward modern culture aligns with a naturally progressive ecological outlook. This mirrors the novel's own distrust of modernity, expressed more gently but with equal stubbornness. The living forest thus emerges as a protest site, a space for critical inquiry and ethical reflection on the Anthropocene. While the novel addresses numerous detrimental aspects of the human relationship with nature, one particularly significant issue is time dissonance, arising from human impatience versus the slow, measured pace of trees. Powers (2018) captures this tension powerfully: "The trees cannot forget what man forgets" (p. 208). Morton's (2013) concept of the hyperobject is applicable here, as Powers uses the forest as a vast, dominant presence that compels readers to think and act at scales far beyond ordinary human perception. *The Overstory* places interconnectedness at the heart of life, in direct opposition to individualism. Bennett's (2010) "vibrant materialism," which proposes that agency is not exclusive to humans, Powers crafts trees that are more than passive symbols; they are active participants in the unfolding of life. The novel ultimately invites readers, through narrative empathy, to think beyond their own perspectives and inhabit the experiences and feelings of all living things.

In doing so, it challenges the industrial logic that has driven environmental degradation for centuries and calls for a deeper, more planetary sense of human purpose. At the same time, the novel critiques the Anthropocene and explores possibilities of collective survival. As Haraway (2016) suggests, the novel envisions an ethical framework that moves beyond human-centred thinking to include more-than-human worlds. In this way, *The Overstory* becomes both a diagnosis of the present and an imaginative vision of posthuman, eco-ethical coexistence.

C. Environmental Understanding and Social Survival

In Powers's narrative, the forest contains more than the beauty of a natural setting. The forest symbolizes memory, wisdom, and gentle strength. The forest's presence critiques the Enlightenment, which prefers abstract reason over the relational, embodied knowledge it represents. The changing perception of the forest combines ecological philosophies and contemporary posthuman thought and represents a more relational way of living to survive than a hierarchical way. Powers encourages the reader to experience what Garrard (2011) names the 'ecological imagination' and have a more intimate and ethical connection to the world. *The Overstory* is not just a book about the importance of trees but also an invitation for the literary world to connect with the world of nature, where we belong. Patricia's solitary searches, Ray and Dorothy's tree-mediated rekindling, and Neelay's virtual existence do not represent a disconnection but form an interconnected narrative, like a forest. Powers builds a story about interdependent human and nonhuman lives.

Powers's characters discover and enact a 'parliament of things' (Latour, 2004) where genuine conversation about how to co-exist is possible, and humans and nonhumans are not separated by category. The eco-wisdom that emerges from this conversation is not mystical or abstract. It requires the patience present in slow, humble living. The trees in this novel offer no lectures and demonstrate instead. Powers (2018) argues that "the world must first be heard and then acted upon" (p. 250). The suggested way to live more honestly, as this novel suggests, is to learn to listen to the slow accumulation of ecological time and the forest. The reciprocity that Kimmerer (2013) describes is through acknowledging and genuinely relating to the Earth through care and mutuality rather than extraction.

Powers hints that the deepening of humanity's perceptual crisis is as important to consider as the environmental crisis. Powers suggests that storytelling itself might be the remedy for this collective forgetting. When Nicholas Hoel listens to the chestnut, not merely observing it but genuinely hearing it, the novel offers one of its most moving moments: "The chestnut remembers, and we remember with it" (Powers, 2018, p. 142). Powers reminds us of the voice we lost beneath the relentless wave of modern progress. *The Overstory* reaches toward what Powers (2018) calls the "oldest wisdom on earth" (p. 360). Humanity's survival, the novel insists, is inextricably linked to the health of the natural world. And as seeds disperse across continents in the novel's closing pages, Powers offers something rare in ecological fiction, genuine, unforced hope. Wherever a living thread between one organism and the biosphere is restored, something begins again.

D. Narrative as Global and Ethical Intervention

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Powers's *The Overstory* is fascinating as it does not simply tell a story about nature; it brings the reader into the story. The novel portrays how the structure of a forest has layers, similar to the structure of the novel, and extends in numerous directions with connections that may not be visible at first, but are nonetheless present. Traditional novels usually have stories that are told in a straight line. A story that extends in multiple directions and delves deeper than the visible is an analogy for roots and branches. Having this structure conveys that being ecologically conscious is not merely talking, but rather a way of being that invites the audience to be conscious and embrace nature.

Powers deliberately disrupts his narrative structure, moving away from the straightforward, linear storytelling that the novel itself subtly critiques. By weaving through different times, voices, and species, the novel challenges readers to rethink what a story is and who it truly belongs to. This idea aligns with what Iovino and Oppermann (2012) describe as a "material narrativity," in which trees, soil, seeds, and underground fungi are not merely background elements but active participants shaping the unfolding story. When Powers shifts from a human-centred narrative to one that genuinely embraces multiple species, he is not simply making a stylistic choice; he is making an ethical statement, encouraging readers to experience the narrative as a forest experiences time: collectively, patiently, and without a single dominant perspective.

This understanding of narrative as a more-than-human practice finds strong theoretical support in the work of Celermajer and Otjen (2024), who argue that the stories we tell either open space for nonhuman beings or quietly close it. Narrative, in their view, is never neutral; it either grants other species a place in the moral world or denies them one. Powers's novel takes precisely the path Celermajer and Otjen advocate: it does not position the human as the sole subject of the story but allows the forest, the chestnut, the mycorrhizal network, and the ancient redwood to carry their own weight. The intertextual and historical allusions in the novel also foster what Buell (1995) calls the environmental imagination, a literary perspective that mirrors and informs our ecological thinking. The novel also develops an ethical outlook that is humble and responsible, reminding us that humanity is only one species in the vast ecological landscape.

Further, Powers employs ethical reflection through changes in the voice. The story exemplifies a form of posthuman narrative ethics, in which narration is less an instrument than a space of habitation. Powers democratises the narrative by decentring human characters in favour of trees and ecosystems, so that human centrality in the traditional novel gives way to the claims of trees and forests. *The Overstory* thus transforms the novel into an eco-cosmopolitan narrative, connecting local environmental problems with global environmental consciousness. The connectivity Powers draws attention to transcend territorial and species differences, and encourages a sense of world citizenship. Through the narrative, he seeks to train the reader to think relationally, as any violence done to another being can affect larger ecosystems.

Finally, *The Overstory* can be read as an example of how literature might foster ecological consciousness, cultivate sensitivity, and rebuild empathy amid environmental alienation. The narrative style through which Powers portrays the Anthropocene does not merely make readers feel as though they are in the Anthropocene; it offers them an embodied experience, allowing them to feel the vibrations of the nonhuman world. Reading the novel, in this sense, becomes an ecological healing process.

V. Conclusion

The Overstory by Richard Powers offers a revolutionary reimagining of human-nature relations in the Anthropocene, granting trees narrative agency and revealing the deep structures of ecological interdependence. It challenges anthropocentric frameworks grounded in the logic of the Industrial Revolution. This paper illustrates how Powers reshapes wisdom through posthuman ethics and complex narrative, constructing eco-wisdom as a form of collective planetary consciousness. The novel values relational existence, a view consistent with the work of Haraway (2016), Braidotti (2013), and Chakrabarty (2021), who advocate distributed agency across living and non-living beings. Powers's novel provides an ethical response to the ecological crisis, suggesting that survival must be a collective endeavour rather than an individual struggle. Finally, *The Overstory* demonstrates that climate consciousness can be sparked by re-enacting the connections between readers, trees, ecosystems, and the wider world. The novel, which brings art, science, and ethics into dialogue, offers a renewed opportunity to embrace multi-species coexistence and affirms that narrative art is one of humanity's most powerful resources for planetary survival. In this way, *The Overstory* not only represents an ecological crisis; it participates in the work of environmental and intergenerational justice, inviting readers to take responsibility for the ways human actions shape the conditions of life for more-than-human others and for future generations. *The Overstory* reminds readers that the ecological crisis cannot be solved with the same destructive mindset that created it. Instead, the novel calls for humility, connection, and shared responsibility with the natural world. As a posthuman narrative, it is itself an act of caring literature. It asks us to move beyond simply observing nature and to genuinely feel our place within it, alongside all living beings in the Anthropocene.

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Familiar and False: A Study of English–Albanian False Friends Across Two Translation Directions

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***Abstract*—As false friends pose recurring challenges to vocabulary acquisition, this bidirectional study aims to analyze the correlation between the variables of translation direction and self-assessment with false-friend errors. For the purposes of this study, students performed a translation task in both translation directions. Additionally, students were asked to provide a self-evaluation after completing the task. The results highlighted that translation direction plays a minor role in the occurrence of false-friend errors and that performance inaccuracies are associated with high levels of self-reported confidence. Therefore, through presenting a list of 35 full false friends shared between Albanian and English, the study aims to emphasize the importance of targeted contrastive analysis in moderating the effects of deceptive surface similarity.**

***Index Terms*—false friends, translation direction, errors, accuracy, confidence**

I. Introduction

Mistranslations are considered a by-product of bilingualism. They are usually harmless, but in particular circumstances, they carry significant consequences. The following historical diplomatic misunderstanding in 1830 between the French and American governments is cited by the BBC as one of the greatest mistranslations ever. 'Le gouverenement français demande…' sparked controversy because it was translated as 'The French government demands' (Macdonald, 2015). This faulty translation prompted the US President to express indignation and pause negotiations.

The misunderstanding stemmed from the French verb *demander*, which actually corresponds to the English verb *to ask*. The instance depicts a typical example of a linguistic phenomenon known as false friends; a manifestation of interference, which happens when "two given words in two or more given natural languages are graphically and/or phonetically the same or very alike; yet, their meanings may be totally or partially different" (Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008, p. 1). The issue of false friends is deserving of attention, especially because false assumptions about their semantic meaning often go undetected and may ultimately lead to error fossilization.

Although studies on false friends are abundant, research has mainly focused on language pairs involving English and various languages such as French, German, and Spanish (Friel & Kennison, 2001; Frunza & Inkpen, 2008; Roca-Varela, 2015). However, in the context of Albanian-English pairs, such studies remain few in number.

Addressing the gap, the present study seeks to explore how false-friend interference manifests across both translation directions and examine students' abilities to assess their own performance. The study seeks to elaborate on the reasons for the persistence of false-friend errors among advanced learners.

II. Literature Review

A. Classification of False Friends

(a). Classification Based on Etymological Criteria

Based on etymological criteria, Chamizo-Domínguez (2008) distinguishes between chance and semantic false friends, noting that the occurrence of the first type is a result of mere coincidence. On the other hand, semantic false friends can be traced to one common etymological source, usually Greek or Latin. While English and Albanian differ vastly etymologically-Albanian belonging to the Indo-European group and English being a Germanic language–both their lexicons have borrowed from the abovementioned common sources, which has in turn led to shared lexical pairs that resemble in surface, but differ in semantic meaning.

This categorization provides important historical insights into the nature of false friends. However, a categorization based on etymological criteria falls out of the scope of this study, which centers on semantic gaps in student knowledge.

(b). Classification Based on Semantic Criteria

Based on semantic criteria, Chamizo-Domínguez (2008) differentiates full from partial false friends. While full false friends have diverged completely in their semantic meaning, partial false friends retain a degree of semantic overlap.

For instance, the lexical pair *argument–argument* may present difficulty to Albanian students, who are familiar with

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the shared meaning of '*a reason to support one's idea*', but do not consider the additional English meaning of '*to quarrel*'. Shaba and Selmani (2023) indicate that these instances are relatively harder to discern because lexical items in English are often polysemantic.

For this reason, only full false friends between English and Albanian were considered. This choice in study scope was made to ensure that the lexical items could be translated without contextual cues, and that the retrieved responses were either right or wrong.

B. Bilingual Lexical Access and the Revised Hierarchical Model: A Theoretical Framework for Contextualizing False-Friend Errors

Various theories have emerged to explain how the bilingual brain processes language. The most prominent are the language-selective and language-nonselective access hypotheses. The first theory claims that the bilingual brain activates lexical items from the target language only, keeping lexicons separate when performing linguistic tasks (Gerard & Scarborough, 1989). On the other hand, the second theory claims that it is difficult for bilinguals to retain a clear distinction between the two linguistic systems when performing a linguistic task (De Groot, 2011).

Indeed, various studies have demonstrated that lexical items that are visually similar tend to activate semantic meanings from both lexicons irrespective of the language in which the task is being conducted (Van Assche et al., 2020). For instance, Poort et al. (2016) observed that encountering a homograph in one language was enough to influence processing of a corresponding homograph in another language. Similarly, false-friend visual similarities urge the bilingual brain to store both lexical items under the same semantic meaning, a process that later manifests as erroneous utterances, unless the bilingual is made aware of the difference in semantic meaning.

However, in reality, bilinguals often lack such a heightened sense of linguistic awareness, which is why they often seek reassurance in familiar spellings and/or pronunciations. From a theoretical viewpoint, the Revised Hierarchical Model argues that L2 novel concepts are acquired through L1 mediation (Kroll & Stewart, 1994). Consequently, translation into the mother tongue (L2→L1) is regarded as relatively much easier compared to translation from the mother tongue (L1→L2). However, this assumption is rightfully questioned, since false friends constitute a particular vocabulary segment that is highly susceptible to error production.

C. Deceptive Surface Similarity and Misleading Confidence

Research indicates that improper use of false friends leads to the creation of inappropriate lexical associations. Consequently, once these inappropriate associations are formed, 'it may become more difficult for the language learner to form the correct association than it would be with translations that differ in sound and appearance' (Friel & Kennison, 2001, p. 253). The main issue lies in surface similarity, which fosters a strong sense of conviction in one's lexical knowledge. It is this deceptive surface similarity that leads students to believe that they possess the correct semantic information. This, in turn, prevents them from questioning what they deem common knowledge. Therefore, the study focuses on confidence as an important variable to be examined.

D. Research Questions

For the aforementioned reasons, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

- What is the relationship between inaccuracy and translation direction? Is there a translation direction that is more vulnerable to false-friend errors?
- What behavioral patterns do students exhibit when they translate false friends? Do they experience overconfidence/underconfidence, or is their confidence realistic?
- Is there a linear relationship between confidence and performance? Do students who report higher confidence perform better or worse individually?

III. Methodology

A. Sample

The study was conducted at the Faculty of Foreign Languages at the University of Tirana. A total of 90 undergraduate English majors participated in the study. All students were native Albanian speakers. They were in their first year of their Bachelor's studies and were expected to have reached B2 proficiency because they had been studying English since third grade and they were majoring in the field. Participants were divided into two groups of 45 students each. The first group was asked to perform the translation task from English to Albanian, while the second group was asked to complete it from Albanian to English. Students were informed beforehand that the data was confidential and would be used for research purposes only.

B. Instrument

A translation task consisting of 35 lexical items was used. All the lexical items are full false friends shared between English and Albanian. They were selected as representations of words that are often confusing for Albanian students, and presented in isolation rather than within a sentence to ensure that students' lexical knowledge was tested directly without the aid of contextual cues. The list of English-Albanian full false friends is presented below. The list was administered to

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both groups, with the only distinction being the translation direction. The shared etymology and divergence in meaning are provided for each pair of false friends.

TABLE 1
LIST OF ABSOLUTE FALSE FRIENDS SHARED BETWEEN ALBANIAN AND ENGLISH

#	Albanian word	English word	Shared etymology	Meaning in Albanian	Meaning in English
1.	Akademia	Academia	Latin Academe	an institution of higher education	life, community, world of teachers and education
2.	Aktual	Actual	Latin Actualis	happening now	real, factual
3.	Distinktiv	Distinctive	French. Distinctif	a visible badge (police, military)	special, noticeable
4.	Dispozicion	Disposition	Latin Disposition	at someone's disposal	temperament, legal transfer of property
5.	I Edukuar	Educated	Latin Educatus	concerning good manners	referring to training and knowledge received at school/university
6.	Emergjent	Emergent	Latin Emergens	urgent	coming into existence
7.	Fabrikë	Fabric	Latin Faber	a factory	textile, cloth
8.	Faktikisht	Factually	Latin Factum	actually, in fact	relating to facts
9.	Fizikan	Physicist	No shared etymology	a scientist in physics	a medical doctor
10.	Gjenial	Genial	Latin Genialis	brilliant, ingenious	friendly, cheerful, pleasant
11.	Ilustrues	Illustrious	Latin Illustrāre (illuminate) Latin Illustris (distinguished)	serving to illustrate	famous, well respected, admired
12.	Impresionues	Impressionable	Latin Impression	impressive, leaving a strong impact	easily influenced, esp. emotionally or mentally
13.	Injorant	Ignorant	Latin Ignorare	rude and uncultured	lacking knowledge
14.	Instancë	Instance	Latin Instantia	a formal authority level	a specific case, an example
15.	Komoditet	Commodity	Latin Commoditas	comfort	referring to raw material
16.	Kondicioner	Conditioner	Latin Conditio	air conditioner	hair conditioner, fabric softener
17.	Krudo	Crude	Latin Crudus	raw, uncooked food	broader sense; unrefined, vulgar, harsh
18.	Librari	Library	Latin Librarium	a bookstore	a place where books are read
19.	Magazinë	Magazine	French magasin	a storehouse	a print periodical
20.	Mimikë	Mimic	Greek. Mimikos	facial expressions	a person who imitates
21.	Miting	Meeting	English borrowing	a political rally, a protest	any kind of gathering
22.	Mizor	Miser	Latin Miser	describing a state of poverty	describing a stingy person
23.	Moderator	Moderator	Latin Moderator	a TV/radio host, show presenter	debate facilitator, online forum manager
24.	Novelë	Novel	Latin Novella	a short story	a long fictional narrative
25.	Ordiner	Ordinary	Latin Ordinarius	a rude, vulgar, low-class person (derogatory)	usual, common, not special (neutral)
26.	Pamflet	Pamphlet	Latin Pamphilus	a short satirical piece	a brochure
27.	Pedagog	Pedagogue	Greek. Paidagogos	a university professor	a strict, pedantic teacher
28.	Pretendoj	Pretend	Latin Praetendo	to lay claim	to give a false appearance of being/possessing
29.	Prokuror	Procurer	Latin Procurare	a public prosecuter	referring to a pimp
30.	Relacion	Relation	Latin Relation	a formal written report	connection; family member
31.	Replikë	Replica	Latin. Replicare	a verbal reply, retort	a physical copy, reproduction
32.	Sensibël	Sensible	Latin Sensibilis	sensitive	practical, reasonable
33.	Simpatik	Sympathetic	In Albanian: from French sympathique In English from Latin sympathia	likeable, pleasant, attractive	showing compassion and understanding
34.	Tekstualisht	Textually	Latin Textus	verbatim	in a way that relates to the text at hand
35.	Xhentil	Gentle	Latin Gentilis	referring to a gentleman	soft, mild, kind

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C. Procedure and Data Analysis

Students were divided into two groups and were requested to work independently without the help of physical or online dictionaries. They were given a 50-minute time limit. At the end, they were asked to rate how confident they felt throughout the task on a 10-point Likert scale (1 = least confident; 10 = most confident).

The study considered only correct responses and inaccuracies attributed to false-friend interference, since they constituted the essence of the study, and ignored unrelated errors and missing translations. After categorizing each translation, JASP was used to provide a statistical analysis of the data by conducting a Chi-square test of independence and a Pearson's correlation test.

IV. Results

A. Student Performance in Both Translation Directions: Relationship Between Translation Direction and Accuracy

The results indicated that students of the Albanian → English group performed relatively better. Respectively, the error rates were 61.92% for the English → Albanian direction and 56.09% for the Albanian → English direction. A Chi-square test of independence was conducted to determine whether there was a relationship between error rates and translation direction. Indeed, an association between the variables was found, as indicated by $p=0.03$. The p-value ($p<0.05$) shows that translation direction influenced error frequency, and that the higher error frequency in the English → Albanian direction was not a mere coincidence. Therefore, this translation direction was more vulnerable to false-friend errors.

Even though there is an existing association between the two variables, Cramer's $V = 0.059$ indicated that the strength of said association was weak, which means that translation direction affected accuracy, but only slightly so. Therefore, false-friend interference between Albanian and English cannot be attributed solely to translation direction. This means that there are additional factors that condition its occurrence.

B. Perceived Versus Actual Performance: Assessment of Confidence Patterns

Students from both groups were asked to rate their overall confidence in performing the translations, as it was a necessary step in assessing students' metacognition, which has been linked to mitigating the effects of language interference. Haukås (2018) argues that an important part of metacognition is strengthening the ability to differentiate between known and unknown information. In the context of the study, students were largely unaware of their semantic knowledge gaps.

Indeed, the results in Table 2 indicate incongruity between confidence and performance. Specifically, the wide gaps between mean accuracy and mean confidence in both groups suggest patterns of overconfidence. That is to say, students believe that they are performing markedly better than their actual performance suggests.

Although both groups displayed overconfidence, students in the Albanian → English group exercised greater caution when translating from their mother tongue, taking additional time to consider semantic meaning prior to proceeding with the translation. The figures in Table 2 indicate that they were generally better calibrated than the English → Albanian group, as indicated by higher accuracy and lower overconfidence.

Table 2
Evidence of Overconfidence Patterns Among Students

Translation Direction	Accuracy (Mean)	Confidence (Mean)	Difference	Overconfidence
English→Albanian	38.03%	70.67%	+32.64	Yes
Albanian→English	44.00%	69.33%	+25.33	Yes

C. Confidence and Accuracy: Is There a Linear Relationship?

Although the results have already established that students exhibit tendencies toward overconfidence, it was important to examine confidence as a student's individual attribute. Therefore, a Pearson's correlation test was conducted to determine whether students who reported higher confidence tended to perform proportionally better or worse.

The Pearson's correlation test, displayed in Table 3 and Table 4, which is numerically very close to zero in both cases, indicated that there was neither a positive nor a negative correlation between accuracy and confidence. While overconfidence was a consistent trend within the group, accuracy varied significantly among students; it did not increase or decrease following a consistent pattern. Therefore, the findings suggest that self-reported confidence cannot be used as a predictor of accuracy. It is evident that students exhibit an inability to judge their performance realistically, which, coupled with patterns of overconfidence, discourages them from questioning their knowledge and reinforces their tendency to seek reassurance from visually similar lexical items.

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TABLE 3
PEARSON'S CORRELATION TEST FOR THE ENGLISH → ALBANIAN DIRECTION

Pearson's Correlations ▼

			Pearson's r	p
Accuracy (%)	-	Confidence.	−0.001	.993

TABLE 4
PEARSON'S CORRELATION TEST FOR THE ALBANIAN → ENGLISH DIRECTION

Pearson's Correlations

			Pearson's r	p
Accuracy (%)	-	Confidence.	0.017	.910

V. DISCUSSIONS

A. Overall Findings

In accordance with the language-nonselective access hypothesis, high error rates in both groups indicate that students were activating items from both mental lexicons simultaneously. The errors, in fact, reflect fossilized inappropriate lexical associations.

The results indicated that the English → Albanian direction, however, was more susceptible to false-friend errors. Apparently, translation into the mother tongue led students to feel more confident and disregard further semantic analysis. Indeed, the study's findings indicated that backward translation, which is generally associated with few difficulties and higher accuracy, proved to be a greater challenge for Albanian students. Although a relationship between direction and inaccuracy was identified, the correlation was relatively weak, indicating that error occurrence was only partially influenced by translation direction.

In addition to direction, the study examined the variable of self-reported confidence to draw conclusions on students' actual and perceived performance. The results point to patterns of overconfidence in both groups. Therefore, the results suggest that false-friend errors are largely associated with overconfidence tendencies.

Lastly, although it is highly recommended that students foster the ability to self-evaluate, self-assessment in these circumstances proves highly unreliable, as correlation testing indicated no linear relationship between confidence and accuracy.

B. Individual Examination of False-Friend Pairs

Although the overall findings suggest that in the context of false-friend interference between Albanian and English, the English → Albanian direction was more susceptible to student errors, individual variation was observed within the pairs. That is to say that the two items within the same pair did not necessarily elicit the same number of errors in a predictable pattern. Conversely, there were instances in which the results indicated stark asymmetry in error rates within pairs. For the purposes of this study, this variation warrants a discussion to frame the quantitative findings.

Komoditet and *commodity* is the first example that the study considers. It seems that students encountered greater difficulty translating the lexical item *commodity* than its false friend *komoditet.* As an Italian borrowing into Albanian, students were able to associate *komoditet* with a sense of ease and comfort, leading them to opt for the correct translation at a rate of 60%. However, the strong lexical associations formed by surface similarity and students' unfamiliarity with the meaning of *commodity,* referring to raw materials, resulted in an error rate of approximately 80% in the English → Albanian translation direction.

However, the contrary pattern manifests in the *pretendoj-pretend* pair. A higher error rate is observed in translation from the mother tongue than in translation from English. Indeed, the error rate when translating from Albanian to English was substantial, reaching 84%. On the other hand, the error rate when translating the lexical item *pretend* was significantly lower, although nearly 50% of translations in this direction fell into false-friend interference category. It appears that students were more familiar with the semantic meaning of *pretend,* which is a lexical concept that they frequently encounter in day-to-day communication, as opposed to the meaning of *claim,* which actually corresponds to the Albanian lexical item *pretendoj.* Although both *pretend* and *claim* are classified at B1 proficiency, it appears that the frequency of exposure plays an important role in imprinting semantic meaning on one's mental lexicon.

By contrast, there are false friends that are equally problematic across both translation directions. Typical examples of this phenomenon include the *aktual–actual* and the *librari–library* false-friend pairs. Evidently, there is enough semantic vicinity between the corresponding semantic meanings of 'current' and 'real' to suggest that *aktual* and *actual* are each other's translation equivalents. Similarly, the point of convergence between *librari* and *library* is book possession. Consequently, this converging point is sufficient to blur the lines between the meanings of 'a place where books are bought' and 'a place where books are borrowed'.

Additionally, interesting findings were observed in cases where lexical items are imbued with differences in stylistic

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nuances. The *ordiner–ordinary* pair posed great difficulties because the faulty semantic association within this pair is strengthened by means of the derogatory connotation that the Albanian lexical item carries. While the English lexical item *ordinary* belongs to a neutral diction, the Albanian false friend conveys a negative connotation. It is this negative connotation that overrides the English item's neutral tone.

A similar confusion on account of differing lexical connotations was observed in the case of the *pedagog–pedagogue* pair. However, it is the English lexical item that carries the pejorative meaning in this case. While the Albanian language assigns a neutral meaning to *pedagog,* referring to a university professor, the English language imbues *pedagogue* with a slightly negative connotation of a strict teacher who adheres to formal rules and trivial matters.

Finally, the sensibël-*sensible* pair presented a very interesting case. As shown by the translations, although students seemed aware that both lexical items were adjectives describing human behavior, they presumably failed to take into account the contrastive semantic meanings. Albanian students associate *sensibël* with sensitivity. In their mother tongue, this lexical item typically depicts a person whose decision-making process is guided by personal feelings. Therefore, this lexical representation undermines the acquisition of the correct meaning of the English *sensible*, which refers to a person who appeals to reason rather than feelings.

The abovementioned examples aim to illustrate that the difficulty in differentiating between false friends lies not only in misleading surface structure, but also in identifying the ties that bind them together. Sometimes, the tie is merely surface structure or common etymology, as in the case of *commodity* and *komoditet.* However, at other times, the tie is solidified by additional factors, including semantic meanings that:

- stand in complete opposition (*sensibël* and *sensible*),
- denote variance in stylistic nuances (*ordiner* and *ordinary*),
- or share a converging point (*librari–library*).

Although the examples elaborated on above are simply a few of the false-friend pairs examined in this study, their qualitative analysis provides further insights into the causes underlying error production.

VI. Suggestions and Conclusions

The study intentionally sampled students who had received extensive English exposure over the years to portray false-friend errors as a dormant issue. Their manifestation is not immediate; it is usually noticed after inappropriate lexical associations have already formed.

Indeed, patterns of overconfidence suggest that students rarely question their preconceived knowledge because they overestimate the reliability of lexical surface similarity. Overconfidence patterns in both sampled groups indicate that students generally believe that they are performing significantly better than their performance suggests, which means that they are not aware of the semantic and connotative differences that permeate false friends. Additionally, the absence of a linear correlation between confidence and accuracy further underpins the fact that self-judgment is often fallible, and may easily hinder students' initiative to monitor their lexical knowledge.

The evident discrepancy between confidence and performance, which stems from students not being made aware of individual semantic differences, necessitates an item-level analysis that further explains the issue of false-friend error production. Consequently, the discussion section considered several examples of false-friend pairs to highlight that error distribution does not follow a predictable pattern, although a statistical relationship between translation direction and inaccuracy can be established.

In conclusion, the production of false-friend errors in the Albanian students' context is a summation of multiple factors that are inextricably intertwined, such as translation direction, the presence of overconfidence, and unfamiliarity with lexical-item-specific characteristics. For the abovementioned reasons, the study advocates targeted contrastive analysis rather than independent inference of the semantic meaning on the students' part. Although it is traditionally believed that contextual cues eventually help students decode semantic meaning, the assumption does not always hold true, because "the contexts in which false friends occur can sometimes be ambiguous enough to 'accept' both the real and the apparent but false meaning" (Frantzen, 1998, p. 250). Indeed, the sentence '*I read a very interesting novel last night'* does not provide substantial clarity as to help Albanian students disambiguate between '*a long fictional narrative'* and '*a short story',* the latter semantic meaning being activated by the Albanian *novelë.*

Therefore, explicit instruction is essential to draw students' attention to false-friend pairs. For example, an explicit explanation juxtaposing the semantic differences between English and Albanian lexical items that share orthographic and phonetic resemblance would be useful to bilinguals (Shaba & Selmani, 2023). Drawing attention to semantic opposition, connotative nuances, and etymological variation may help mitigate students' dependence on formal similarity, which, when taken at face value, ultimately leads to error fossilization.

Overall, the quantitative findings suggest that translation direction affects student performance on false-friend errors. Although the relationship between the variables exists, the strength of said association is weak, as false friends present intricate individual characteristics, which, coupled with the presence of excessive confidence in one's abilities, prompt students to create false lexical associations that linger–sometimes indefinitely–in their bilingual mental lexicon. However, it is important to acknowledge that although the occurrence of false-friend errors is a bidirectional phenomenon, the English → Albanian direction is more susceptible to errors because students tend to be more confident when translating into their mother tongue, thereby exerting less caution in semantic processing. In addition, by highlighting the

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unpredictable nature of false friends, the study points to the need to address them in a straightforward manner, so as to help students improve their performance and their ability to self-monitor their lexical knowledge.

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The Effects of the Storytelling Teaching Approach on English Speaking Proficiency Among Primary Pupils in China: An Embedded Mixed-Methods Study

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***Abstract*—This study examined the effects of the Storytelling Teaching Approach (STA) on Chinese primary pupils' English speaking proficiency and explored how classroom processes supported such development. An embedded mixed-methods quasi-experimental design was employed in a public primary school in China over a 13-week intervention period. Four intact Grade 5 classes participated, with two classes assigned to the experimental group and two to the control group. The quantitative strand was primary and involved a pretest-posttest comparison of pupils' speaking proficiency using an adapted Cambridge English: A2 Flyers speaking test rated analytically across four dimensions: pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and fluency. Because most speaking variables did not satisfy normality assumptions, Mann-Whitney U tests were used for between-group comparisons and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests for within-group comparisons. To explain the quantitative results, qualitative data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with selected pupils. The quantitative findings showed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group at posttest in overall speaking proficiency as well as in pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and fluency. Both groups improved over time, but the gains in the experimental group were substantially greater. The qualitative findings further indicated that STA supported speaking development through multimodal scaffolding, rehearsal and retelling opportunities, embodied and creative oral production, peer collaboration, perceived progress, and a low-threat classroom environment. The study suggests that STA may be a pedagogically meaningful approach for supporting young learners' oral English development in Chinese primary classrooms.**

***Index Terms*—storytelling, English speaking proficiency, mixed-methods, primary pupils, China**

I. Introduction

Speaking remains one of the most difficult outcomes to develop in primary English education in China. Policy documents now give clear attention to communication and practical language use. However, many classroom routines still reward textbook coverage, vocabulary explanation, grammar accuracy in written work, and examination preparation. This pattern creates a familiar problem for English teachers. Pupils may know words and sentence patterns, but they hesitate when they need to use them orally (Hu, 2005; Pan & Block, 2011; Qi, 2016).

This problem has become more visible under recent reform. The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) stresses meaningful language practice and oral communication. The 2021 Double Reduction policy also places renewed responsibility on schools. Schools now need to improve learning quality inside regular lessons rather than depend on homework or off-campus tutoring. In this context, teachers need an oral English pedagogy that works during ordinary class time. They cannot rely only on special projects, extra clubs, or private tutoring (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022; General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee & General Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

The Storytelling Teaching Approach (STA) offers one possible response. In a story-based lesson, language is attached

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to characters, intentions, problems, actions, and consequences. This feature makes STA different from decontextualized speaking drills. In a drill, pupils may repeat a form without a strong reason to speak. In a story, pupils usually have a clearer reason. They describe what happened, explain what a character wants, continue a plot, or solve a problem. These story demands can move speaking from a display activity toward a meaning-making activity (Bruner, 1991; Egan, 1986).

STA is also suitable for young learners because children often respond well to concrete events and visible actions. A story gives pupils a path to follow. It gives them a beginning, a problem, and an ending. It also gives them emotional cues. These cues can help pupils understand why a character speaks and how a line should sound. For many Grade 5 pupils, this support matters. Pupils do not begin with an empty topic. They begin with a shared story world that they can remember, retell, and perform.

The theoretical case for storytelling is strong. Story activities can provide comprehensible input. They can create opportunities for interaction around meaning. They can also push learners to produce language that is longer and more purposeful than single-word answers (Krashen, 1982; Long, 1983; Swain, 1985). Narrative engagement may further support speaking because pupils do not need to invent all content in real time. They can rely on the plot, pictures, roles, and classroom rehearsal. These resources may reduce the burden of spontaneous oral production (Green & Brock, 2000; Zwaan, 2004).

Nevertheless, evidence from Chinese primary classrooms remains thinner than the policy enthusiasm for activity-based teaching might suggest. Many studies report livelier lessons or stronger interest after storytelling. Such findings are useful, but they do not fully answer whether pupils speak better. Speaking proficiency is not one simple outcome. It includes pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and fluency. A useful classroom study therefore needs to examine these dimensions directly. It also needs to explain how classroom activity leads to change.

The present study addresses this need. The study compares an STA group with a regular-instruction group over 13 weeks. It assesses speaking through an adapted Cambridge English: A2 Flyers speaking test. It then uses observation and interview data to explain the classroom process. The focus is not only whether STA improves speaking. The study also asks how STA supports pupils when they try to pronounce words, retrieve vocabulary, form sentences, and keep speaking.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: Are there significant differences in English speaking proficiency between Chinese primary pupils taught through STA and those receiving regular English instruction?

RQ1a: Are there significant differences in pronunciation?

RQ1b: Are there significant differences in vocabulary usage?

RQ1c: Are there significant differences in grammatical accuracy?

RQ1d: Are there significant differences in fluency?

RQ2: How does STA support Chinese pupils' development in pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and fluency in classroom practice?

II. Literature Review

Storytelling has long been used in education because it gives ideas a memorable shape. A story usually has characters, actions, problems, intentions, and outcomes. These elements help children follow meaning in a natural way. Bruner (1991) viewed narrative as a basic mode of meaning-making. Egan (1986) also argued that stories can organize learning content in ways that match children's imagination and cognitive development. In English language teaching, stories connect language with events, feelings, choices, and communication rather than presenting it as isolated words or rules.

The Storytelling Teaching Approach (STA) is not the same as simple story reading. In a traditional story-reading lesson, the teacher may read a text, explain vocabulary, and ask comprehension questions. In STA, the story frames the whole lesson, guiding pupils to listen, predict, rehearse, retell, interact, perform, and reflect, thereby moving the lesson from comprehension to oral use. STA gives them a reason to use English because the story requires them to describe events, express intentions, continue a plot, or solve a problem.

Second language acquisition theory helps explain why STA may support speaking development. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis emphasizes the need for comprehensible input. Storytelling can make input more accessible through pictures, gestures, facial expressions, voice changes, and story events. These resources help pupils understand meaning even when some language is new.

STA also creates space for interaction. Long's (1983) Interaction Hypothesis highlights the value of meaning negotiation in language learning. In story-based lessons, pupils may discuss what happened, choose roles, ask classmates for help, or repair misunderstandings. These small exchanges give pupils chances to use English for real classroom purposes. Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis further suggests that learners need opportunities to produce language. Through retelling, role-play, dialogue, and performance, pupils must retrieve vocabulary, form sentences, pronounce words, and continue speaking.

A sociocultural view offers another explanation. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that learning develops through social support and mediated activity. STA provides different forms of support for speaking. Pictures, role cards, sentence frames, peer support, and teacher modeling provide layered scaffolding for pupils' oral production. These supports allow pupils to attempt speech before they can speak fully on their own. With repeated participation, pupils may gradually become more confident and independent speakers.

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Narrative processing theory also helps explain the role of stories in oral production. When pupils understand a story, they build a mental route through the events. Green and Brock (2000) described deep involvement in a story as narrative transportation. Zwaan (2004) also linked comprehension with mental simulation. These ideas are relevant to speaking because young learners often pause not only because they lack words, but also because they are unsure what to say next. A shared story reduces this burden.

The scenario cycle provides a practical structure for STA lessons. A story-based lesson can move through preparation, performance, and debriefing. During preparation, pupils learn the setting, characters, problem, and useful language before rehearsing with partners or groups. During performance, they retell, speak in roles, or act out scenes. During debriefing, the class reviews pronunciation, vocabulary choice, sentence accuracy, fluency, and communication strategies. This cycle connects input, interaction, output, and feedback. It also keeps storytelling from becoming only a pleasant classroom activity without clear language learning goals.

Speaking proficiency is treated as a multidimensional construct in this study. The adapted assessment focuses on pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and fluency. This analytic view is necessary because STA may affect different aspects of speaking in different ways. A single holistic score can show overall improvement, but it may hide specific changes in pupils' speaking proficiency.

Pronunciation is important because clear speech supports intelligibility. Primary pupils may recognize a word in writing but still say it unclearly. STA may support pronunciation through repeated and meaningful exposure. The teacher models target words and expressions during storytelling. Pupils then imitate and practice them during rehearsal and performance. Storytelling also gives pronunciation a communicative purpose. This makes rhythm, stress, and intonation more natural than isolated repetition.

Vocabulary usage is also central to speaking. Many pupils memorize word meanings, but they may not retrieve words quickly in oral tasks. STA can help because story vocabulary is tied to people, objects, places, and actions. Vocabulary becomes part of story events rather than isolated word-list learning. This connection may make vocabulary easier to remember and use when pupils speak.

Grammatical accuracy is another key part of speaking proficiency. Pupils need to produce complete and understandable sentences. STA can support grammar without turning the lesson into grammar drilling. The teacher may provide sentence frames before speaking tasks. Pupils can reuse these patterns during retelling and role-play. The teacher can later address common errors during debriefing.

Fluency refers to the smoothness and continuity of speech. Young learners often pause because they need to search for ideas and language at the same time. STA reduces both demands. The story gives pupils something to say. Rehearsal gives them time to practice how to say it. Repeated retelling may help pupils move from hesitant speech to smoother expression.

Previous studies have reported positive effects of storytelling and digital storytelling on oral English learning. Hwang et al. (2016) found that technology-supported storytelling could support EFL speaking. Nair and Yunus (2021) reviewed digital storytelling studies and reported positive patterns in speaking development. Yang et al. (2022) linked digital storytelling with English speaking and creative thinking. More recently, Yao et al. (2025) found in a systematic review and meta-analysis that oral narrative interventions had positive effects on L2 learning outcomes, particularly speaking, grammar, and vocabulary. Macalister and Thao (2025) also showed that storytelling-based coursebook adaptation could promote young EFL learners' oral production. In the Chinese context, Zheng et al. (2025) reviewed empirical research on storytelling in English language education from 2014 to 2024 and highlighted the need for stronger classroom-based evidence on implementation and learning outcomes. These studies suggest that stories can support speaking by providing context, engagement, and repeated chances for expression.

However, the existing evidence still has limitations. Some studies pay more attention to interest and engagement than to speaking proficiency. Some studies treat speaking as a broad outcome and do not examine pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and fluency separately. Other studies are conducted outside Chinese primary classrooms. This matters because Chinese primary English lessons often face textbook pacing, examination pressure, large classes, and limited time for oral practice.

The present study addresses this gap by examining STA in an ordinary Chinese primary school classroom. It compares pupils taught through STA with pupils taught through regular English instruction. It uses pretest and posttest speaking measures to examine pupils' speaking development. It also uses classroom observations and pupil interviews to explain the results. In this way, the study does not only ask whether STA improves speaking. It also explores how STA helps pupils pronounce more clearly, use vocabulary more appropriately, form more accurate sentences, and speak more fluently.

III. Method

A. Research Design

The study used an embedded mixed-methods quasi-experimental design. The quantitative strand was primary. Pupils in the experimental group and control group completed a speaking pretest and posttest across a 13-week period. The qualitative strand was embedded to explain the classroom processes behind the quantitative pattern (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Morgan, 2007).

This design was selected for practical and methodological reasons. The school had already placed pupils into intact classes. The researcher could not assign pupils randomly at the individual level. A quasi-experimental design was

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therefore suitable and ethically realistic (Dimitrov & Rumrill, 2003; Shadish et al., 2002). The pretest made it possible to examine baseline comparability. The posttest made it possible to compare outcomes after the intervention.

The qualitative strand had a clear explanatory purpose. Test scores could show whether pupils improved, but the scores could not show what happened during lessons. Observation and interview data therefore helped interpret the statistical pattern. These data showed how pupils used pictures, teacher modeling, peer assistance, rehearsal, and role-play when they tried to speak.

B. Participants and Context

The research took place in a public primary school in China during the second semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. The school followed the regular English curriculum. This context allowed the intervention to be examined under ordinary classroom conditions rather than in a laboratory-like setting.

Four intact Grade 5 classes participated in the study. Two classes were assigned to the experimental group (EG), and two classes were assigned to the control group (CG). The total sample included 160 pupils. Each group included 80 pupils. All classes followed the school timetable and studied comparable textbook content.

The qualitative strand was embedded within the same classroom population. Classroom observations were conducted during the intervention. Selected pupils joined semi-structured interviews after the intervention. Purposeful selection helped represent different participation patterns (Patton, 2007). Their comments helped explain how pupils experienced the story-based speaking lessons.

TABLE 1
STUDY OVERVIEW

Aspect	Description
Research design	Embedded mixed-methods quasi-experimental design
Setting	One public primary school in China (Grade 5)
Participants	160 pupils from four intact classes
Grouping	EG: 80 pupils (2 classes); CG: 80 pupils (2 classes)
Duration	13-week intervention
EG condition	Storytelling Teaching Approach (STA)
CG condition	Regular English instruction
Quantitative data	Adapted Cambridge English: A2 Flyers speaking test
Qualitative data	Classroom observations and semi-structured interviews

C. Instruments

Three instruments were used in the study: an adapted speaking test, classroom observation, and semi-structured interviews. The speaking pre-test and post-test generated the main quantitative evidence. The observation and interview data provided explanatory evidence about the classroom process.

Pupils' speaking proficiency was assessed with an adapted Cambridge English: A2 Flyers speaking test. This framework was selected because it is designed for young English learners. It uses visually supported and age-appropriate communicative tasks (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2024; Han et al., 2018; McKay, 2005). For the local school context, the researcher made minor procedural adjustments to prompts and instructions. The core elicitation logic was retained.

Pupils' speaking performances were rated across four dimensions: pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and fluency. Each dimension was scored from 0 to 5. The total possible score was 20. An analytic rubric was preferred over a single holistic score because it made the pattern of oral development more visible (Luoma, 2004).

Classroom observation documented how story-based tasks were introduced, scaffolded, rehearsed, and performed. The observation focus included multimodal support, story sequencing, pupil rehearsal, peer interaction, and willingness to speak. Semi-structured interviews were conducted after the intervention. The interviews asked pupils how they perceived story-based speaking tasks, peer support, rehearsal, retelling, and classroom performance (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Table 2 summarizes the analytic framework used to score pupils' speaking proficiency.

TABLE 2
ANALYTIC SPEAKING ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

Dimension	Operational focus	Score range
Pronunciation	Intelligibility and clarity of spoken production	0–5
Vocabulary usage	Appropriate and sufficient lexical use in context	0–5
Grammatical accuracy	Accuracy and completeness of sentence production	0–5
Fluency	Continuity and smoothness of spoken delivery	0–5
Overall FLSP	Sum of four analytic dimensions	0–20

D. Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

The study established methodological rigor at both quantitative and qualitative levels. A pilot speaking assessment was conducted with 35 pupils from the same schooling stage but outside the final sample. The pilot helped identify procedural issues. It also provided evidence for the quality of the speaking assessment.

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Five experts in English education and language assessment reviewed the adapted speaking test package. The package included picture prompts, task instructions, sample questions, and follow-up prompts. The experts judged whether the materials were age-appropriate, clear, and able to elicit spoken responses from upper-primary pupils. Their feedback confirmed the suitability of the instrument. The researcher then revised several details before the main test.

The analytic rubric was also reviewed. The review checked whether the four dimensions matched the research objectives and whether the descriptors were suitable for primary learners. Inter-rater reliability was then checked during the pilot. Two trained raters scored the same speaking performances independently. Cohen's Kappa values were .844 for pronunciation, .905 for vocabulary usage, .817 for grammatical accuracy, and .810 for fluency. According to Landis and Koch (1977), these values indicate almost perfect agreement.

The qualitative strand used several strategies to strengthen trustworthiness. The researcher triangulated observation and interview data. The observations followed a checklist. The interviews used a semi-structured guide. Parental consent and pupil assent were obtained. All interview records were anonymized (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). The trustworthiness of the qualitative strand was further strengthened through classroom observation records and interviews with nine pupils selected to represent different participation patterns.

E. Intervention Procedure

The intervention lasted for 13 weeks. It was implemented within the normal school timetable. Both groups used the same core textbook, Compulsory Education Textbook: English (PEP Edition), Grade 5, Volume 2. Both groups also covered comparable unit content. This arrangement helped ensure that the main difference between the groups was the teaching approach rather than instructional time or curriculum exposure.

The experimental group received instruction through STA. The lessons drew on teaching-as-storytelling principles and a scenario-cycle logic. At classroom level, the cycle was translated into a sequence of story input, guided comprehension, language rehearsal, retelling, role-based performance, and debriefing. Each lesson aimed to move pupils from understanding a story to speaking about or through the story.

The teacher used textbook content as the foundation. The teacher did not replace the curriculum with unrelated stories. Instead, textbook sections were placed inside a story-based activity chain. For example, Let's try was used for prediction and situation building. Let's talk and Role-play were used for interaction and performance. Let's learn provided vocabulary and sentence-pattern support. Read and write and Let's wrap it up supported consolidation and reflection.

A typical STA lesson began with a contextual opening. The teacher introduced the setting, characters, and problem through pictures, short videos, gestures, and voice variation. Pupils then listened to the story and answered simple comprehension questions. After this stage, pupils practiced key words and sentence frames. They rehearsed with partners or groups. They retold parts of the story. They then performed short role-based tasks or reconstructed the story collaboratively.

The teacher used several forms of scaffolding. The teacher modeled target pronunciation. The teacher displayed key expressions. The teacher gave pupils preparation time. Group members helped one another recall words and plan lines. The teacher used delayed correction so that pupils could finish speaking before receiving feedback. This approach aimed to protect fluency and confidence while still giving attention to accuracy.

The control group followed the regular teaching approach used in the school context. These lessons emphasized vocabulary explanation, grammar instruction, reading comprehension, written exercises, and textbook-based question-and-answer routines. Some oral practice occurred in the control group. However, the lessons did not include the systematic storytelling cycle, role-based performance, or structured rehearsal process used in the experimental group.

TABLE 3
INSTRUCTIONAL CONTRAST BETWEEN THE EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS

Aspect	EG: STA instruction	CG: Regular instruction
Lesson opening	story context, pictures, problem situation	textbook warm-up / teacher-led review
Input	story-based input with multimodal support	vocabulary and dialogue explanation
Speaking practice	rehearsal, retelling, role-play, performance	repetition, short answers, textbook dialogue reading
Peer interaction	group planning and peer support	limited pair/group work
Feedback	delayed feedback and debriefing	immediate correction / answer checking
Lesson closure	reflection on language and performance	exercise checking / summary

F. Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0. Descriptive statistics were first calculated for overall English speaking proficiency and for the four speaking dimensions: pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and fluency. Means and standard deviations were used to show pupils' pretest and posttest proficiency.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was then used to examine normality because each group included more than 50 pupils (Massey, 1951). Since most variables did not meet the normality assumption, non-parametric tests were adopted. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the experimental group and the control group at pretest and posttest (Nachar, 2008). The pretest comparison checked baseline equivalence, while the posttest comparison examined post-intervention between-group differences. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to examine within-group changes from pretest to posttest (Sprent & Smeeton, 2007).

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The qualitative data from classroom observations and pupil interviews were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis procedure. The analysis focused on repeated classroom patterns, including multimodal support, rehearsal, retelling, peer assistance, role-play, and pupils' oral participation. These themes were used to explain how STA supported pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and fluency. The quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated during interpretation following mixed-methods integration principles (Fetters et al., 2013). The test results showed whether pupils improved, while the qualitative data explained how the improvement occurred in classroom practice.

IV. Results

A. Quantitative Findings on English Speaking Proficiency

This section reports the quantitative findings for Chinese pupils' English speaking proficiency. The analysis covered overall speaking proficiency and four dimensions: pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and fluency. The results are presented through descriptive statistics, between-group comparisons, and within-group comparisons. Table 4 shows the descriptive pattern of pupils' pretest and posttest scores.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics for English Speaking Proficiency

Variable	CG Pretest M (SD)	EG Pretest M (SD)	CG Posttest M (SD)	EG Posttest M (SD)
Pronunciation	2.875 (0.778)	2.870 (0.787)	3.780 (0.927)	4.090 (0.703)
Vocabulary usage	2.881 (0.764)	2.870 (0.770)	3.680 (0.911)	4.130 (0.679)
Grammatical accuracy	2.938 (0.769)	2.940 (0.752)	3.780 (0.941)	4.070 (0.745)
Fluency	2.819 (0.739)	2.810 (0.735)	3.840 (0.882)	4.120 (0.704)
Overall FLSP	11.512 (1.723)	11.488 (1.775)	15.075 (2.604)	16.413 (2.521)

As shown in Table 4, the two groups started from almost the same level before the intervention. In the control group, the pretest mean scores were 2.875 for pronunciation, 2.881 for vocabulary usage, 2.938 for grammatical accuracy, and 2.819 for fluency. The experimental group showed a very similar pattern, with mean scores of 2.870, 2.870, 2.940, and 2.810 respectively. The overall speaking scores were also close. The control group obtained 11.512, while the experimental group obtained 11.488. These values indicate that the two groups had comparable speaking proficiency at the beginning of the study.

After the 13-week intervention, both groups improved. The control group reached posttest mean scores of 3.780 for pronunciation, 3.680 for vocabulary usage, 3.780 for grammatical accuracy, and 3.840 for fluency. The experimental group achieved higher scores in all four dimensions. Its posttest means were 4.090 for pronunciation, 4.130 for vocabulary usage, 4.070 for grammatical accuracy, and 4.120 for fluency. The total score increased to 15.075 in the control group and 16.413 in the experimental group. This pattern suggests that regular instruction was associated with some progress, while the STA group showed a stronger overall gain.

Table 5 presents the between-group comparison results.

Table 5
Summary of Between-Group Results

Variable	Pretest U (p)	Posttest U (p)
Pronunciation	3188 (.966)	2533 (.017)
Vocabulary usage	3176 (.932)	2119.5 (< .001)
Grammatical accuracy	3198.5 (.996)	2572.5 (.025)
Fluency	3176 (.932)	2485 (.010)
Overall FLSP	3194 (.984)	2012 (< .001)

At pretest, the Mann-Whitney U test showed no significant differences between the two groups. The results were non-significant for pronunciation ($U = 3188$, $p = .966$), vocabulary usage ($U = 3176$, $p = .932$), grammatical accuracy ($U = 3198.5$, $p = .996$), fluency ($U = 3176$, $p = .932$), and overall speaking proficiency ($U = 3194$, $p = .984$). These findings confirm that the two groups were statistically comparable before the intervention. This baseline result is important because it makes the posttest comparison more meaningful.

At posttest, the results changed clearly. The experimental group performed significantly better than the control group in all areas of speaking. Significant differences were found in pronunciation ($U = 2533$, $p = .017$), vocabulary usage ($U = 2119.5$, $p < .001$), grammatical accuracy ($U = 2572.5$, $p = .025$), fluency ($U = 2485$, $p = .010$), and overall speaking proficiency ($U = 2012$, $p < .001$). These results indicate that the posttest advantage of the STA group was not limited to one speaking skill. Pupils in the experimental group spoke with clearer pronunciation, used vocabulary more appropriately, produced more accurate sentences, and delivered speech more smoothly.

The strongest posttest difference appeared in vocabulary usage and overall speaking proficiency. This result may be related to the nature of STA. In the experimental group, pupils met target words through story events, characters, pictures, actions, and role-based tasks. They did not only memorize vocabulary from the textbook. They used words to retell scenes, describe actions, and perform roles. This repeated use in meaningful contexts may have helped them retrieve vocabulary more effectively during speaking tasks.

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TABLE 6
SUMMARY OF WITHIN-GROUP RESULTS

Variable	CG Z (p)	EG Z (p)
Pronunciation	-5.511 (< .001)	-6.875 (< .001)
Vocabulary usage	-5.171 (< .001)	-6.865 (< .001)
Grammatical accuracy	-5.512 (< .001)	-6.354 (< .001)
Fluency	-6.856 (< .001)	-6.929 (< .001)
Overall FLSP	-7.474 (< .001)	-7.729 (< .001)

Note. U = Mann-Whitney U statistic; Z = Wilcoxon signed-rank test statistic.

Table 6 shows the within-group comparison results. The control group improved significantly from pretest to posttest in pronunciation ($Z = -5.511$, $p < .001$), vocabulary usage ($Z = -5.171$, $p < .001$), grammatical accuracy ($Z = -5.512$, $p < .001$), fluency ($Z = -6.856$, $p < .001$), and overall speaking proficiency ($Z = -7.474$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that regular English instruction still contributed to pupils' speaking development during the semester.

The experimental group also showed significant improvement in all dimensions. The gains were significant for pronunciation ($Z = -6.875$, $p < .001$), vocabulary usage ($Z = -6.865$, $p < .001$), grammatical accuracy ($Z = -6.354$, $p < .001$), fluency ($Z = -6.929$, $p < .001$), and overall speaking proficiency ($Z = -7.729$, $p < .001$). The rank results further support this pattern. In the experimental group, most pupils improved in each speaking dimension. For overall speaking proficiency, 79 pupils improved, one pupil remained unchanged, and no pupil showed a decline.

Taken together, the quantitative findings provide a positive answer to RQ1. The two groups began with similar speaking levels, but the experimental group achieved significantly higher posttest scores after the intervention. Although both groups improved, the STA group showed stronger and more consistent gains across pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, fluency, and overall speaking proficiency. These results suggest that pupils in the STA group achieved stronger and more consistent speaking gains than those in the regular-instruction group.

B. Qualitative Findings Explaining Speaking Development

The qualitative data helped explain why pupils in the STA group showed stronger gains in English speaking proficiency. Classroom observations and pupil interviews pointed to five connected processes: multimodal scaffolding, rehearsal and retelling, peer collaboration, perceived progress, and a low-threat speaking environment. Together, these processes formed a classroom pathway through which pupils understood the story, prepared language, practiced speech, and spoke with more confidence.

First, multimodal scaffolding gave pupils clearer support before they were asked to speak. In the STA lessons, the teacher used pictures, short videos, gestures, facial expressions, voice changes, and key expressions to introduce the story. These resources helped pupils understand the setting, characters, actions, and problem. Observation data showed that pupils often used pictures or teacher gestures to recall content, suggesting that multimodal input reduced idea-generation burden and connected language with meaning.

This support was especially useful for pronunciation and vocabulary usage. Pupils heard target words several times during storytelling before they had to produce them. The teacher's oral modeling helped them notice pronunciation, stress, and intonation. At the same time, words were linked to visible characters, actions, and events. This made vocabulary easier to recall during retelling and role-play.

Second, rehearsal and retelling gave pupils repeated opportunities to turn input into output. In the STA lessons, pupils did not move directly from listening to public speaking. They first practiced key words and sentence frames. They then rehearsed with partners or groups. After that, they retold parts of the story or performed short role-based tasks. This gradual sequence allowed pupils to try the same language more than once. It also helped them reduce hesitation before speaking in front of others.

The rehearsal process appeared closely related to fluency. Several pupils reported that they could speak more smoothly after practicing the story several times. They also said that the plot helped them remember the order of ideas. The story provided an idea sequence, while rehearsal allowed pupils to prepare the language.

Third, peer collaboration supported pupils during speaking preparation and performance. In group work, pupils discussed story events, divided roles, planned lines, and helped one another recall words or sentence patterns. Stronger pupils often gave quick support to less confident classmates. These small forms of peer help allowed weaker speakers to continue instead of stopping completely.

Peer collaboration also reduced the individual pressure of speaking because pupils prepared with classmates before public performance. As a result, some pupils became more willing to try longer utterances. This process helps explain how STA supported vocabulary retrieval, sentence organization, and speaking confidence at the same time.

Fourth, pupils became aware of their own progress. Interview data showed that many pupils felt they could speak more clearly, use more words, or produce longer sentences than before. Some pupils noticed that they made fewer pauses during retelling. Others felt more comfortable when performing a role. Such perceived progress appeared to encourage further participation.

This sense of improvement matched the quantitative pattern. Pupils' comments also aligned with the four assessed dimensions, including clearer pronunciation, richer vocabulary use, better sentence formation, and smoother speech. These perceptions suggest that the improvement was not only visible in test scores. Pupils also experienced the change in

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classroom practice.

Finally, STA created a lower-threat environment for oral participation. In regular lessons, pupils often had to answer teacher questions individually. This format could make speaking feel risky, especially when pupils were unsure about grammar or pronunciation. In STA lessons, speaking was embedded in stories, roles, group rehearsal, and performance. Pupils could speak as characters and rely on group preparation before public performance.

The interviews showed that several pupils felt less afraid of making mistakes in story-based lessons. Some pupils reported focusing more on the story than on perfect sentences, while others felt safer after group rehearsal. This atmosphere encouraged pupils to attempt speech, sustain speech, and repeat speech. It also helped them take risks that they might avoid in teacher-fronted questioning. Table 7 summarizes the qualitative themes.

TABLE 7
SUMMARY OF QUALITATIVE THEMES

Theme	Classroom Process	Contribution to Speaking
Multimodal scaffolding	Pictures, video, gestures, voice, and key expressions prepared pupils before speaking.	Pupils had clearer content and stronger language support.
Rehearsal and retelling	Pupils practiced story language before performance.	Pupils produced smoother and longer utterances.
Peer collaboration	Group members planned lines and helped each other repair breakdowns.	Less confident pupils had support to continue speaking.
Perceived progress	Pupils noticed clearer and longer speech over time.	Pupils became more willing to participate.
Low-threat atmosphere	Role-play and group performance reduced the risk of speaking alone.	Pupils attempted speech with less fear of mistakes.

Overall, the qualitative findings answer RQ2 by showing how STA supported speaking development in classroom practice. Multimodal scaffolding helped pupils understand the story and prepare language. Rehearsal and retelling gave them repeated chances to practice oral output. Peer collaboration provided immediate support when pupils forgot words or lost confidence. Perceived progress encouraged continued participation. A low-threat environment reduced fear and made speaking more manageable. Collectively, these themes explain how STA supported pupils' development in pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and fluency through linguistic scaffolding, repeated oral production, and a supportive interactional environment.

C. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The quantitative and qualitative findings converged. The posttest results showed that pupils in the STA group performed better than those in the regular-instruction group in overall speaking proficiency and in all four assessed dimensions. The classroom data helped explain this pattern. Repeated teacher modeling and story-based oral practice supported pronunciation. Story contexts helped pupils remember and use vocabulary. Sentence frames, peer rehearsal, and delayed feedback supported grammatical accuracy. Rehearsal and retelling helped pupils speak more smoothly because the story provided a clear sequence of ideas. Taken together, the findings suggest that STA supported speaking through a classroom chain of story input, guided preparation, peer support, speaking performance, and reflection.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that pupils taught through STA achieved stronger posttest speaking outcomes than those receiving regular instruction. This result is meaningful in the Chinese primary classroom context. In many regular lessons, speaking is still a small part of the lesson. Pupils may repeat after the teacher, read textbook dialogues, or answer short questions. These activities can provide practice, but they do not always give pupils enough time to prepare, organize meaning, and speak for a real purpose. The STA lessons appeared to reorganize this pattern by placing speaking inside a story-based context. Pupils spoke to retell events, play roles, solve problems, and move the story forward. This gave oral English a clearer classroom function.

The posttest results showed that the STA group performed better in pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, fluency, and overall speaking proficiency. This broad improvement suggests that STA did not only make pupils more active. It also supported the quality of their speech. The finding is consistent with SLA perspectives which argue that language development needs comprehensible input, interaction, and pushed output (Krashen, 1982; Long, 1983; Swain, 1985). In the STA lessons, these conditions appeared together. Pupils first received story-based input. They then rehearsed with peers. After that, they produced spoken language through retelling and role-play. This sequence gave pupils several chances to hear, practice, and use English.

The improvement across the four speaking dimensions can be interpreted through the classroom processes observed in STA lessons. Pronunciation gains may be linked to repeated oral modeling and meaningful imitation, as pupils heard and practiced key expressions before performance. Vocabulary gains may be related to the story context, where words were connected with characters, actions, and events rather than memorized only as textbook items. Grammatical accuracy may have been supported by sentence frames, model turns, peer rehearsal, and delayed feedback, which allowed pupils to focus on meaning first and form later. Fluency gains appeared to be connected with the story sequence and repeated retelling, which reduced the need to search for ideas and language at the same time. These patterns are consistent with

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work on vocabulary use, scaffolding, and repeated task performance (Nation & Newton, 2009; Gibbons, 2002; Bygate, 2001).

The qualitative findings add depth to the statistical results. They suggest that STA may have supported speaking development through a classroom chain rather than through one single technique. Multimodal input helped pupils understand the story. Rehearsal helped them prepare language. Peer collaboration helped them continue when they forgot words. Performance gave them a reason to speak. Debriefing helped them notice what could be improved. A low-threat atmosphere also mattered. Pupils were more willing to try when they could speak as characters and prepare with classmates. This finding echoes Vygotsky's (1978) view that learning develops through supported participation.

Overall, the findings suggest that STA is useful because it reorganizes the speaking ecology of the classroom. It does not simply add more speaking time. It changes how speaking is prepared, supported, performed, and reflected on. For Chinese primary English classrooms, this point is practical. Teachers do not need to abandon textbook content. They can place textbook vocabulary and sentence patterns inside story-based tasks. They can also use pictures, role cards, sentence frames, group rehearsal, and delayed feedback to make speaking more manageable. The study therefore provides evidence that STA may be a feasible approach for supporting oral English development among primary pupils. Especially when teachers aim to balance meaning, accuracy, fluency, and learner confidence.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted in one public primary school in China, and all participants were Grade 5 pupils from a relatively homogeneous instructional context. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with caution when applied to pupils from other regions, school types, grade levels, or proficiency backgrounds. Second, the intervention lasted 13 weeks, and no delayed posttest was conducted; therefore, the long-term sustainability of pupils' speaking gains remains to be examined.

VI. Conclusion

This study examined STA in relation to Chinese primary pupils' English speaking proficiency. The findings showed that pupils taught through STA achieved significantly better posttest results than those taught through regular English instruction. The advantage appeared in overall speaking proficiency and in all four assessed dimensions: pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, and fluency.

The qualitative findings helped explain how this improvement was supported in classroom practice. STA gave pupils a meaningful story context, clear language support, repeated rehearsal, peer assistance, and opportunities for role-based performance. These classroom conditions appeared to help pupils understand what to say and how to say it. They also reduced the pressure of speaking in front of others. This may have contributed to pupils' greater willingness to use English and their ability to sustain oral expression.

The study suggests that STA may be a practical and pedagogically meaningful approach for supporting primary English speaking instruction in China. It does not require teachers to abandon the textbook. Instead, it helps teachers reorganize textbook content into story-based tasks that support oral use. Future studies may examine STA in different regions, grade levels, and school contexts. Longer interventions may also show whether pupils' speaking gains can be sustained over time.

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Error Analysis of Synonymous Nominal Classifiers in Chinese and Teaching Strategies: Implications for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

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***Abstract*—Nominal classifiers in Chinese are numerous and varied in usage, presenting a significant challenge in the teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL). Among the most pedagogically problematic are synonymous nominal classifiers—those that share overlapping semantic features yet differ in subtle but critical ways. This study investigates the error patterns produced by CFL learners when using synonymous nominal classifiers, drawing on corpus data from the Global Chinese Interlanguage Corpus and the HSK Dynamic Composition Corpus. Sixteen groups of commonly used synonymous nominal classifier sets were identified and systematically analyzed based on the International Chinese Education Chinese Proficiency Grading Standards (2021). Subsequently, five high-error groups were selected for in-depth error analysis: linear classifiers (条/tiáo, 根/gēn, 支/zhī, 道/dào), planar classifiers (片/piàn, 面/miàn, 张/zhāng, 幅/fú), animal individual classifiers (头/tóu, 条/tiáo, 只/zhī, 匹/pǐ), personal individual classifiers (个/gè, 位/wèi, 名/míng, 口/kǒu), and quantitative classifiers (对/duì, 双/shuāng, 副/fù). Four primary error types were identified: collocational misuse, differences in measurement scope, cross-use of overlapping semantic features, and overgeneralization. The underlying causes include negative transfer from the learner's first language, negative transfer from the target language knowledge, cultural interference, and the use of avoidance strategies. Based on these findings, the study proposes pedagogical recommendations targeting teaching methodology, textbook design, and classifier dictionary compilation.**

***Index Terms*—teaching Chinese as a foreign language, synonymous nominal classifiers, error analysis, corpus analysis**

I. Introduction

Nominal classifiers occupy a distinctive grammatical position in the Chinese language system. Unlike Indo-European languages, which express quantification through grammatical categories and morphological changes, Chinese employs lexical and syntactic means—specifically through classifier-noun combinations. Within this system, nominal classifiers are used with high frequency in daily communication, yet their collocational patterns with nouns are rarely one-to-one. Instead, they typically exhibit one-to-many or many-to-one relationships, creating a zone of ambiguity that is particularly challenging for learners of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL).

Among the most difficult aspects of classifier acquisition are synonymous nominal classifiers (近义名量词, jìnyì míng liàngcí)—groups of classifiers sharing similar semantic characteristics but differing in subtle yet critical ways with respect to their distributions, usages, and stylistic registers. As He (2001) observed, classifiers with shared semantic features form what he termed 'synonym groups' (近义词群), within which internal distinctions are precisely what learners find most challenging to master. When a learner acquires classifiers such as 个 (gè), 位 (wèi), 名 (míng), and 口 (kǒu)—all of which can count persons—the question of which classifier is appropriate in a given context becomes a persistent source of error.

Despite their communicative importance, synonymous nominal classifiers have received relatively limited attention in CFL research. Most existing studies have focused on classifier ontology or on individual classifier groups, with few offering systematic, corpus-based analyses of learner errors across multiple synonymous classifier sets. Furthermore, widely used CFL textbooks such as the HSK Standard Course (Jiang, 2015) provide only minimal and often insufficient explanations of individual classifiers, leaving little room for contrastive analysis of near-synonymous forms.

The present study aims to address this gap by: (1) identifying 16 groups of commonly used synonymous nominal classifiers relevant to CFL instruction; (2) analyzing the semantic distinctions within each group; (3) investigating error patterns in five high-frequency, high-error classifier groups through corpus analysis; (4) identifying the causes of these errors; and (5) proposing evidence-based pedagogical strategies to improve the teaching and learning of synonymous nominal classifiers in CFL contexts.

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II. Literature Review

A. Ontological Research on Synonymous Nominal Classifiers

The formal classification of Chinese classifiers began relatively late in the history of Chinese linguistics. The term 'classifier' was first officially adopted in the Tentative Chinese Grammar Teaching System (暂拟汉语教学语法系统) in 1956 to denote 'units expressing the quantity of things or actions.' Since then, a substantial body of research has examined the semantic and syntactic properties of nominal classifiers.

A recurring focus in this literature is the phenomenon of semantic overlap among classifier groups. Shao (1993) was among the first to theorize that semantically related classifiers form 'synonym groups,' and he identified four key dimensions of comparison: additional semantic features, applicable objects, focal perspective, and stylistic register. He further characterized the semantic properties of synonymous classifiers as exhibiting precision versus vagueness, polysemy versus cross-categorization, similarity versus differentiation, and concreteness versus abstractness.

Subsequent scholars have approached synonymous classifiers from various angles. He (2001) proposed the concept of 'semantic clan phenomena' among classifiers, analyzing near-synonyms according to differences in evaluative meaning, motivational focus, and measurement category. Zhou (2006) applied cognitive prototype theory to explain the semantic divergence among classifier groups, arguing that differences in prototype features of objects determine differences in classifier functions. More recently, Zhou and Shao (2014) analyzed the three-dimensional semantic features of the classifier group 条 (tiáo)/根 (gēn)/道 (dào) from perspectives of cognitive subjectivity and contextual constraint.

B. Error Research on Synonymous Nominal Classifiers in CFL Contexts

Research on learner errors in classifier use has grown considerably in recent decades. Wang (2012) conducted a contrastive analysis of the animal classifiers 头 (tóu), 匹 (pǐ), 条 (tiáo), and 只 (zhī) for Japanese learners, attributing most errors to negative transfer from the mother tongue. Huang (2019) traced the historical evolution of the personal classifiers 个 (gè), 位 (wèi), and 名 (míng) and conducted a corpus-based error analysis for CFL learners.

Yu (2019) identified major error types in the linear classifier group 条 (tiáo)/根 (gēn) through the HSK Dynamic Composition Corpus, including overgeneralization of 个 (gè), omission errors, and confusion with homophones. Liu and Yang (2021) designed a questionnaire-based study targeting students at Shandong University, categorizing individual classifier errors into four types: generalization of 个, misuse of homophones, confusion among near-synonymous individual classifiers, and confusion among shape-based individual classifiers.

Despite these contributions, the field still lacks comprehensive, multi-group error analyses that span different classifier categories with a unified theoretical framework. The integration of technology and AI-based tools in language instruction has also gained increasing attention in recent years, with studies demonstrating their effectiveness in improving specific language skills such as pronunciation and translation (Al-Shallakh, 2024; Alkhawaja, 2024). Cross-linguistic studies have also highlighted the role of quantitative expressions in emotional communication across languages (Zhu & Sun, 2016). The present study responds to this need.

III. Methodology

A. Definition and Scope of Synonymous Nominal Classifiers

For the purposes of this study, synonymous nominal classifiers are defined as groups of classifiers that share clan-like features, are generally capable of collocating with the same nouns or verbs, and exhibit subtle semantic differences in usage. This definition is broader than those used in purely ontological studies, reflecting the pedagogical reality that CFL learners need to distinguish any classifiers they perceive as interchangeable, regardless of whether these forms constitute strict synonyms in the theoretical sense.

Based on the International Chinese Education Chinese Proficiency Grading Standards (GF0025-2021; hereafter 'New Standards') and the Common Classifier Table for CFL Teaching compiled by Zhang and Zhao (2017), 16 groups of synonymous nominal classifiers were identified for analysis. These were selected according to five criteria: (1) group-clan features, (2) semantic similarity, (3) overlap in collocational objects, (4) subtle differences in usage, and (5) suitability for CFL instruction. Table 1 presents these 16 groups.

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TABLE 1
SIXTEEN GROUPS OF SYNONYMOUS NOMINAL CLASSIFIERS FOR CFL INSTRUCTION

No.	Classifier Group	Clan Type	Proficiency Level	Classification
1	条/根/支/道	Linear	Elementary-Intermediate	Shape-based
2	线/股/缕/丝	Linear	Elementary-Advanced	Shape-based
3	节/段/截	Segmental	Elementary-Advanced	Shape-based
4	片/面/张/幅	Planar	Elementary-Intermediate	Shape-based
5	颗/粒/枚	Point-like	Intermediate-Advanced	Shape-based
6	堆/沓/叠	Stacked	Intermediate-Advanced	Shape-based
7	层/重	Layered	Elementary	Shape-based
8	束/把/捆	Bound	Elementary-Advanced	Shape-based
9	头/条/只/匹	Animal Individual	Elementary-Intermediate	Non-shape-based
10	个/口/位/名	Personal Individual	Elementary	Non-shape-based
11	棵/株	Plant Individual	Intermediate-Advanced	Non-shape-based
12	座/尊	Object Individual	Elementary-Intermediate	Non-shape-based
13	对/双/副	Quantitative	Elementary-Intermediate	Non-shape-based
14	座/所/幢/栋	Building	Elementary-Advanced	Non-shape-based
15	帮/群/批/伙	Collective	Elementary-Intermediate	Non-shape-based
16	种/类/样	Categorical	Elementary-Intermediate	Non-shape-based

B. Data Sources

Error data were collected from two corpora: the Global Chinese Interlanguage Corpus (全球汉语中介语语料库; http://qqk.blcu.edu.cn), developed by Beijing Language and Culture University with an annotation accuracy of 96.56%, and the HSK Dynamic Composition Corpus 2.0 (HSK 动态作文语料库 2.0; HSK 作文语料库), which served as a supplementary source. The word-class search function was used to retrieve all instances of each classifier, and the resulting error tokens were extracted and tabulated.

Of the 52 classifiers across the 16 groups, the five groups with the highest error rates and sufficient corpus representation were selected for detailed analysis: (1) linear classifiers 条/根/支/道, (2) planar classifiers 片/面/张/幅, (3) animal individual classifiers 头/条/只/匹, (4) personal individual classifiers 个/位/名/口, and (5) quantitative classifiers 对/双/副.

IV. RESULTS: SEMANTIC ANALYSIS AND ERROR PATTERNS

A. Semantic Distinctions Within the Five Target Groups

Prior to the error analysis, a systematic semantic comparison was conducted for each target group, drawing on the Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th ed., 2016), the Usage Dictionary of Modern Chinese Classifiers (Guo, 2022), the Chinese Classifier Dictionary (Liu, 1996), and Classifier Made Easy (He, 2003). The analysis focused on the semantic intersection and divergence within each group.

Linear classifiers (条/根/支/道): All four classifiers denote long, thin shapes, but they differ in their physical properties. 条 (tiáo) is used for flat or softly elongated objects (e.g., towels, trousers, rivers); 根 (gēn) applies to rigid cylindrical or column-shaped items (e.g., candles, roots, hair strands); 支 (zhī) describes short, stiff rod-like objects and also extends to military units and musical pieces; 道 (dào) covers abstract long forms, passages, and procedural steps. Partial substitution is possible (e.g., 一条/根绳子, 'a rope'), but in other contexts substitution is blocked by differences in physical texture, dimensionality, or abstraction level.

Planar classifiers (片/面/张/幅): These classifiers share the semantic core of 'flat surface,' but differ in size, texture, and extensibility. 片 (piàn) applies to thin, small flat objects and also to landscapes and sounds (e.g., a leaf, a field, a burst of laughter); 面 (miàn) refers to a single face or side of a three-dimensional object; 张 (zhāng) collocates with objects that can expand or be rolled out (e.g., paper, maps, photos, tables); 幅 (fú) emphasizes the integrity and wholeness of flat textile or artistic works (e.g., paintings, curtains).

Animal individual classifiers (头/条/只/匹): These classifiers all count animals but differ in prototypical features. 条 (tiáo) applies to elongated animals (e.g., snakes, fish, dogs); 头 (tóu) is used for large animals with prominent head features (e.g., cattle, elephants, pigs); 匹 (pǐ) has a narrow application primarily to horses and horse-like animals; 只 (zhī) is the most broadly applicable, extending from birds and insects to small mammals, and displays a strong generalization tendency in learner usage.

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Personal individual classifiers (个/位/名/口): All four can count persons, but with distinct pragmatic and stylistic implications. 个 (gè) is semantically neutral and stylistically informal, applicable to a wide range of persons and objects; 名 (míng) is neutral in affect but implies a specific professional role or identity (e.g., a teacher, a worker); 位 (wèi) carries positive connotations of respect or admiration, as its use signals the speaker's esteem for the referent; 口 (kǒu) is restricted to counting family members (e.g., 三口人, 'three family members').

Quantitative classifiers (对/双/副): All three express paired or matched quantities. 双 (shuāng) and 对 (duì) both require exactly two items, but 双 emphasizes sameness (e.g., a pair of socks, chopsticks), while 对 emphasizes the complementary or oppositional relationship between the two (e.g., a married couple, a pair of candles). 副 (fù) is the most flexible, applying to matched sets that may contain more than two items (e.g., a pair of glasses, a set of chopsticks and bowls), and also extends to facial expressions and dispositions (e.g., 一副笑脸, 'a smiling face').

B. Error Frequency by Classifier

Table 2 presents the error statistics for all 52 classifiers, showing recorded instances, error counts, and error rates from the corpus. Five classifiers with the highest error rates among high-frequency forms were: 支 (zhī) at 16.44%, 片 (piàn) at 16.04%, 节 (jié) at 12.15%, 名 (míng) at 11.52%, and 口 (kǒu) at 11.38%. Notably, the classifier 个 (gè) recorded the highest absolute number of errors (3,437 errors out of 54,134 instances), reflecting its ubiquitous overgeneralization by CFL learners.

TABLE 2
ERROR STATISTICS FOR SELECTED SYNONYMOUS NOMINAL CLASSIFIERS

Classifier	Recorded	Errors	Error Rate	Classifier	Recorded	Errors	Error Rate
条	412	31	7.52%	头	92	4	4.35%
根	304	10	3.29%	只	2347	212	9.03%
支	146	24	16.44%	匹	168	6	3.57%
道	347	21	6.05%	个	54134	3437	6.35%
片	268	43	16.04%	位	9926	98	0.99%
面	196	10	5.10%	名	486	56	11.52%
张	1694	125	7.38%	口	325	37	11.38%
节	214	26	12.15%	对	1407	89	6.33%
段	2684	143	5.33%	双	1343	20	1.49%
颗	518	6	1.16%	副	337	14	4.15%

V. ERROR ANALYSIS AND CAUSES

A. Typology of Errors

Following Lu's (1994) four-category framework of omission, addition, misuse, and misordering, the present analysis focuses specifically on semantic misuse within synonymous nominal classifier groups, as this is the most complex and pedagogically consequential error type. Four subtypes of semantic misuse were identified:

1) Collocational Misuse: Learners select a classifier from within the correct semantic clan but fail to observe the collocational constraints of the target classifier. For example, corpus data show errors such as *一头乌龟 (*a turtle with 头/tóu, a classifier reserved for large animals with prominent head features) and *一双老夫妻 (*an elderly couple with 双/shuāng, which should be 对/duì for complementary pairs). These errors reveal that learners recognize the general classifier category but have not mastered the contextual constraints governing specific collocations.

2) Measurement Scope Differences: Near-synonymous classifiers often share a broad semantic domain but diverge in the specific scope of what they measure. In the group 条/根/支/道, for instance, all four apply to long, thin shapes, but learners frequently overgeneralize 条 to replace 根 (e.g., *一条香蕉 for 一根香蕉, 'a banana'), failing to observe that 根 specifically applies to rigid, column-shaped objects, while 条 applies to flat or soft elongated items. Similarly, learners confuse 片 and 张 in the planar classifier group, producing errors such as *一片白纸 ('a piece of white paper') where 张 is the appropriate classifier for a whole sheet.

3) Cross-Use of Overlapping Features: When two classifiers share at least one semantic intersection—the most ambiguous zone of synonymous classifier usage—learners often fail to observe the subtle distinctions within this shared semantic space. Errors such as *一对凉鞋 ('a pair of sandals' using 对 instead of 双) reflect the confusion between 双 (emphasizing sameness of paired items) and 对 (emphasizing complementarity or oppositeness). Likewise, *一位努力的学生 ('a hardworking student' using 位, which implies respect) reflects the pragmatic distinction between 名 (neutral professional identity) and 位 (respect-marked) that learners frequently overlook.

4) Overgeneralization: The classifier 个 (gè) exhibits the most extreme overgeneralization in the corpus, functioning as a 'default' classifier for learners who are uncertain which specific classifier to use. Errors such as *一个老师 (for 一位老师), *一个演员 (for 一名演员), and *三个小动物 (for 三只小动物) reflect a systematic avoidance strategy in which

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learners substitute 个 for a range of specific classifiers. Similarly, 只 (zhī) is frequently overgeneralized to animals that require other classifiers (e.g., *一只犀牛 for 一头犀牛).

B. Causes of Errors

1) Negative Transfer from the First Language (L1): Many learner errors stem from the absence of a classifier category in the learner's L1 or from differences in the classifier-noun collocational structure. Learners whose L1 lacks classifiers (e.g., English speakers) frequently omit classifiers in production, as illustrated by errors such as *一小狗 and *一街上. Learners from languages with different noun-numeral-classifier ordering (e.g., Thai, which uses Noun + Numeral + Classifier) produce ordering errors such as 蛇一条 and 鱼两条. For learners whose L1 has some classifier analogs (e.g., Japanese, Korean), partial matches between L1 and Chinese classifier ranges cause systematic confusion (e.g., Korean 두 assigns 头 to a broader range of animals than Chinese).

2) Negative Transfer from Target Language Knowledge: At intermediate and advanced levels, errors arising from overgeneralization of partially acquired target language rules are particularly common. Learners apply classifier knowledge acquired in one context to new, structurally similar contexts, generating systematic errors. The high error rates for 支 (zhī), 片 (piàn), and 名 (míng) reflect this mechanism: learners who have partially mastered these classifiers incorrectly extend them to collocations that require a different classifier within the same semantic clan.

3) Negative Transfer of Cultural Factors: Some classifier errors cannot be attributed to purely linguistic factors but reflect an incomplete understanding of the cultural values embedded in Chinese classifier usage. The distinction between 位 (respect-marked) and 名 (neutral) for counting persons is fundamentally tied to Chinese cultural norms of hierarchical respect (尊师重道, 尊敬长辈), which are not universal. Learners who are unfamiliar with these norms frequently misuse 位 in neutral contexts, or fail to deploy it in contexts where respect is conventionally expected.

4) Avoidance Strategies: When confronted with classifier choices that exceed their current competence, learners frequently resort to avoidance by substituting a classifier they already know. The systematic substitution of 个 for 位, 名, and 口, and of 只 for 头, 条, and 匹, represents a form of communicative coping strategy. While such strategies enable basic communication, they inhibit the development of more target-like classifier competence and, if left unaddressed, may fossilize into permanent errors.

VI. Pedagogical Implications

A. Staged Teaching Approach

Given that classifier acquisition is a multi-year process extending across elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels, a staged, cumulative approach to teaching synonymous nominal classifiers is recommended. At the elementary stage, instruction should focus on establishing basic one-to-one classifier-noun pairings through repetition and contextualized exposure. At the intermediate stage, one-to-many and many-to-one collocational patterns should be introduced, with explicit attention to the semantic boundaries within high-frequency synonym groups. At the advanced stage, instruction should address the full range of semantic, pragmatic, stylistic, and cultural distinctions within each group, including the affective and register dimensions of classifiers such as 位, 双, and 幅.

A critical pedagogical principle across all stages is continuity: classifiers introduced at earlier stages should be regularly revisited at higher levels, with their collocational ranges progressively expanded. The high error rates observed even among intermediate and advanced learners in this study indicate that classifier instruction often creates a gap between early introduction and later consolidation.

B. Exploiting Clan Features for Contrastive Teaching

Both shape-based (形态类) and non-shape-based (非形态类) classifier groups offer productive frameworks for contrastive classroom instruction. For shape-based groups, instructors can use physical objects or visual aids to highlight the key dimensional features (e.g., length vs. thickness, flatness vs. extension) that distinguish near-synonyms. For instance, placing a pearl (颗, grained/rounded) next to a grain of rice (粒, small-grained) can make the size-based distinction between 颗 and 粒 immediately perceptible.

For non-shape-based classifiers—where distinctions rest on social, pragmatic, or cultural features rather than physical properties—contrastive analysis within role-play scenarios and culturally grounded dialogues is particularly effective. The 位/名/个 group, for example, can be taught through simulated interactions in which learners practice addressing teachers, officials, colleagues, and strangers, observing how the choice of classifier signals different degrees of respect.

C. Cross-Linguistic and Cross-Cultural Comparison

Given that many classifier errors originate in L1 interference, explicitly comparing Chinese classifier-noun structures with corresponding structures in the learners' L1 can preempt common errors. For English-speaking learners, who lack a grammatical classifier category, early instruction should emphasize the obligatory nature of the Chinese number-classifier-noun structure (数词+量词+名词). For learners from Thai or other languages with different ordering conventions, systematic drilling of the correct word order is essential.

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Cultural factors embedded in classifier semantics, particularly in the distinction between 位 (respect-marked) and 名 (neutral), should be taught explicitly rather than assumed. Linking these distinctions to broader discussions of Chinese social values and communication norms can enhance both cultural understanding and classifier competence. This cross-linguistic awareness is particularly relevant in Arabic-speaking contexts, where recent research has highlighted the growing role of AI-powered tools in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps in language learning and translation (Alkhawaja, 2024).

D. Textbook and Dictionary Design

A review of the HSK Standard Course (Jiang, 2015), the most widely used CFL textbook series, reveals that classifier explanations are consistently minimal—typically a brief English gloss for a single sense—and that no dedicated sections for synonymous classifier comparison exist. This study recommends that CFL textbook developers incorporate: (1) multi-sense glosses for high-frequency classifiers at intermediate and advanced levels; (2) dedicated synonym discrimination sections for near-synonymous classifier groups; (3) targeted exercises designed to distinguish classifier usage in contrasting contexts; and (4) increasing recurrence of high-error classifiers across units to improve retention.

Regarding classifier dictionaries, existing resources fall into two broad categories: those designed for native speakers (e.g., Guo, 2022; Liu, 1996), which are too detailed and linguistically technical for CFL learners, and a small number of simplified dictionaries for learners (e.g., He, 2003) that are targeted only at beginners. A comprehensive CFL classifier reference that covers the full proficiency range, includes systematic synonym discrimination sections, and provides pedagogically graded examples is a significant gap in the field that future materials development should address.

VII. Conclusion

This study has provided a systematic corpus-based investigation of learner errors in the acquisition of synonymous nominal classifiers in Chinese as a foreign language. Based on data from two large-scale interlanguage corpora, 16 groups of synonymous nominal classifiers were identified, and five high-error groups were selected for in-depth analysis. Four principal error types were identified: collocational misuse, measurement scope differences, cross-use of overlapping features, and overgeneralization. These errors were attributed to negative transfer from the L1, negative transfer from target language knowledge, cultural interference, and avoidance strategies.

The pedagogical implications of these findings are substantial. A staged, clan-based, cross-linguistically informed approach to classifier instruction—combined with improvements in textbook and dictionary design—holds considerable promise for reducing the high error rates documented in this study. Future research should extend the corpus analysis to larger, more linguistically diverse learner populations, investigate the developmental trajectories of classifier acquisition longitudinally, and evaluate the effectiveness of the pedagogical interventions proposed here.

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Effects of Digital and Non-Digital Game-Based Instruction on Vocabulary Acquisition Among Thai Secondary School Learners

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Abstract—**This study investigated the effects of digital game-based learning (DGBL) and non-digital game-based learning (NDGBL) on vocabulary acquisition among Thai secondary school EFL learners. A quasi-experimental design was employed with 75 seventh-grade students from two intact classes, assigned to either a digital or a non-digital game-based instructional group. Vocabulary knowledge was measured across four dimensions: receptive recognition, receptive recall, productive recognition, and productive recall. Pre- and post-test data were analysed to assess vocabulary acquisition. The findings revealed that both instructional approaches significantly improved learners' receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge of form-meaning connections. No statistically significant differences were found between the two instructional modes, suggesting comparable usefulness. Furthermore, results across test types demonstrated a clear developmental progression from receptive recognition to productive recall, reinforcing the view that vocabulary acquisition is incremental and multidimensional. The questionnaire results further indicated that students held positive perceptions of both approaches, particularly regarding engagement, enjoyment, and their usefulness in strengthening form-meaning connections. This study offers substantial evidence that both digital and non-digital game-based learning are effective, learner-centred methodologies for improving vocabulary knowledge and retention in EFL contexts. The findings also suggest that the game-based instruction influences learning outcomes more than the technological medium per se; therefore, teaching strategies with efficient values can be implemented regardless of whether the games are digital or non-digital.**

Index Terms—**vocabulary knowledge, digital game-based learning, non-digital game-based learning, vocabulary retention, Thai secondary school EFL learners**

I. Introduction

Vocabulary knowledge is widely perceived as an essential element of effective second and foreign language (L2) learning because students' ability to comprehend and express themselves relies on vocabulary knowledge in both spoken and written modalities (Afzal, 2019; Schmitt, 2010). It is frequently construed as a multifaceted construct of word knowledge, including form, meaning and use. These components can be developed both receptively and productively (Nation, 2022). Receptive vocabulary knowledge refers to learners' recognition and comprehension of word form and meaning while listening or reading, whereas productive knowledge refers to the ability of retrieving, producing, and appropriately using words when speaking or writing (Ha, 2021; Janebi Enayat & Derakhsan, 2021; Sukying, 2025).

At the heart of this multidimensional framework sits a well-established mechanism in vocabulary development: creating strong form-meaning connections. Recognition of form-meaning connections is a critical step in acquiring vocabulary and achieving fluency in the target language (Laufer & Goldstein, 2004; Qian & Lin, 2020). As vocabulary acquisition is believed to be a gradual process, empirical findings indicate that form-meaning associations are typically acquired first, with productive control developed at subsequent stages (González-Fernández & Schmitt, 2020; Zhong, 2018). Additionally, these connections are reinforced, and the loss of vocabulary can provide long-term support (Teemueangsai et al., 2025). Thus, this connection between form and meaning aids vocabulary learning and other aspects of language, such as listening comprehension, reading ability, and general language proficiency (Cheng & Mathews, 2018; Webb, 2009). Thus, developing robust and durable form-meaning connections is one of the most important goals of successful vocabulary instruction in EFL contexts.

While form-meaning connections are essential for vocabulary learning, conventional classroom practices typically fail to provide sufficient meaningful exposure and repeated retrieval opportunities necessary for integration. Secondary school learners in many EFL contexts often face challenges with spelling, pronunciation, and word recognition that seriously inhibit vocabulary development (Afzal, 2019). Nonetheless, a number of commonly used instructional approaches still rely predominantly on rote memory, isolated word lists and word-for-word translation methods, which provide low levels of vocabulary learning and weak transfer to communicative performance (Nation, 2022; Matwangsaeng & Sukying, 2023).

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However, these methods support the immediate recognition of a word's meaning but fail to give learners a thorough understanding of vocabulary and its use across contexts. This limits the learners' ability to use words both accurately and meaningfully (Stæhr, 2008; Webb, 2009). Therefore, although they are exposed to English in the classroom, most learners do not acquire enough vocabulary knowledge to be academically successful (Alqahtani, 2015; Saengpakdeejit, 2014; Teemueangsai et al., 2025). This requires interactive, context-rich pedagogical approaches. Activities such as games, collaborative tasks, and real-world applications promote meaningful learning and help encode vocabulary in long-term memory.

Due to these limitations, game-based learning (GBL) has gained significant attention as a pedagogical approach for increasing the vocabulary. Research has demonstrated that games can play a valuable role in increasing student interest, motivation and engagement with learning, especially among young students (Russell, 2015; Teemueangsaiet al., 2025). Games embed vocabulary input in achievable, interactive tasks that encourage reflective encoding of lexical items as they are retrieved and explored in meaningful contexts (Coyne et al., 2009; Teemueangsai et al., 2025). Together, these characteristics combine to reinforce the connection between form and meaning, which is necessary for effective vocabulary learning and long-term retention.

Both digital and non-digital game-based approaches in the Thai EFL context provide important but diverse affordances. Given the greater accessibility of digital technologies, as well as their multimedia-rich and interactive nature (Chang & Hwang, 2019; Kohnke et al., 2020; Zou et al., 2021), digital games have rendered themselves an attractive medium for learning new vocabulary. Digital games have the potential to benefit learners' attention, noticing, and remembering of language forms as well as form-meaning mappings through multimodal input, immediate feedback and gamified elements like scoring systems and rewards. These affordances have been demonstrated to promote engagement leading to short-term vocabulary gains in recognition-based learning tasks (Zou et al., 2021). Through gamified experiences, learners can reignite enjoyment and immersion in the process of vocabulary acquisition.

In technologically inaccessible contexts, non-digital games offer a readily available and pedagogically useful choice (Akdogan, 2017). Activities such as board games, card games and role-play tasks can encourage real-world contact, peer negotiation and embodied learning. These characteristics may stimulate deeper cognitive processing, collaborative scaffolding, and productive use of the language and lead to improving learners' grasping and retention of language concepts (Ke et al., 2015; Teemueangsai et al., 2025). In brief, they reinforce and keep form-meaning mappings that are crucial for successful language learning and allow learners to practice their skills in real-world situations.

While research supporting the effectiveness of digital game-based learning for vocabulary growth has expanded, relatively few studies have directly compared the effects of digital and non-digital game-based approaches in an analogous instructional context. The gap is noticeable in secondary English education within Thailand, especially outside metropolitan areas, where traditional instructional practices often remain, and knowledge of the capacity of digital game-based learning to further students' vocabulary acquisition compared to traditional methods remains limited. This highlights the need for empirical inquiries into how various modalities of game-based instruction will provide aid with vocabulary development, specifically production and retention of semantic form-meaning linkages.

Subsequently, this study investigated the effects of two different modes of game-based instruction, digital and non-digital, on vocabulary learning of Thai secondary school EFL learners. It aims to reinforce learners' form-meaning linkages across both receptive and productive domains jointly, as well as the extent to which learners perceive these instructional procedures as language learning strategies. As such, this study will provide theory-grounded, classroom-relevant knowledge on effective vocabulary instruction to aspiring practitioners in implementing more student-engaged, equitable and context-oriented practices in EFL contexts. The following research questions guide the study accordingly:

1. What are the effects of digital and non-digital game-based instruction on Thai secondary school learners' vocabulary knowledge?
2. What are Thai secondary school learners' perceptions of using digital and non-digital games for vocabulary learning?

II. Literature Review

A. Vocabulary Knowledge

Vocabulary knowledge is widely recognised as a crucial component of language teaching and learning. Nation (2022) described the multi-component nature of vocabulary knowledge, comprising form, meaning, and use. Form encompasses spoken and written forms of a word and word parts such as prefixes and suffixes. Meaning includes knowledge of form-meaning connections, concepts and referents, and word associations. Use comprises grammatical functions, collocations, and constraints on use, such as register and frequency. These components are further classified as receptive and productive word knowledge (Nation, 2022). Receptive word knowledge is the ability to recognise a word, at least to some extent, and to retrieve its meaning through listening and reading. In contrast, productive word knowledge is the learner's ability to recall and use a word in speaking and writing. Mastery of these components enables learners to select, interpret, and use vocabulary appropriately across a range of communicative contexts.

Vocabulary development is a gradual process that unfolds through repeated exposure to and engagement with lexical items (González-Fernández & Schmitt, 2020; Nation, 2022; Schmitt, 2010). This development encompasses both

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vocabulary breadth, the number of words a learner knows, and vocabulary depth, the richness of understanding of each word, including its meanings, usage, and collocational patterns. Together, both breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge are critical to effective language use and overall proficiency.

B. Game-Based Learning

Game-based learning is a creative pedagogical approach that has been developed. It is also used to improve learning in subjects, including maths, language, computing, science, and social studies. It offers the theoretical background with multiple practical implications for effective learning outcomes (Liu et al., 2020). It also decreases anxiety, increases motivation and helps students link what they learn to practice (Chang & Hwang, 2019; Kohnke et al., 2020), thereby improving the educational experience and retention of knowledge. Teemueangsai et al. (2025) argued that game-based learning is an appropriate approach to learning vocabulary. By participating in the tasks that interest students and thinking about words, they are growing their attention to target words, which enhances retention and recall (Coyne et al., 2009). Such activities will also help the teacher to develop an environment for meaningful low-stakes learning, which allows students a safe space that eases anxieties around them and engages them in wanting to participate and take risks in their learning. Generally, based on the level of use with information technology, it is either digital game-based learning (DGBL) or non-digital game-based learning (NDGBL).

Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL) involves the use of digital games for embedding educational content in a video or board game format that supports teacher instruction and learner engagement and academic performance (Ke et al., 2015; Kohnke et al., 2020). DGBL can be described as an instructional approach that leverages the motivational affordances of digital platforms, such as mobile applications, computer games, and console-based systems, to facilitate learning. DGBL covers a broad range of formats from interactive simulations to mobile vocabulary apps, offering many opportunities for implementing any one of them. Involvement in audiovisual resources (audio, animation and instant feedback) will engage learners because of multimodal processing, which helps in vocabulary learning (Zou et al., 2021).

Non-Digital Game-Based Learning (NDGBL), by contrast, refers to the use of physical and tangible materials, including board games, flashcards, card-sorting activities, and teacher-designed tools. The approach focuses on learning through experience and social interactions through using tactile techniques, face-to-face interactions and joint problem-solving (Ke et al., 2015). In addition, NDGBL incorporates important elements of games, such as goal orientation, competition, immediate feedback and collaboration, which enhances autonomy, motivation and the meaningfulness of engagement with the material (Park & Lee, 2017).

C. Theoretical Frameworks

The three interconnected theoretical perspectives on which this study is built are dual coding theory (DCT), cognitive load theory (CLT), and constructivist learning theory (CTL). According to dual coding theory (Paivio, 1971), information is processed through two connected channels, verbal and nonverbal (visual), and is better learned when both are activated simultaneously. In game-based learning, both digital and non-digital games encode vocabulary across multiple modes, including images, sounds, and contextualisation. Such strategies help learners construct more comprehensive cognitive-semantic networks of lexical items and deepen their conceptual knowledge of words.

The salient cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1994, 2011) holds that optimal instruction rests on minimising extraneous cognitive demand and facilitating deep or meaningful processing. As with game-based learning, both digital and non-digital games help students acquire new vocabulary by organising information into well-structured, meaningful units, consequently reducing extraneous cognitive demand and making processing more efficient. Digital games include audio, video, and immediate response and interactivity, which, through dual-channel processing (Chandler & Sweller, 1991), can complicate simple linguistic input. Likewise, more traditional games, e.g., board games and card-based activities, deliver knowledge in a structured, interactive way that focuses learners on relevant linguistic features while imposing minimal cognitive demands. Both modalities aim to orient learners without overloading them with information, using tasks that distil vocabulary learning goals into clear form-meaning relationships. The literature suggests that well-designed, simplified instructional resources can also help reduce cognitive demand and enhance retention and comprehension of material (Leahy & Sweller, 2011).

Additionally, constructivist learning theory holds that learners actively build knowledge through interaction with their environment, rather than simply receiving information (Piaget, 1952, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). As such, learning is a process of searching, interrogating and introspecting to gradually build understanding. Whenever we interact with our peers and teachers, they support cognitive development, as knowledge can be co-constructed through sociocultural engagement (Piaget, 1985). This differs from the use of games in word learning, where learners are active agents who construct their own meaning through problem-solving, experimentation and joint effort. Games offer engaging, interactive tasks that reflect authentic language use, helping learners internalise vocabulary through relevant contextual use. This enhances higher-order thinking and vocabulary retention by enabling learners to elicit items from memory through social interaction.

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III. Research Methods

A. Research Design

The study was conducted in a positivist research paradigm, in line with the assumption that relationships between cause and effect can be objectively investigated based on systematic measurement and statistical analysis. In accordance with this viewpoint, the present study utilised a quasi-experimental research design to examine the impact of game-based instruction employing digital and non-digital games on receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge in Thai secondary school learners. Two intact classes were assigned to either of the experimental conditions and provided with digital or non-digital game-based vocabulary instruction. Equivalent pretests and posttests were administered to measure vocabulary gains. Moreover, the aspect of learners' own perceptions towards instructional approaches was captured using a structured questionnaire. Standardised instruments facilitated objective assessment of instructional effects, providing quantitative evidence of learning outcomes and students' perceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

B. Participants and Setting

The present study included 75 Thai students, aged between 12 and 13, from two intact classes at a secondary school in northeastern Thailand. The two classes were assigned randomly to digital game-based learning (DGBL) (n = 36) and non-digital game-based learning NDGBL) (n = 39) groups. All participants learned English as a foreign language (EFL) and enrolled in a supplementary English course. All participants, who partook in the study, were familiar with smartphones and reported regular use of digital devices. To evaluate the effectiveness of both teaching methods, the results of the institutional English examination showed no statistically significant differences, suggesting that participants from both digital game-based learning (DGBL) and non-digital game-based learning NDGBL) groups had a similar level of English proficiency before the intervention. Furthermore, the intervention lasted 8 weeks, with game-based instructional activities, totaling 24 hours of instruction delivered by the same teacher.

C. Games as Intervention

(a). Digital Games as Instructional Intervention

Digital games were used as an instructional intervention. They were defined as technology-enhanced, goal-oriented learning activities. These activities required learners to participate actively in vocabulary learning through interactive tasks delivered on digital devices. These activities were designed to strengthen form-meaning linkages of a word through recurrent experience, retrieval exercise, and meaningful visits. The digital game-based learning participants received teaching using four platforms: Blooket, Gimkit, ZEP Quiz, and Wordwall. These platforms were selected because they provide (a) repeated practice opportunities, (b) immediate and informative feedback, (c) multimodal input mingling text, images, and sound, and (d) interactive and competitive features that help maintain learners' motivation and attention. Collectively, these characteristics are consistent with principles of vocabulary learning, particularly noticing, retrieval, and consolidation (Nation, 2022).

(b). Non-Digital Games as Instructional Intervention

Non-digital games were implemented as a teaching method to strengthen learners' knowledge of form-meaning linkages and improve vocabulary acquisition. In this study, non-digital games were defined as hands-on, cooperative, and movement-based learning activities. The activities were designed to promote vocabulary learning through repeated exposure, retrieval exercises, peer collaboration, and meaningful communication. The participants in the non-digital game-based learning group partook in four activities: board games, card games, Rip and Run, and word unscramble games. These non-digital games were applied due to their features, which encompass active participation and social interaction in low-anxiety learning atmospheres. Such features accord with research (Nation, 2022; Teemueangsai et al., 2025), indicating that movement-based and collaborative games can improve memory retention, word recognition, and learner motivation by engaging social, cognitive, and kinesthetic processes simultaneously.

D. Instruments

Four vocabulary knowledge tests, including receptive recognition, productive recognition, receptive recall, and productive recall, were used to assess students' vocabulary knowledge before and after the intervention. A questionnaire was also administered to investigate perceptions of using digital and non-digital games for vocabulary learning. The following sections provide detailed information on the instruments.

(a). Receptive Recognition Test

This test was a multiple-choice assessment in which participants selected the correct meaning of the target word. It consisted of 20 items selected from the target word lists and took about 20 minutes. The test aimed to measure the written receptive vocabulary of both L1 and L2 students. One point was awarded for each correct answer. For example:

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Directions: Choose the correct meaning of the given word.		**Answer**	**Point**
1.	**brave:** The <**brave**> firefighter ran into the burning house to help the family.		
a)	เป็นมิตร	incorrect	0
b)	กล้าหาญ	correct	1
c)	ร่าเริง	incorrect	0
d)	มีน้ำใจ	incorrect	0

(b). Receptive Recall Test

The Receptive Recall Test presented participants with 20 questions, each requiring them to match a word to its correct meaning. It was divided into two columns: the left column contained L2 meanings, and the right column contained target words and definitions. Points were awarded to participants for each correct response. For example:

Instructions: Match the words. Write the number of that word next with the correct definitions.

Meaning		**Target Word**
1.	พ่อ	
2.	แม่	____5____ **husband:** a man who is married to a woman
3.	ลูกชาย	____2____ **mother:** a woman who has a child or children
4.	ลูกสาว	____4____ **daughter:** a girl who is the child of her parents.
5.	สามี	
6.	ภรรยา	

(c). Productive Recognition Test

The Productive Recognition Test, adapted from Laufer and Nation's (1995) Vocabulary Production Test, was designed and presented in a fill-in-the-blank format, requiring learners to write the target words. The test measured the extent to which students could spell the target word correctly in response to the given sentence or definition. There were 10 sentences. One point was awarded for each correct spelling, and no points were awarded for incorrect spelling. Minor spelling mistakes that did not change the meaning of the word were ignored. For example:

Directions: Complete the sentence with the correct words that match the given meanings.

1. The **d**_____ runs and plays in the yard. (สุนัข)

   Answer: The ***dog*** runs and plays in the yard. (สุนัข)

(d). Productive Recall Test

The productive recall test is adapted from Laufer and Goldstein (2004) and Webb (2009). It consisted of 15 items and was designed to assess students' understanding of word meanings. In this test, students were given Thai definitions and asked to recall and write the corresponding English words. Students received 1 point for a fully correct answer, 0 points for a blank or incorrect answer, and 0.5 points if part of the morpheme was correct. An example of the test format is shown below.

Directions: *Complete the word from the given meaning.*

	Word Questions	**Answer**	**Correct Answer**	**Point**
1	หมู่บ้าน	**v** *illage*	village	1
2	สวย	**b** *eauty*	beautiful	0.5
3	ยางลบ	**e** _____	eraser	0

(e). Questionnaire

This study utilised two perception-based instruments: the *Digital Game-Based Learning Questionnaire* and the *Non-Digital Game-Based Learning Questionnaire*. Each questionnaire was designed to investigate students' perceptions of the instructional effectiveness of digital and non-digital game-based learning in improving vocabulary knowledge. The questionnaires focused on students' understanding of form-meaning connections developed during the intervention, across both productive and receptive aspects. Responses were rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). To ensure clarity and accuracy, the questionnaires were administered in Thai, allowing participants to fully comprehend the questions.

E. Data Collection

This study employed a three-stage data collection procedure to examine vocabulary acquisition and retention. In Stage 1 (Week 1), participants completed a pre-test to establish their baseline vocabulary knowledge. The assessment comprised four test types designed to measure both receptive and productive dimensions of vocabulary knowledge. Stage 2 (Weeks

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2-9) involved the instructional intervention, during which students in each group participated in one hour of game-based learning activities per session, either digital or non-digital, focusing on specific vocabulary topics. Interactive learning techniques were embedded throughout this phase to promote sustained engagement and repeated exposure to target vocabulary. Finally, in Stage 3 (Week 10), a post-test was administered using the same assessment format as the pre-test to evaluate immediate learning gains. In addition, a questionnaire was distributed to gather students' perceptions of the intervention and their experiences with digital and non-digital games as instructional tools. Each test was designed to be completed within 60 minutes, with balanced item distribution and comparable difficulty levels across test types to ensure fairness. This structured, multi-stage design enabled a comprehensive evaluation of the intervention's effectiveness in enhancing vocabulary acquisition and retention.

F. Teaching Procedure

The instructional design was adapted from the vocabulary-teaching principles proposed by Gains and Redman (2007), which emphasise systematic exposure, meaningful practice, and active learner engagement. Each instructional unit included 12 target vocabulary items, carefully selected to align with learners' proficiency levels and curriculum objectives. Throughout the lessons, students encountered the same vocabulary items multiple times through a variety of digital or non-digital game-based activities, depending on their assigned group, thereby ensuring repeated retrieval across diverse contexts. A typical lesson follows a structured sequence, beginning with the introduction of target vocabulary through brief explanations and contextualised examples. This was followed by guided practice, during which learners engaged with the vocabulary through games. Immediate feedback and peer discussion were then incorporated to help learners identify errors and refine their understanding. Finally, consolidation activities were implemented to reinforce form–meaning connections through repeated and meaningful gameplay, including collaborative tasks and reflective discussions to deepen learners' comprehension of the material.

G. Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted to examine the effects of digital and non-digital game-based instruction on Thai EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge (RQ1) and to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the intervention. To determine whether significant vocabulary gains occurred within each group, paired-samples t-tests were used to compare pre-test and post-test mean scores. In addition, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare post-test scores between the digital game-based learning (DGBL) group and the non-digital game-based learning (NDGBL) group, assessing the extent to which the mode of instruction influenced vocabulary development. Furthermore, a repeated-measures ANOVA was employed to examine differences across test types (i.e., receptive recognition, receptive recall, productive recognition, and productive recall) and to analyse changes in vocabulary knowledge across time for both groups. Post hoc analyses were conducted to identify specific differences between test conditions and to provide a more detailed interpretation of the learning outcomes.

Regarding students' perceptions of the two instructional approaches (RQ2), descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and percentages, were calculated from responses to a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire. This analysis revealed students' attitudes, levels of engagement, and perceived benefits of using digital and non-digital games as vocabulary-learning tools, thereby highlighting the motivational and interactive nature of the instructional approaches.

IV. Results

A. The Effects of Digital Games and Non-Digital Games on Vocabulary Knowledge

(a). Receptive Vocabulary Performance Results

Table 1 presents performance scores on the receptive recognition and receptive recall tests at two time points. The results indicated that post-test scores were higher than pre-test scores in both the digital and non-digital groups. Specifically, for receptive recognition, the digital group's mean rose from 12.42 (S.D. = 3.68) on the pre-test to 16.28 (S.D. = 3.72) on the post-test. Similarly, the non-digital group improved, with mean scores rising from 12.46 (S.D. = 3.41) to 16.08 (S.D. = 3.42). Paired-samples *t*-tests revealed statistically significant within-group differences for both groups (digital: $t = 4.28$, $p < .001$; non-digital: $t = 10.28$, $p < .001$), indicating that both instructional approaches significantly enhanced learners' receptive recognition of vocabulary. A similar pattern was observed in the receptive recall test. The digital group's mean score increased from 10.33 (S.D. = 5.18) to 14.75 (S.D. = 4.01), while the non-digital group improved from 9.77 (S.D. = 3.41) to 13.08 (S.D. = 4.14). These improvements were also statistically significant (digital: $t = 8.32$, $p < .001$; non-digital: $t = 6.75$, $p < .001$). Overall, the findings suggest that both digital and non-digital game-based learning improved learners' receptive vocabulary, including recognition and recall of vocabulary's form-meaning links.

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TABLE 1
PARTICIPANTS' SCORES ON THE RECEPTIVE VOCABULARY TEST WITHIN GROUPS

Tests	Groups	Pre-test Mean (%)	S.D.	Post-test Mean (%)	S.D.	*t* (within)	*p* (within)
Receptive recognition	Digital	12.42 (62.08%)	3.68	16.28 (81.39%)	3.72	4.28	0.001*
	Non-digital	12.46 (62.31%)	3.41	16.08 (80.38)	3.42	10.28	0.001*
Receptive recall	Digital	10.33 (51.67%)	5.18	14.75 (73.75%)	4.01	8.32	0.001*
	Non-digital	9.77 (48.84%)	3.41	13.08 (65.38%)	4.14	6.75	0.001*

***Note:** the total score = 20; $p < 0.001$.

Table 2 presents participants' scores on the receptive vocabulary tests for the experimental and control groups. Independent-samples *t*-tests indicated no statistically significant differences between the digital and non-digital groups at both pre-test and post-test for receptive recognition and recall ($p > .05$). These findings indicate that although both instructional methods were associated with gains in receptive vocabulary knowledge, neither pedagogical mode outperformed the other, suggesting that the observed improvements were attributable to the shared game-based instructional design rather than the mode of delivery.

TABLE 2
PARTICIPANTS' SCORES ON THE RECEPTIVE VOCABULARY TEST BETWEEN GROUPS

Tests	Time	Digital group	S.D.	Non-digital group	S.D.	*t* (between)	*p* (between)
Receptive recognition	Pre-test	12.42 (62.08%)	3.68	12.46 (62.31%)	3.41	-0.05	0.96
	Post-test	16.28 (81.39%)	3.72	16.08 (80.38)	3.42	0.24	0.80
Receptive recall	Pre-test	10.33 (51.67%)	5.18	9.77 (48.84%)	4.01	0.52	0.61
	Post-test	14.75 (73.75%)	3.41	13.08 (65.38%)	4.14	1.77	0.80

***Note:** the total score = 20; $p > .05$.

(b). Productive Vocabulary Performance Results

Table 3 presents the results of the productive recognition and productive recall tests. For productive recognition, the digital group's mean score increased significantly from 2.17 (S.D. = 2.24) on the pre-test to 4.06 (S.D. = 4.16) on the post-test ($t = 4.22$; $p < .001$). Similarly, the non-digital group showed significant improvement, with mean scores rising from 1.90 (S.D. = 2.02) to 3.56 (S.D. = 3.12). The paired-samples *t*-test revealed statistically significant differences ($t = 5.74$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that both instructional techniques significantly enhanced learners' recognition of productive vocabulary.

TABLE 3
PARTICIPANTS' SCORES ON THE PRODUCTIVE VOCABULARY TEST WITHIN GROUPS

Tests	Groups	Pre-test Mean (%)	S.D.	Post-test Mean (%)	S.D.	*t* (within)	*p* (within)
Productive recognition	Digital	2.17 (14.44%)	2.24	4.06 (27.04%)	4.16	4.22	0.001*
	Non-digital	1.90 (12.65%)	2.02	3.56 (23.76%)	3.12	5.74	0.001*
Productive recall	Digital	2.03 (13.52%)	2.60	3.31 (22.04%)	3.72	2.99	0.05
	Non-digital	1.82 (12.13%)	1.90	3.26 (21.71%)	3.17	3.45	0.001*

***Note:** the total score = 20; $p < 0.001$.

Table 4 shows a similar trend in productive recall across groups. The digital group's mean score increased by 8.52% on the productive recall test (S.D. = 2.60 for the pre-test and S.D. = 3.72 for the post-test), while the non-digital group improved by 9.58%, rising from 1.82 (S.D. = 1.90) to 3.26 (S.D. = 3.17). The improvement in the non-digital group was statistically significant ($t = 3.45$, $p < .001$), whereas the digital group showed a marginally significant difference ($t = 2.99$, $p = .05$). Together, these findings indicate that both digital and non-digital game-based learning contributed to improvements in learners' productive vocabulary knowledge, although the effect was more consistently significant in the non-digital group for productive recall.

Independent-samples t-tests were also conducted to assess performance differences between the digital and non-digital groups on vocabulary tests. The results indicated no statistically significant differences, suggesting that both instructional techniques produced comparable improvements in learners' productive vocabulary knowledge, with no clear advantage for either modality.

TABLE 4
PARTICIPANTS' SCORES ON THE PRODUCTIVE VOCABULARY TEST BETWEEN GROUPS

Tests	Time	Digital group	S.D.	Non-digital group	S.D.	*t* (between)	*p* (between)
Productive recognition	Pre-test	2.17 (14.44%)	2.24	1.90 (12.65%)	2.02	0.54	0.59
	Post-test	4.06 (27.04%)	4.16	3.56 (23.76%)	3.12	0.58	0.56
Productive recall	Pre-test	2.03 (13.52%)	2.60	1.82 (12.13%)	1.90	0.39	0.69
	Post-test	3.31 (22.04%)	3.72	3.26 (21.71%)	3.17	0.06	0.95

***Note:** the total score = 20; $p > .05$.

(c). Differences Between the Four Types of Tests Among Pre-Tests and Post-Tests

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To assess varying levels of vocabulary knowledge, repeated-measures ANOVA analyses were also conducted. As presented in Table 5 and Figure 1, the results revealed statistically significant differences among the four test types at both time points for both instructional groups. In the digital games group, significant test-type effects were observed at the pretest, $F(3, 257.78) = 88.19$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .72$, and again at the posttest, $F(3, 205.70) = 166.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .83$. Similarly, the non-digital games group demonstrated highly significant differences among test types at the pretest, $F(3, 98.98) = 256.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .87$, and at the posttest, $F(3, 128.17) = 266.72$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .88$. The large effect sizes (η^2 between 0.72 and 0.88) across vocabulary tests in both groups and at different time points indicate that test type exerted a strong and consistent influence on vocabulary performance, regardless of instructional condition. Overall, the findings reveal a performance hierarchy across the four vocabulary test types, with receptive recognition producing the highest scores, followed by receptive recall, productive recognition, and productive recall.

TABLE 5
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE FOUR TYPES OF TESTS AMONG PRE-TESTS AND POST-TESTS

Groups	Test Types	Pre-test			Post-test		
		Mean (%)	*F*	η^2	Mean (%)	*F*	η^2
Digital games (*n*=36)	Receptive Recognition	12.42 (62.08)	88.19	0.72	16.28 (81.39)	166.51	0.83
	Receptive Recall	10.33 (51.67)			14.75 (73.75)		
	Productive Recognition	2.17 (14.44)			4.06 (27.04)		
	Productive Recall	2.03 (13.52)			3.31 (22.04)		
Non-digital games (*n*=39)	Receptive Recognition	12.46 (62.31)	256.86	0.87	16.08 (80.38)	266.72	0.88
	Receptive Recall	9.77 (48.84)			13.08 (65.38)		
	Productive Recognition	1.90 (12.65)			3.56 (23.76)		
	Productive Recall	1.82 (12.13)			3.26 (21.71)		

***Note:** the total score = 20.

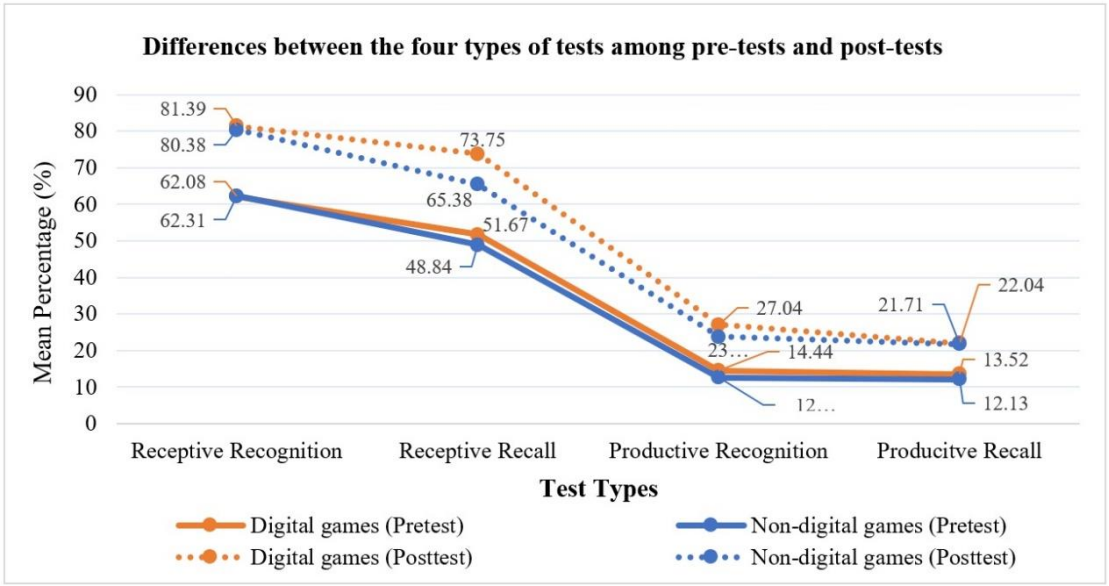


Figure 1. Differences Between the Four Types of Tests Among Pre-Test and Post-Tests

B. The Effects of Digital Games and Non-Digital Games on Students' Perceptions of Vocabulary Learning

The results, summarised in Table 6, highlight students' positive perceptions of digital games. The overall mean score across all questionnaire items was 4.40 (88%), with a standard deviation of 0.77. These findings indicate that Thai secondary school participants have a high level of positive agreement with learning vocabulary through digital games. High ratings across all items reflect strong engagement, enjoyment, and active participation. Students reported feeling pleased ($\bar{x} = 4.78$) and relaxed ($\bar{x} = 4.56$), and demonstrated effort, attention, and motivation in learning new words. Overall, these findings suggest that digital game-based learning creates an engaging and supportive environment that encourages active involvement and sustained interest in vocabulary learning.

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TABLE 6
STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF DIGITAL GAMES

No.	Items	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	%	Meaning
1	I am actively involved in digital game-based vocabulary activities.	4.42	0.73	88%	Very high
2	I try hard to finish the vocabulary tasks in digital games.	4.53	0.65	91%	Very high
3	I pay close attention during digital game-based lessons.	4.44	0.69	89%	Very high
4	I feel happy when I learn vocabulary through digital games.	4.78	0.42	96%	Very high
5	I feel excited to learn new words through digital games.	4.36	0.89	87%	Very high
6	I feel more relaxed while using digital games to learn vocabulary.	4.56	0.65	91%	Very high
7	I think carefully about the vocabulary used in digital games.	4.22	0.83	84%	Very high
8	I try to understand the meaning of each new word in the game.	4.47	0.84	89%	Very high
9	I focus on learning vocabulary while playing digital games.	4.36	0.79	87%	Very high
10	I ask questions or share my ideas during digital game lessons.	4.14	0.96	83%	Very high
11	I give suggestions to improve the digital learning games.	4.05	1.04	81%	Very high
12	I show initiative to learn new words during or after the games.	4.48	0.77	90%	Very high
Total		**4.40**	**0.77**	**88%**	**Very high**

The analysis of the questionnaire data also indicated participants' high level of positive perception of learning vocabulary through non-digital games. The results showed an overall mean score of 4.37 ($\bar{x}$ = 87%; S.D. = 0.75). High ratings across all items reflect strong engagement, enjoyment, and active participation. Students reported feeling relaxed ($\bar{x}$ = 4.51) and demonstrated a strong effort to understand word meanings ($\bar{x}$ = 4.62), while also showing motivation and focus in learning new vocabulary. Overall, these findings suggest that non-digital game-based learning fosters an engaging, supportive environment that encourages active involvement and sustained interest in vocabulary learning.

TABLE 7
STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF NON-DIGITAL GAMES

No.	Items	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	%	Meaning
1	I am actively involved in non-digital game-based vocabulary activities.	4.33	0.70	87%	Very high
2	I try hard to finish the vocabulary tasks in non-digital games.	4.35	0.71	87%	Very high
3	I pay close attention during non-digital game-based lessons.	4.30	0.73	86%	Very high
4	I feel happy when I learn vocabulary through non-digital games.	4.46	0.75	89%	Very high
5	I feel excited to learn new words through non-digital games.	4.46	0.71	89%	Very high
6	I feel more relaxed while using non-digital games to learn vocabulary.	4.51	0.68	90%	Very high
7	I think carefully about the vocabulary used in non-digital games.	4.26	0.91	85%	Very high
8	I try to understand the meaning of each new word in the game.	4.62	0.59	92%	Very high
9	I focus on learning vocabulary while playing non-digital games.	4.46	0.68	89%	Very high
10	I ask questions or share my ideas during non-digital game lessons.	4.08	0.89	82%	Very high
11	I give suggestions to improve the non-digital games for learning.	4.00	1.00	80%	Very high
12	I show initiative to learn new words during or after the games.	4.62	0.63	92%	Very high
Total		**4.37**	**0.75**	**87%**	**Very high**

V. DISCUSSION

A. Effects of Digital and Non-Digital Game-Based Instruction on Vocabulary Learning

The results reported in this study indicate that both digital and non-digital game-based instructional techniques can enhance receptive and productive vocabulary acquisition among Thai secondary school learners over time. The consistent gains observed across phases suggest that these instructional modes are effective for teaching new vocabulary and may also aid the retention of form-meaning mappings. Similar results have been reported in our previous studies, which indicated that game-based learning is effective for EFL learners (Nation, 2022; Teemueangsai et al., 2025; Webb & Nation, 2017) and that retrieval practice promotes vocabulary acquisition through repeated exposure to words.

Theoretically, these findings can be explained by Paivio's (1986, 2006) dual coding theory, which suggests that we learn more easily when information is processed through both our verbal and nonverbal systems. In the current study, both digital and non-digital games may have elicited these processes. Digital games usually integrate written input, auditory feedback, and dynamic visual elements, whereas non-digital games typically combine verbal explanations, peer discussions, and visual or physical materials. This multimodal engagement may have promoted more robust form-meaning associations for receptive vocabulary knowledge.

One important finding is that receptive vocabulary knowledge, particularly recognition, outperformed recall (productive), which remained relatively lower. This pattern aligns with established models of vocabulary acquisition (Nation, 2022; Schmitt, 2010), which theorise that vocabulary development progresses along a continuum, from receptive access to productive control. This distinction may be further explained by dual coding theory, in which visual and contextual cues often aid recognition, whereas productive recall requires learners to retrieve lexical forms independently, placing a greater burden on memory and processing.

Additionally, the findings could be understood in the context of Sweller's (1994) cognitive load theory. Because digital games feature more structured interfaces, immediate feedback, and guided task sequences, the cognitive load associated with extraneous processing may have been reduced, allowing learners to reallocate cognitive resources from extraneous

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processing to lexical processing. In contrast, digital games may have discouraged deeper semantic processing through faster-paced interaction, peer negotiation, and the ubiquity of verbal rehearsal. Collectively, these complementary processes suggest that both modes of instruction might support vocabulary learning through divergent yet perhaps comparably potent cognitive processes.

Although inferential analysis found no statistically significant differences between the two groups, a few descriptive trends appear pedagogically important. Across the reception domain, digital users performed slightly better on recall-based tasks, suggesting a modest boost in controlled retrieval and short-term consolidation, potentially due to user interference from immediate feedback and repetition cycles. By contrast, the group that did not use digital materials performed better on recognition tasks, indicating that social interaction and embodied engagement may strengthen visual-verbal associations. These nuanced results also align with previous studies on the differential impact of instructional conditions on distinct aspects of vocabulary knowledge (Laufer & Goldstein, 2004; Stæhr, 2008).

Crucially, both formats appear to have offered more opportunities for retrieval practice, an approach known for its role in vocabulary learning, according to Webb and Nation (2017). Learners engaged with lexical items through repeated exposure, decision-making, and information retrieval. Thus, such repeated retrieval may account for some of the sustained gains and, by extension, retention. In addition, the game-based settings may have fostered low-anxiety, motivating situations that would facilitate sustained involvement and risk-taking, conditions known to promote growth in applied vocabulary development.

In a Thai EFL context, these results appear to support previous research suggesting that learners are likely to have stronger receptive than productive vocabulary knowledge (Nontasee & Sukying, 2023; Sukying, 2025). However, the current study extends this work by testing a different hypothesis about productive vocabulary knowledge: that teaching (when activities involve interaction, repetition, and communicative engagement) may have a larger effect than previously thought. This provides preliminary evidence that a game-based approach may offer a strategy for addressing long-standing issues in fostering learners' active vocabulary use.

B. Learners' Perceptions of Digital and Non-Digital Game-Based Vocabulary Learning

Results on learners' perceptions indicated that both digital and non-digital game-based instruction were perceived as enjoyable and effective for vocabulary learning. These positive impressions appear to align with previous research, which shows that game-based learning environments can boost learner motivation, engagement, and attitudes towards language learning (Teemueangsai et al., 2025).

Constructivist learning theory, as reflected in these results, is evident in Vygotsky's (1978) work, which stressed the importance of social interaction and active participation in learning. Specifically, non-digital games might have supported collaborative learning, peer discussion, and negotiation of meaning, all of which are conducive to co-constructing knowledge in meaningful contexts. This interaction likely fostered positive attitudes and engagement among students.

Concurrently, digital games appeared to offer interactive, visually engaging experiences that may have fostered motivation and sustained learners' engagement over time. Features such as instant feedback, game mechanics, and multimedia input may have led learners to view computerised games as rewarding and an easy way to learn vocabulary. This aligns with studies showing that a digital environment may promote cognitive and affective engagement in learning, thereby enhancing L2 acquisition.

What was intriguing, however, was that learners did not see digital and non-digital games as competing methods, but rather as complementary instructional materials. On the one hand, digital games were associated with convenience, speed, and an orderly way to obtain feedback, whereas non-digital ones led to interaction, cooperation, and more intricate discussion. This finding also corroborates the recent trend towards blended or hybrid instruction in EFL settings, suggesting that learners may benefit more from a balanced combination of modalities.

VI. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicated that both digital and non-digital game-based instruction can improve EFL learners' vocabulary learning and long-term retention, particularly by reinforcing the form-meaning connection through active involvement. Both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge improved significantly, with gains persisting in subsequent assessments. Importantly, the statistically non-significant difference between the two modes suggests that pedagogical design, rather than the technological medium alone, may be a more relevant driver of learning outcomes. Both pedagogical modes foster positive perceptions among learners, helping to create motivating and engaging environments.

Pedagogically, the arguments emphasise the need to design tasks that are goal-specific, promote retrieval practice, and foster interaction to support meaningful language use. Digital and non-digital games appear to serve as complementary tools, suggesting that a blended approach might yield the greatest engagement and learning. Aligning task difficulty and pacing with learners' skill levels may further enhance effectiveness. On a methodological level, the study showcases the potential of an integrated mixed-methods approach to capture learning outcomes and learner experiences holistically. However, a few limitations need to be recognised. Generalisability is limited using a single, context-based sample. Furthermore, concentrating solely on the form-meaning connection fails to adequately address the many facets of vocabulary knowledge, and the limited duration may not suffice for long-term development. More studies with

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heterogeneous populations, delivered over a longer period and using broader measures of lexical knowledge (e.g., productive collocations or contextual meaning), are needed in future research. Future research may also investigate other language competencies and compare game-based instruction with non-game-based instructional methods.

Together, these findings add to the growing evidence of the effectiveness of game-based instruction in facilitating receptive and productive vocabulary development and tentatively support the use of combined digital and non-digital strategies in EFL classrooms.

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Enhancing Qur'anic Comprehension Through Linguistic Cohesion: A Discourse Analysis of the Indonesian Translation of Surah Yusuf

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***Abstract*—Understanding the Qur'an requires more than just identifying words. Readers also need to understand how grammatical features connect meanings throughout sentences. This study explored the role of grammatical cohesion in facilitating the reader's comprehension of the Indonesian translation of Surah Yusuf, where the referential component, specifically personal and demonstrative references, facilitates the reader's understanding and maintains textual continuity. The research used an exploratory, reader-response methodology, with a questionnaire administered to 15 participants. In addition, the analysis combines qualitative analysis with Halliday and Hasan's cohesion theory. The results demonstrated that integrated reference patterns facilitate the reader's knowledge of the storyline, character identification, and interpretation of temporal and spatial relationships more efficiently and effectively. Most readers agree that the Indonesian translation is easy to understand. Overall, although it is limited in the scope of participants, the study found that grammatical cohesiveness is crucial for improving the understanding of translated texts. The linguistic component in this study is paramount as a basis for further study on the translation of the Qur'an. Finally, the research enhances analysis of the Qur'anic discourse by showing that grammatical coherence serves as a textual attribute and a cognitive instrument that facilitates the reader's understanding of the translated text.**

***Index Terms*—cohesion, comprehension, exploration, grammar, Prophet Yusuf**

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I. Introduction

In the Qur'an, Surah Yusuf tells the story of the prophet Yusuf. It contains 111 verses, some of which are from the Makkiyah chapter, which was written in Mecca before the *hijrah*, Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina in AD 622, marking the formation of the first Muslim community. The surah is named after the prophet Yusuf, indicating that it primarily concerns his life. However, the gist of Surah Yusuf is emphasizing that the Quran, as a holy book, describes everything in great detail. This explanation leads to advice grounded in the power and knowledge of the Almighty and includes hidden features (Savaskan, 2021).

Surah Yusef is a unique chapter in the Qur'an that conveys a person's story through a series of events. This narrative is extremely paramount because it shows the anguish in a young person's emotions, the seduction of women, the endurance of sorrow, and the love of a father. The surah is often referred to in Arabic as *ahsan al-qashash* ("the best of stories"). Still, the significance of this surah is further underscored by the perception of the Indonesian translation of the Qur'an as a masterpiece, particularly among those engaged in its dissemination. Although the Qur'an is the holy scripture of Islam and a way of life for Muslims (Ayyad, 2022; Boğan & Sarıışık, 2019), not all Muslims are fluent in Arabic; hence, translations are crucial for them to understand the Qur'an. Therefore, it is helpful to explain the Qur'an to people who may not speak the local language.

Several studies have examined the surah on Prophet Yusuf. For example, "The Story of Yusuf in the Qur'an: A Study of Stylistics" by Hanis (2012) examined stylistic aspects, including homonyms, synonyms, and antonyms. Mahliatussikah's (2016) study "Analysis of Prophet Yusuf's Story in the Qur'an through the Interdisciplinary Approach of Literary Psychology" states that Yusuf's story had great style, content, and purpose. The research titled "Cohesion and Coherence in Prophet Yusuf's Story in the Qur'an," by Nashoih (2015), analyzed the Arabic of Prophet Yusuf's narrative, focusing on cohesion and coherence rather than translation. Trisnaningrum et al. (2019) paper "Discourse Analysis of Grammatical Cohesion Devices in College Students' Academic Writing Essays" highlighted that references and conjunctions are commonly employed, suggesting a preference for ellipses and substitutes.

Previous research on Surah Yusuf has been analyzed through a narrative lens, focusing on stylistic, psychological, and cohesion-oriented perspectives. However, it is primarily descriptive and centered on the Arabic language of the Qur'an. Very few studies have been conducted on the influence of grammatical cohesiveness on the understanding of the translation of the Qur'an in Indonesian. This gap is significant because Surah Yusuf is among the most frequently read and oft-quoted chapters of the Qur'an. It teaches Indonesian readers about moral, social, and religious teachings. To comprehend the plot of the text, readers need more than just words. It also requires an excellent understanding of when to use the right words or phrases. Thus, the message conveyed by the text's greeting is maintained from one verse to another.

The study highlights the Indonesian-language coherence of Surah Yusuf, published by Al-Mujamma Al-Malik Fahd, focusing on the use of personal and demonstrative pronouns. Previous research on Surah Yusuf has primarily focused on the stylistic elements or the coherence of the Arabic text of the Qur'an. Therefore, given the importance of linguistic coherence for comprehension and its role in improving readers' understanding, this study uses two methodologies that integrate discourse analysis with the study's perspective. The approach, grounded in linguistic principles, examines how personal and demonstrative pronouns support the narrative development of each sentence. In addition, the questionnaire responses were used to assess the clarity and understanding of cohesive patterns. The research combines linguistic structure with reader comprehension to show that grammar functions not only as a textual component but also as a guide to help non-Arab readers understand their reading. It can expand the linguistic reach of translated surahs and increase knowledge of Qur'an study and translation theory.

II. Literature Review

A. Discourse Comprehension

Readers need to comprehend what they are reading easily. How well a reader can pick up on language clues that help them understand what a text means is just as necessary as what it says. This shows how writers and readers affect each other (Zahra & Burr, 2018). Understanding style is also crucial because it shows how words fit together and how thoughts flow (Fareh et al., 2020). To fully understand the Qur'an, one must first know how it was put together, especially its syntax. Discourse analysis studies language as a means by which people act in society. It examines how language, context, and people work together to create meaning (Mostofi, 2018). It shows how language choice affects communication, especially how grammatical structures make communication more coherent and help people agree on what they mean (Alyahya, 2023; Kykot, 2021; Opeibi, 2019). Grammatical coherence is a well-known part of discourse analysis that helps people understand texts (Szymańska, 2020).

Discourse is an integrated and interrelated aspect of language. Moreover, it can be said or written in a way that makes sense and is easy to understand (Zanichelli et al., 2020). Cohesion uses linguistic abilities to connect phrases and sentences. It lets readers see how ideas fit together in a way that makes sense. Grammatical cohesiveness is the use of grammatical tools like reference, conjunction, syntactic structure, and others to assist in arranging information in a phrase. These elements work together to transform how people communicate, making it easier to understand what they mean. Kintsch's (1998) construct-integration model posits that a reader's capacity to synthesize concepts across text sections into a

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cohesive mental representation influences comprehension. Grammatical cohesive devices, particularly referential processes, enhance comprehension by guaranteeing the fluidity and coherence of phrases and sentences. This study demonstrates that a solid understanding of grammatical allusions in the Indonesian translation of Surah Yusuf helps readers accurately and distinctly comprehend the narrative.

B. Linguistic Cohesion

Grammatical and lexical or syntactic categories are groups of words that play different grammatical and semantic roles in a sentence. Examples of grammatical categories are function words, such as articles, prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, and auxiliary verbs. They serve grammatical purposes but usually have little lexical value. Furthermore, these grammatical or lexical categories include cohesion. Grammatical cohesiveness is the way that different forms in the grammatical system work together. It includes things like references, substitutions, ellipsis, and conjunctions (Abu-Ayyash, 2017; Ampa & Basri, 2019; Qin et al., 2019; Suwandi, 2016). Lexical categories, or parts of speech, are collections of words that act the same way regarding grammar. It commonly refers to states, events, or other things that are not mere words. This word can be found in nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. When grammatical and lexical categories are closely related, discourse can be straightforward, easy to understand, and get its point across to readers. Researchers assert that discourse analysis is crucial for recognizing and comprehending various elements, including substitutions, relationships, ellipses, lexical cohesion, intersections, and rhetorical structures. This method examines every part of the conversation to ensure clarity.

This study underscores the significance of referents in data analysis. According to discourse analysis, reference is the act of referring, which the speaker or writer sees as a key part of communication. Referents may act as co-referents, denoting entities that do not self-interpret but signify another entity. A reference corresponds to this viewpoint, indicating an indirect participant or component whose identification can be retrieved. In English, demonstratives, definite pronouns, comparatives, and euphoric adverbs (such as here, there, now, and then) are all used as references (Ahn, 2022; Garing, 2011; Hinterwimmer & Bosch, 2018; Kaplan, 2004; Pappas, 2025). They are all taught, learned, and employed well and interchangeably.

The categories of references include personal, demonstrative, and comparative references, enhancing understanding of their role in language and speech. In interpretation, if understanding extends beyond the text, the relationship is termed exophora, indicating that it does not enhance the text's integrity. On the other hand, if the text's interpretation is endophoric, that means it creates unifying links. It is an example of two anaphoric features of ending physical relationships, as seen through a backward reading (Cornish, 1996; Perdicoyianni-Paléologou, 2006). Readers who use a cataphoric approach look for meanings that come after the text. This difference in how people read helps them understand and make sense of the relationships between texts. Thus, there is the necessity for sentences that flow well and create a complete and sufficient discussion. The main factor in deciding whether a group of sentences is text or context is how the sentences in the network relate to each other and to the network as a whole. The network is built on a cohesive relationship, which gives it its identity. Semantic cohesion describes the meaning of textual relationships. Moreover, textual, grammatical, and lexical factors contribute to cohesion (Abu-Athreh & Aladdin, 2025; Eskandari & Saeidi, 2024). Cohesion also includes making meaning, which goes beyond conversation, language, and sentences. Finally, cohesion occurs when different parts of a discourse are understood in relation to each other, helping us grasp how all parts of a text are connected.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) observed that coherence is a semantic connection that unites textual elements, enabling texts to function as a coherent whole. Grammatical coherence can be seen in the use of references, substitutions, ellipses, and conjunctions. In narrative speech, references are the most paramount way to make a story make sense. The conceptual framework indicated how personal reference and demonstrative function in the Indonesian translation of Surah Yusuf.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The study was conducted using a qualitative analytic discourse analysis based on the exploration of data and reader responses. This study focused on the use of personal pronouns and demonstratives in translating Surah Yusuf from Indonesian into English. In addition, it applied the cohesion theory to analyze the connections among anaphora, cataphora, and exophora that appear in the verse, especially as the characters, temporal sequence, and story context develop. By reading the text carefully, 15 readers were asked to fill out the questionnaire to assess how clear and fluent their understanding is in terms of the use of referential consistency in the verse. Questionnaire data is used only for exploratory purposes, not for statistical generalization. However, this analysis serves as methodological triangulation, offering a reader-centered perspective that helps put discourse-based findings in context and demonstrate their value. The study is intended to add depth of interpretation and the reader’s credibility in integrating the reading textually and thoroughly, based on the reader's responses.

B. Data Sources

The study's data sources included Surah Yusuf from the Qur’an and the 15 participants chosen to represent readers through the questionnaire. Because this research is qualitative and exploratory, a limited number of participants were chosen with the intention of keeping each participant's responses fully engaged and to allow their reading experience to

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be interpreted more holistically. The study does not aim for statistical generalizations but offers enlightening insights into readers' perceptions and processing of grammatical cohesiveness in the context of authentic reading. The questionnaire results were analyzed descriptively to identify recurring patterns in readers' understanding and to complement the findings of the discourse analysis. Though the limited sample size also limits the generalization of the study, this does not detract from its analytical significance, as it shows the efficacy of grammatical cohesion in the translation of the Qur'an. These findings provide a basis for future studies that can improve analysis by using a larger, more diverse group of participants or by applying a more robust experimental approach to investigate the relationship between coherent devices and reader understanding.

C. Data Collection Techniques

The data collection technique is based on two core sources: the Indonesian translation of Surah Yusuf and readers' responses to specific parts of the Qur'an. Textual data consists of surahs that mark pivotal moments, particularly those characterized by tension, transitions, and conclusions. The author chose the verse to show how grammatical consistency works within it and how the story flows as it is. In addition to discourse-based analysis, 15 participants were given a questionnaire to collect data on readers' responses to the verse. Furthermore, the questions in the questionnaire were intended to make the reader think about how clear and easy the verses are to understand, especially when it comes to using referential language. The questionnaire was simple and to the point so each participant could read the Indonesian translation of the Qur'an very well and could easily think about their experience while reading it rather than having to do a technical or critical review.

D. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using three interconnected processes. First, a qualitative discourse analysis was carried out on selected ayat (verses) from Surah Yusef, focusing on the consistency of language, particularly the use of demonstratives and personal references. The reason for this is to assess referential items in discourse that are interconnected among phrases in the verses. It means that the analysis does not measure how often certain parts are used; instead, it examines how the reader makes the story more plausible.

Second, the reader's responses to the questionnaire distributed were analyzed to group the reader's answers based on how well they can read and understand the interrelationships among the verses. Additionally, the responses were compiled to categorize how most individuals understood the topic.

Third, the researchers compared the readers' response test findings with a discourse analysis to examine how the grammatical coherence pattern aligned with the reader's actual understanding of the text. Moreover, this study integrated textual context with readers' interpretations to provide comprehensive insight into grammatical coherence in the Indonesian translation of Surah Yusuf, helping the reader easily understand the story of the prophet Yusuf.

E. Data Validity and Reliability

Quality and reliability data were confirmed through triangulation and traditional methods. Combining discourse data analysis and readers' responses to a questionnaire enhanced validity and helped readers see the pattern of grammatical coherence in the story. An analysis criterion that is consistent with a theoretical framework and the methodology for collecting and interpreting data is paramount to the validity process. It means the data and theory used in this study are reliable.

IV. RESULTS

A. Grammatical Cohesion in Discourse on the Story of Prophet Yusuf

From a grammatical parameter, conjunctions, ellipsis, restoration, referents, and substitution are the elements that improve discourse coherence. It examines specific traits, primarily focusing on the reference property listed in the following tables.

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TABLE 1
PERSONAL REFERENCES IN THE INDONESIAN TRANSLATION OF THE STORY OF PROPHET YUSUF (QUR'AN 12:1–35)

Verses	Reference Type	Linguistic Marker	Referent	Direction of Reference	Discourse Function
1–3	Personal (Exophoric, Cataphoric)	*kami, -mu, kamu*	Allah, Prophet Muhammad	Exophoric; Cataphoric	Introduces the divine narrator and addressee, creating the first coherent conversation.
4–5	Personal (Anaphoric)	*-nya, kamu, -mu*	Yusuf	Anaphoric	Keeps everything the same between Yusuf and his father.
6–7	Personal (Anaphoric)	*kamu,, -mu, -Nya, -nya*	Yusuf; Allah; Yusuf's brother	Anaphoric	Links heavenly authority to bloodline and story participants.
8–10	Personal (Anaphoric and Cataphoric)	*mereka, kita, dia, and kamu*	Yusuf's brothers: Yusuf	Anaphoric; Cataphoric	Maintains group identity and creates narrative tension.
11–12	Personal (Anaphoric)	*dia, -nya*	Yusuf	Anaphoric	Strengthens Yusuf's role as the main character.
13–15	Personal (Anaphoric and Cataphoric)	*dia, kamu, -nya, kami*	Yusuf; brothers; Allah	Anaphoric; Cataphoric	Creates tension and shows that God is involved.
16–18	Personal (Anaphoric, Endophoric)	*mereka, kami, kamu, and dia*	Brothers; Ya'qub	Anaphoric; Endophoric	Supports emotional conversation and story flow.
19–22	Personal (Anaphoric and Cataphoric)	*mereka, dia, -nya, and kami*	Travelers; Yusuf; Allah	Anaphoric; Cataphoric	Keeps track of participants even when the scenario changes.
23–25	Personal (Anaphoric)	*dia, aku, kami, -nya, and -mu*	Zulaikha; Yusuf; Allah; Al-'Aziz	Anaphoric	Clarifies roles in family fights.
26–29	Personal (Anaphoric and Cataphoric)	*dia, -nya, kamu*	Zulaikha; Yusuf	Anaphoric; Cataphoric	finishes accusations and judgments.
30–31	Personal (Anaphoric)	*mereka, dia, kami, -nya*	Women of the town; Zulaikha; Yusuf	Anaphoric	Keeps public conversation coherent.
32–33	Personal (Anaphoric and Exophoric)	*aku, dia, -nya, engkau*	Zulaikha; Yusuf; Allah	Anaphoric; Exophoric	Shows moral conflict and begging.
34–35	Personal (Anaphoric)	*dia, -nya*	Allah; Yusuf	Anaphoric	Ends the episode with divine authority.

Table 1 shows that personal references are paramount for keeping people interested in the story of Prophet Yusuf. Pronouns like *dia, mereka, kami, -nya,* and *kamu*, usually refer to people who have already been identified, such as Yusuf, his brothers, and Allah. Anaphora is often used to help the reader keep track of the characters as they go through different scenarios and chat to each other without repeating the exact words. When divine beings communicate in verses, there are cataphoric and exophoric references. Pronouns imply or succeed to the immediate context of the text. Thus, using adequate personal references helps the story flow by highlighting characters' interactions and advancing the plot.

TABLE 2
DEMONSTRATIVE REFERENCES (LOCATIONAL AND TEMPORAL) IN THE INDONESIAN TRANSLATION OF THE STORY OF PROPHET YUSUF

Verse	Demonstrative Type	Linguistic Marker	Spatial/Temporal Scope	Direction of Reference	Discourse Function
9	Locational	*ke suatu daerah*	Unspecified region	Cataphoric	Adds spatial uncertainty to Yusuf's fate.
10	Locational	*ke dasar sumur*	Bottom of the well	Cataphoric	Identifies a key setting for the story.
17	Locational	*di dekat barang-barang kami*	Near belongings	Anaphoric	Increases the realism of emotions and space.
21	Locational	*Mesir; di muka bumi*	Egypt; Earth	Anaphoric	Mark's shift in socio-geography.
23	Locational	*di rumahnya*	Zulaikha's house	Cataphoric	Creates the conditions for temptation.
30	Locational	*di kota*	The town	Cataphoric	Encloses the public social area.
3	Temporal	*sebelum*	Time before revelation	Cataphoric	Indicates the epistemological state before revelation.
12	Temporal	*besok pagi*	Immediate future time	Cataphoric	Uses future planning to move the plot along.
16	Temporal	*di sore hari*	Specific past time	Anaphoric	Anchors affective occurrences in time.
22	Temporal	*tatkala*	Life-stage transition	Anaphoric	Indicates Yusuf's advancement and growth.
15	Temporal	*tatkala; akan*	Sequential and future time	Anaphoric; Cataphoric	Puts things in chronological order and predicts their results.
28	Temporal	*tatkala*	Moment of realization	Anaphoric	Identifies a pivotal moment in the story.

Table 2 shows that demonstrative references help place the story in a specific time and location, facilitating a more

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straightforward interpretation of the content. *Ke dasar sumur, di rumahnya*, and *di kota* are locational demonstratives that associate a particular area with specific events. These allow readers to follow the narrative and understand how the context develops. For instance, *sebelum, besok pagi, di sore hari*, and *tatkala* are words that indicate the order of events in time by pointing out instances in the past, present, and future. These time markers are very significant because they show changes, highlight major events, and hint at what will happen next. In general, demonstrative references provide a clear spatiotemporal perspective that helps events unfold in a logical order and helps the reader grasp the story more clearly.

B. Comprehending Prophet Yusuf's Story Discourse

A study of how well Indonesian Muslims comprehend and use technology shows that they need clear language and careful planning to make it easier for them to access and understand. This language strategy is intended to help readers better understand texts. Its goal is to make communication as clear as possible so that everyone can understand it and have no trouble reading it.

(a). Comprehension Based on the Reader

Figure 1 shows that 15 randomly selected participants answered 10 questions about the story of Prophet Yusuf, indicating that they understood it well.

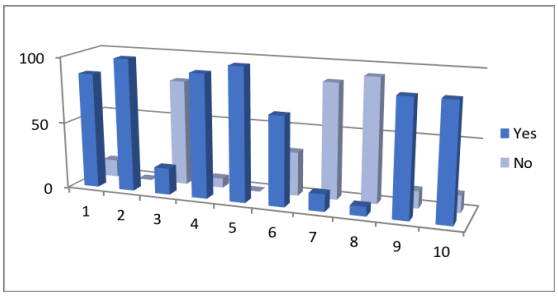


Figure 1. Percentage of Readers' Comprehension of Prophet Yusuf's Story

The survey results suggest that most readers found it easy to skim the story of Prophet Yusuf, as 87% said it was easy to skim, and 13% said it was hard. Participants reported that stories containing grammatical coherence tools were easier to grasp in Questions 9 and 10, just like they did in Questions 8 and 9. On the other hand, 13% said that snippets based on cohesiveness were challenging to understand. Everyone agreed with Questions 2 and 5; therefore, there is a solid consensus on comprehension. Furthermore, 80% of the participants who answered Questions 3, 6, and 8 said reading was easy, 67% said it was easy to understand, and only 7% said it was challenging. Meanwhile, 20% said it was difficult to read, and 33% said it was difficult to understand. The results indicate that 80% and 93% of the readers found it easy to read and comprehend, suggesting there were few issues.

(b). Comprehension Based on Language Device Use

To comprehend the story of the Prophet Yusuf, it is necessary to devote special attention to grammar, as demonstrated through personal and demonstrative references that correspond with theoretical ideas. Making up time and space in a story renders it more engaging by using demonstrative references. These parts of speech work together to help ensure the story conveys sense and is easy for readers to follow, allowing the conversation to flow more easily. The survey results demonstrated that the language worked, as almost everyone who took part understood the story, indicating it was simpler to follow. These results support what is already known about how language affects the understanding of religion. The researchers and leaders of the religion must explain how they communicate and treat everyone. The critical thing to remember is that people in the community speak different languages and come from other cultures. Understanding how language affects people makes spiritual experiences easier for everyone to understand and strengthens ties with religious concepts.

The story of Prophet Yusuf demonstrates strong grammatical consistency, particularly in its use of references across all five episodes. The possessive *nya* (“his”) is used 13 times in the story to refer to God or Prophet Yusuf. The pronouns *dia* (“he”) and *kamu* (“you”) are third person. Local and temporal demonstrations help the story by showing how things change over time and in different places. The phrases *ke dasar sumur* (“to the bottom of the well”) and *dari Mesir* (“from Egypt”) help readers understand the story by indicating when and where it happened. The story of the Prophet Joseph also uses words like *sebelum* (“before”) and *besok pagi* (“tomorrow morning”) to make it easy to follow. It refers to Halliday and Hasan's (1976) concept of cohesiveness. These references make it easy to see how different parts of the text relate, which helps keep the story consistent. Readers can sort events by time to better understand how the story of the Qur’an unfolds. This method clearly presents the subject, the story's structure, and the order of events. It also discusses how essential language techniques are for clearly conveying minor temporal differences, thereby enabling readers to comprehend the Qur’an's literary techniques better.

Cohesion theory affirms that grammatical coherence highlights the paramount role of reference in comprehending a discourse. It connects the story’s lines and themes, making it easier to learn. In addition, it also makes it easier for readers

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to follow and understand the content. This linguistic feature provides a deeper understanding of the intricate aspects of the Prophet Yusuf's story and the Qur'an as a whole. Using the Indonesian translation ensures that the reader comprehends the story and enjoys the narrative. It also shows how to use what readers are reading. It emphasizes the paramount importance of language for understanding religious texts. The theoretical perspective offers a solid basis for comprehending textual coherence. The coherence theory, as proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976), holds that factors such as conjunctions and reference can assist a text in making sense and understanding the Qur'an language. It is a way to read and understand the text quickly, so the story's message is easily understood.

V. Discussion

This study highlights that personal references and demonstratives are a core means of connecting thoughts in the Indonesian translation of the story of Prophet Yusuf. Most of those references are anaphora, which point back to the people mentioned earlier in the verse, including Yusuf and other prominent characters in the story. Its concept aligns with Halliday and Hasan's (1976) perspective on the paramount role of references in maintaining textual cohesion and character continuity. The Indonesian translation keeps the story going, reduces repetition, and allows readers to easily follow what each character is saying by utilizing personal pronouns throughout the verses.

Demonstrative references, although rare, serve an additional function in the narrative, specifically the temporal and spatial aspects, such as the words *sebelum* ("before"), *kapan* ("when"), and *besok pagi* ("tomorrow morning"), but they can help the reader understand the sequence of events in a story. On the other hand, local demonstratives can connect the events to specific places. The findings provide insight into the cohesive, both personal and demonstrative, beyond mere formal linguistic functions. The reference also facilitates the reader's comprehension of the text, as evidenced by Halliday and Hasan (1976) and other research on understanding discourse (Suwandi, 2016). These references effectively create a plausible structure for the story and give it meaning.

From a cognitive viewpoint, the connection between personal and demonstrative reference follows the construct-integration model of Kintsch (1998). Kintsch (1998) emphasizes that comprehension depends on the reader's ability to integrate the cross-clause information into a unified mental representation. Personal references help track who is participating and demonstratively show how things relate in space and time, making it easier for the reader to understand the information. In addition, referential cohesiveness makes it easier for readers to follow complex storylines by providing clear clues about who did what, where, and when.

Furthermore, the reader's response supports the interpretation's results. The questionnaire's data show that the reader relies heavily on referential signs to comprehend the narrative progression. Parts that consistently incorporate personal and demonstrative references are considered easier to understand, thus confirming that coherence serves not only as a linguistic feature but also as a cognitive facilitator. The finding is consistent with the study of narrative insight, which shows that the referential clarity enhances reading and interpretive certainty (Fareh et al., 2020; Mostofi, 2018).

The study demonstrates that grammatical consistency, particularly in personal and demonstrative references, is paramount to enhancing comprehension of Qur'an translation. This referential choice serves as both a structural component and a pragmatic tool, guiding the reader through a complex sequence of actions, emotions, and moral significance. Cohesion acts as a bridge among the texts of the Qur'an verses. Modern readers combine how text is organized with how the brain processes the information presented. It makes it easier for people from different languages and cultures to understand the text they read.

The research focuses on Qur'an discourse, which shows that grammatical cohesion in translation serves as a structural and cognitive element for the reader. The study results are relevant to Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion theory, which explains how referential references actively influence interpretation in the Qur'anic story, particularly for non-Arab readers. Finally, the study highlights a coherent pattern in readers' responses, synthesizes language analysis, and examines discourse on the translation of the Qur'an.

VI. Conclusion

Referring to the results and discussion, the study focuses on five episodes of the Prophet Yusuf story, highlighting different grammatical relationships, particularly in references. The possessive *nya* ("his") is used most often (13 times) in the story. The reference is a third-person pronoun that refers to God or Yusuf, depending on the story context. The referential structure is making linguistic features consistent with the relationship between human and divine actions. For instance, the pronouns *dia* ("he") and *kamu* ("you") are used to track who the characters are and how Yusuf interacts with them in the story. The pronouns allow the reader to keep track of the narrative without having to repeat the characters' names. The Prophet Yusuf's story also contains demonstratives that indicate where and when it takes place, as well as references to the people in the story. Grammatical consistency proved paramount in helping readers understand Yusuf's life and the book's message. Finally, based on the arguments, the study results demonstrate that Indonesian translation is facilitated not only by its content but also by its grammatical cohesiveness; thus, readers can connect more readily with the text.

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The Perception of Bookish Religious Lexicon in Selected Poetry of Akmulla: Comprehensibility, Lexical Complexity, and Poetic Effect

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***Abstract*—This study examines how bookish religious vocabulary in Akmulla's poetry is perceived by contemporary Kazakh-speaking readers. The aim is to identify the relationship between text comprehensibility, lexical complexity, and poetic effect. The research materials were drawn from a corpus of 60 poetic stanzas, of which 10 were selected for experimental analysis, each containing one target lexical item. Data were collected through Google Forms, where participants evaluated stanzas containing Arabic-Persian-derived words. The results show that overall text comprehensibility remains relatively high despite lexical complexity. Although lexical difficulty is moderate, it does not significantly hinder understanding. At the same time, poetic effect scores are consistently high, indicating that readers are able to appreciate the aesthetic value of the text even when some lexical items are not fully understood. Correlation analysis reveals a weak relationship between comprehensibility and difficulty, and a slight positive relationship between difficulty and poetic effect. The A/B comparison results demonstrate that participants tend to prefer simplified variants in terms of clarity. However, the original bookish forms retain their aesthetic impact. These findings suggest that the perception of poetic texts operates on both cognitive and aesthetic levels. The study contributes to understanding the role of historical bookish vocabulary in modern reader perception and the mechanisms underlying poetic language processing.**

***Index Terms*—poetic text, lexical complexity, poetic effect, bookish religious lexicon, reader perception**

I. Introduction

The issue of poetic text perception is one of the important directions in contemporary linguistics and literary studies. In particular, the relationship between linguistic complexity in literary texts and its effect on the reader remains insufficiently explored. According to the traditional view, text comprehensibility is assumed to be directly related to linguistic simplicity. However, in poetry this relationship is not always straightforward, since meaning in literary texts is shaped not only at the lexical level but also through aesthetic, emotional, and cultural context (Kim, 2024).

Reader-oriented theories regard text comprehension not as passive reception but as an active cognitive process. From this perspective, meaning is not given in a ready-made form; rather, it emerges through the interaction between the reader and the text (Gürgil & Erdağı 2025; Momeni et al., 2026; Rosenblatt, 1978). Thus, even when readers do not fully know the meanings of individual words, they can still construct the general meaning of the text by relying on context and their

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linguistic experience. In this way, text comprehension depends not only on lexical factors but also on cognitive and interpretive mechanisms (Nursaid et al., 2025; Widayanti et al., 2025; Spiegel, 1998).

This issue is especially important in poetry, where the aesthetic function of language becomes dominant. In poetry, a word is not merely a carrier of information but also a means of producing emotional and artistic effect (Jakobson, 1960). Therefore, unclear or rarely used vocabulary may in some cases not weaken the impact of a text but rather intensify it. This demonstrates the specificity of poetic language and the multilayered nature of its perception.

In the context of Kazakh literature, this issue is particularly relevant (Abdrakhim, 2018; Iskakov, 2007; Fazylova, 2021; Zhurtbay, 2021). In the poetry of akyns and zhyraus, especially in nineteenth-century works, Arabic-Persian religious and Sufi vocabulary was widely used. This lexicon was closely connected with the spiritual and cultural worldview of the period, and poetry served not only an aesthetic but also a religious and educational function. Drawing on Qur'anic verses and Islamic teachings, poets guided their audiences toward faith, morality, and spiritual values (Däribaiuly, 2017).

At the same time, the Sufi and religious terms used in nineteenth-century poetry have undergone semantic changes over time and are not always fully understandable to modern readers (Abylkasov et al., 2025; Aubakirova & Zhumagul, 2025). This phenomenon creates additional difficulties in the perception of poetic texts. Sufi vocabulary in Kazakh poetry has not fully preserved its original meanings and has acquired new interpretations (Akhmetbekova, 2013; Mataeva et al., 2022).

Accordingly, the way modern readers perceive such texts, and how lexical complexity influences comprehensibility and poetic effect, becomes an important research issue. In particular, the question of whether obscure vocabulary weakens textual perception or preserves its aesthetic impact remains highly relevant.

The aim of this study is to identify the features of how bookish religious vocabulary in Akmulla's poetry is perceived by contemporary readers. The study analyzes the levels of text comprehensibility, lexical complexity, and poetic effect, and statistically examines the relationships among them. In addition, through an A/B comparison of the original and simplified versions, the study identifies readers' perceptual strategies.

The study addresses the following main research questions:

1. How does bookish religious vocabulary affect the overall comprehensibility of the text?
2. Does lexical complexity weaken poetic effect, or does it preserve it?
3. What choice do modern readers make between comprehensibility and aesthetic effect?

Thus, this study approaches poetic text perception by integrating its cognitive and aesthetic dimensions and provides new empirical data based on Kazakh literary material.

II. Method

A. Participants

Kazakh-speaking respondents voluntarily participated in the study. Data were collected online via Google Forms. At the beginning of the survey, participants provided demographic information, including age, gender, education, profession, and level of familiarity with Kazakh literature. The total sample consisted of approximately 79 respondents, as determined by the percentage distribution of responses. The diversity of participants in terms of social and educational background ensured the generalizability of the results.

B. Materials

The research materials consisted of poetic stanzas selected from the works of Akmulla. Although the full corpus included 60 stanzas, 10 were selected for experimental analysis. The selection was purposeful, prioritizing texts containing bookish religious vocabulary that could potentially cause difficulty for modern readers.

Each stanza contained one target lexical item. The analyzed words were: ghibratly, ghazab, ghaqaid, khalaf, ghadet, sirat, tamigh, shahbaz, ghaqyl, and yskhat. These words are of Arabic-Persian origin and are relatively rare in contemporary usage.

For each lexical item, two versions were presented:

A – the original bookish form,

B – a simplified modern equivalent.

This design allowed for identifying participants' preferences in terms of comprehensibility and poetic effect.

C. Procedure

The survey followed a consistent structure, with identical questions for each stanza. After reading each text, participants rated its comprehensibility using a 5-point Likert scale (1 – not understandable, 5 – fully understandable).

Next, participants evaluated the degree to which the target word hindered comprehension (on a 1–5 scale). They also rated the poetic effect of the word. Additionally, participants were asked to provide their own interpretation of the word's meaning.

At the end of the survey, an A/B comparison task was included, where participants selected which version was more understandable and which was more aesthetically effective.

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D. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using R software. The main variables included comprehensibility, lexical difficulty, and poetic effect.

For each variable, mean values and standard deviations (SD) were calculated. Frequency distributions and percentage values were also computed.

Mean values were compared across individual lexical items. The results of the A/B tasks were analyzed in percentage terms.

Relationships between variables were examined using Pearson correlation:

– comprehensibility vs. difficulty

– difficulty vs. effect

This analysis allowed for identifying the interrelations among the key variables.

III. Results

A. Overall Comprehensibility of the Texts

At the first stage of the study, participants' overall level of text comprehension was assessed quantitatively. This indicator was calculated based on the aggregated array of ratings for all stanzas (comp_all). The results showed that the average level of comprehensibility was relatively high, with a mean value of M = 3.65 and a standard deviation of SD = 1.29. Within the 5-point scale, this indicates that the texts were not perceived as completely difficult, but neither were they entirely easy; rather, they were understood at a moderately high level.

Table 1
Overall Comprehensibility

Variable	Mean	SD
Comprehensibility	3.6468	1.2888

These results suggest that the semantic structure and lexical composition of the texts were generally accessible to participants. However, the relatively high standard deviation (SD ≈ 1.29) indicates variability in responses. In other words, while some participants fully understood the texts, others experienced lower levels of comprehension. This variation may be attributed to differences in the perception of bookish religious vocabulary.

To examine the impact of individual lexical items on overall comprehension, mean ratings were calculated for each target word. The results are presented below.

Table 2
Comprehensibility by Lexical Item (Mean Values)

Word	Mean
ghibratly	3.8228
ghazab	3.8861
ghaqaid	3.5063
khalaf	3.5949
ghadet	3.8354
sirat	3.7089
tamigh	3.6329
shahbaz	3.5443
ghaqyl	3.5570
yskhat	3.3797

As shown in Table 2, the highest comprehensibility scores were observed for ghazab (M = 3.89), ghadet (M = 3.84), and ghibratly (M = 3.82). These results suggest that these words are relatively more familiar to participants or easier to interpret semantically. It is also possible that these lexical items are connected to modern Kazakh usage or have recognizable analogues, facilitating their comprehension.

In contrast, the lowest score was recorded for yskhat (M = 3.38), followed by ghaqaid (M = 3.51), shahbaz (M = 3.54), and ghaqyl (M = 3.56). These words may represent less familiar or more complex lexical items for participants. In particular, Arabic-Persian-derived terms are known to be more difficult to interpret without sufficient contextual support, making such results expected.

Nevertheless, it is important that all mean values fall within the range of 3.3–3.9. This indicates that the texts were not perceived as incomprehensible overall; rather, most participants were able to understand them to a certain extent. In other words, bookish religious vocabulary does not render the texts entirely inaccessible but may reduce the level of comprehension to some degree.

Furthermore, the results suggest that overall comprehension depends not only on individual lexical meanings but also on contextual factors. Even when participants did not know the exact meaning of certain words, they were able to infer the general meaning of the stanza intuitively. This reflects the cognitive nature of text perception, where meaning is constructed not only at the lexical level but also through the overall textual structure.

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Overall, the findings demonstrate that the studied poetic texts exhibit a moderately high level of comprehensibility and remain accessible to readers despite lexical complexity. While individual lexical items vary in their impact, they do not fundamentally prevent the understanding of the text as a whole.

B. Lexical Difficulty of Archaic and Bookish Words

At the next stage of the study, the perceived difficulty of individual lexical items was analyzed. This indicator was calculated based on the aggregated ratings of how much each word hindered text comprehension (diff_all). The overall results showed that the mean lexical difficulty was M = 2.71 with a standard deviation of SD = 1.32. On a 5-point scale, this indicates that the words were generally not highly difficult, but not entirely easy either, reflecting a below-average level of difficulty.

TABLE 3
OVERALL LEXICAL DIFFICULTY

Variable	Mean	SD
Lexical difficulty	2.7051	1.3227

The fact that the mean value is below 3 is a significant finding. It suggests that most participants were able to understand the words to some extent or relied on contextual cues for interpretation. However, the relatively high standard deviation (SD ≈ 1.32) indicates variability in responses, meaning that for some respondents the words posed considerable difficulty. To better understand the distribution of lexical difficulty, frequency percentages were examined.

TABLE 4
DISTRIBUTION OF LEXICAL DIFFICULTY (PERCENTAGES)

Rating	Percentage (%)
1	27.22
2	13.16
3	33.16
4	14.81
5	11.65

As shown in Table 4, the largest proportion corresponds to rating 3 (33.16%), indicating that most participants perceived the words as moderately difficult. At the same time, rating 1 accounts for a substantial share (27.22%), suggesting that some words caused no difficulty at all. Higher difficulty levels (ratings 4–5) are relatively less frequent (approximately 26% combined), which confirms that the lexical items did not significantly obstruct comprehension.

An analysis of individual words reveals variation in perceived difficulty.

TABLE 5
LEXICAL DIFFICULTY BY WORD

Word	Difficulty
ghibratly	2.2785
ghazab	2.5190
ghaqaid	2.7848
khalaf	2.8608
ghadet	2.6835
sirat	2.7975
tamigh	2.8608
shahbaz	2.8354
ghaqyl	2.7848
yskhat	2.6456

These results show clear differences among lexical items. The lowest difficulty score was observed for ghibratly (M = 2.28), suggesting that its meaning may be relatively accessible through intuition or prior linguistic experience. Similarly, ghazab (M = 2.52) and yskhat (M = 2.65) were also perceived as comparatively easier.

In contrast, the highest difficulty scores were found for khalaf (M = 2.86), tamigh (M = 2.86), shahbaz (M = 2.84), and sirat (M ≈ 2.80). These words are typically associated with religious or historical contexts and occur less frequently in modern usage, which likely contributes to their increased difficulty.

Nevertheless, it is important that all mean values fall within the range of 2.2–2.9. This indicates that the analyzed vocabulary is not entirely unfamiliar but remains at least partially accessible, often through contextual inference. Thus, while lexical difficulty is present, it does not prevent overall comprehension of the texts.

Furthermore, the results suggest that readers rely not only on the individual meanings of words but also on contextual information when interpreting texts. Even when participants did not know the exact meanings of certain words, they were able to infer their functional role within the text. This highlights a key feature of poetic text perception: meaning is constructed not solely at the lexical level but through the overall textual structure.

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Overall, the findings demonstrate that lexical difficulty has only a partial effect on text comprehension, and that the analyzed words are not entirely alien to the reader.

C. Poetic Effect of Lexical Items

At the third stage of the study, the poetic effect of lexical items was analyzed. This indicator was calculated based on participants' evaluations of how each word contributed to the emotional and aesthetic perception of the stanza (effect_all). The overall results showed a mean poetic effect of M = 3.73 with a standard deviation of SD = 1.28. This indicates that the analyzed words produced a generally positive poetic impression and contributed to the artistic quality of the texts.

TABLE 6
OVERALL POETIC EFFECT

Variable	Mean	SD
Poetic effect	3.7329	1.2800

A mean value around 3.7 is significant, as it shows that participants not only understood the lexical items but also evaluated them positively in aesthetic terms. Thus, bookish religious vocabulary performs not only a semantic but also an aesthetic function.

To further examine the distribution of poetic effect, frequency percentages were analyzed.

TABLE 7
DISTRIBUTION OF POETIC EFFECT (PERCENTAGES)

Rating	Percentage (%)
1	8.73
2	6.08
3	28.10
4	17.34
5	39.75

As shown in Table 7, the largest proportion corresponds to the highest rating (5 points, 39.75%), indicating that most participants evaluated the poetic effect as strong. Ratings of 4 (17.34%) and 3 (28.10%) also account for substantial shares. In contrast, low ratings (1–2) are relatively rare (approximately 15%), confirming that the lexical items generally produced a positive aesthetic impact.

Differences in poetic effect across individual lexical items are presented below.

TABLE 8
POETIC EFFECT BY LEXICAL ITEM

Word	Effect
ghibratly	4.0000
ghazab	3.9494
ghaqaid	3.5443
khalaf	3.5949
ghadet	3.7468
sirat	3.7595
tamigh	3.6076
shahbaz	3.6835
ghaqyl	3.8354
yskhat	3.6076

The results show that the highest poetic effect was observed for ghibratly (M = 4.00) and ghazab (M ≈ 3.95). Their semantic clarity and emotional connotations may have enhanced their aesthetic perception. Similarly, ghaqyl (M ≈ 3.84) and ghadet (M ≈ 3.75) also demonstrated relatively high effect, indicating their important stylistic role in the text.

Lower, though still positive, values were observed for ghaqaid (M ≈ 3.54), khalaf (M ≈ 3.59), and tamigh (M ≈ 3.61). These words may be less familiar or more complex, which could slightly reduce their perceived poetic impact. However, none of the values fall below 3.5, indicating that their effect is not weak.

Overall, all lexical items fall within the range of 3.5–4.0, demonstrating a consistently positive poetic effect. This suggests that lexical complexity does not diminish aesthetic perception; rather, it may even enhance it to some extent.

These findings highlight the importance of the relationship between sound, form, and meaning in poetic texts. Even when participants did not fully understand the exact meanings of certain words, they were still able to perceive their emotional and stylistic qualities. This confirms the multilayered nature of poetic perception: meaning is constructed not only through semantics but also through phonetic and associative dimensions.

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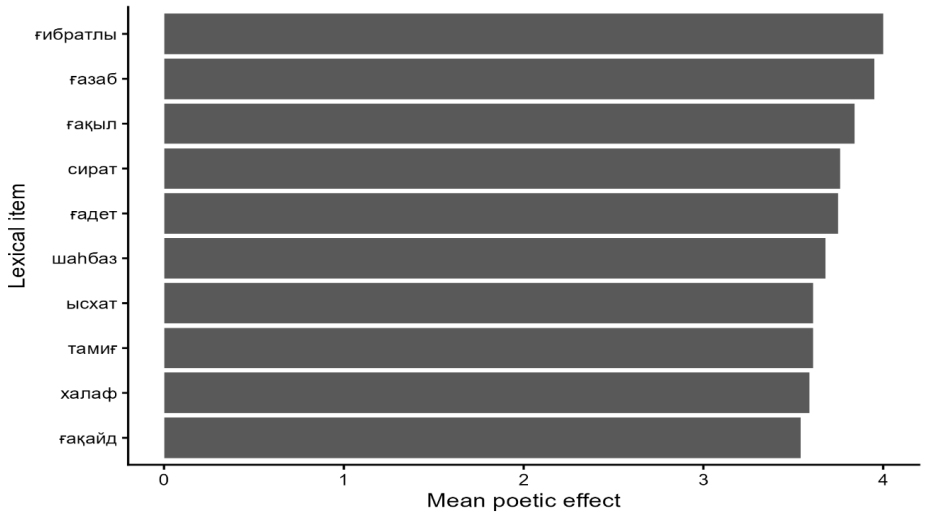


Figure 1. Poetic Effect of Lexical Items

Figure 1 visually represents the poetic effect of the analyzed lexical items. All mean values fall within the range of 3.5–4.0, indicating a stable positive aesthetic impact. The highest values are observed for ghibratly and ghazab, while ghaqaid and khalaf show relatively lower scores, though still within the overall positive range. In general, the results demonstrate that, despite lexical complexity, these items contribute positively to the artistic perception of the text.

In summary, the analyzed lexical items received consistently high evaluations in terms of poetic effect and contribute positively to the overall aesthetic perception of the texts.

D. A/B Comparison of Lexical Variants

At the final stage of the study, participants' preferences between the original (bookish/religious) and simplified (modern explanatory) variants were analyzed. This analysis aimed to determine which of the two versions (A – original form, B – simplified form) was perceived as more comprehensible and more effective. The results were calculated in percentages, allowing for the identification of general trends.

TABLE 9
A/B CHOICE RESULTS (COMPREHENSIBILITY, %)

Word	A (%)	B (%)
1	16.46	83.54
2	16.46	83.54
3	11.39	88.61
4	18.99	81.01
5	12.66	87.34
6	21.52	78.48
7	17.72	82.28
8	11.39	88.61
9	16.46	83.54
10	15.19	84.81

The results in Table 9 reveal a clear and consistent pattern: in almost all cases, the majority of participants preferred option B (the simplified or modern variant). The proportion of B ranges from 78% to 89% across all lexical items. This strongly indicates that participants prioritize comprehensibility when interpreting poetic texts.

The largest differences are observed for words 3 and 8 (B ≈ 88.6%), suggesting that these lexical items were likely the least familiar or most difficult for participants, leading to a strong preference for their simplified equivalents. The smallest difference is found for word 6 (B ≈ 78.5%), where, although B still dominates, the proportion of A is relatively higher (≈21.5%). This may indicate that certain words are somewhat more familiar to participants.

Overall, the proportion of A remains consistently low, ranging from 11% to 22%. This demonstrates that original bookish religious forms occupy a weaker position in terms of comprehensibility for modern readers. While such vocabulary enriches the text stylistically, it may complicate the process of understanding.

It is important to interpret these findings in relation to previous results. Section 3.2 showed that lexical difficulty is moderate, and the current results demonstrate its practical consequence: participants systematically choose more understandable alternatives. At the same time, although Section 3.3 revealed a high level of poetic effect, this factor does not play a decisive role compared to comprehensibility.

Thus, the findings suggest the following hierarchy in reader perception:

– first: comprehensibility

– second: lexical ease (difficulty)

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– third: poetic effect

This hierarchy is clearly reflected in the A/B choices, as participants consistently favored clarity over aesthetic or traditional forms.

These results also raise important implications for adapting poetic texts to modern audiences. If the goal is to enhance accessibility, complex religious and bookish vocabulary should be explained or replaced. However, if the goal is to preserve stylistic authenticity and tradition, such vocabulary can be maintained as a means of enhancing poetic effect.

In conclusion, the A/B comparison demonstrates that comprehensibility is the dominant factor for modern readers, and simplified language variants are consistently preferred.

IV. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the perception of bookish religious vocabulary in Akmulla's poetry is a complex and multilayered process. The data show that the relationship between text comprehension, lexical complexity, and poetic effect is not linear. This aligns with reader-response theory, where meaning is not given but constructed through interaction between reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1978).

The relatively high level of comprehensibility (M = 3.64) indicates that participants were able to understand the texts even without full lexical knowledge. Readers rely on context, intuition, and linguistic experience to construct meaning. This supports the view that comprehension is an active cognitive process rather than simple decoding (Westwood, 2009).

The moderate level of lexical difficulty (M = 2.70) and its weak correlation with comprehensibility (r = 0.07) suggest that difficult words do not significantly disrupt understanding. This implies that, beyond vocabulary knowledge, contextual and structural cues play a crucial role in comprehension (Nagy, 1988). At the same time, the partial loss of religious and Sufi terminology in modern linguistic consciousness explains the variability in responses (Akhmetbekova, 2013).

One of the key findings is the high level of poetic effect (M = 3.73). This shows that readers perceive texts not only cognitively but also emotionally and aesthetically. In poetry, form and expressiveness remain important even when full comprehension is lacking (Jakobson, 1960). Moreover, the poetry of akyns historically served both artistic and spiritual-educational functions (Däribaiuly, 2017; Safari & Mohaghegh Montazeri, 2017).

The weak but significant correlation between lexical difficulty and poetic effect ($r = 0.11$, $p < 0.01$) suggests that complex words may enhance rather than reduce aesthetic impact. Rare or unfamiliar vocabulary can increase expressiveness, confirming that poetic language serves not only an informational but also an aesthetic function (Cushing, 2020).

Word-level analysis supports this interpretation: familiar words showed higher comprehensibility, while less familiar ones were rated lower, yet their poetic effect remained relatively stable. This indicates that lexical knowledge influences comprehension but does not fully determine aesthetic perception (Baumann, 2005).

The A/B comparison results clearly reveal readers' strategies: the majority (≈80–88%) preferred simplified variants. This demonstrates that accessibility is a key factor for modern readers. At the same time, historical bookish vocabulary undergoes transformation and reinterpretation in contemporary language (Akhmetbekova, 2013).

Overall, the findings confirm the multidimensional nature of poetic perception. Comprehensibility, lexical complexity, and poetic effect are interrelated but not fully aligned. Poetic understanding emerges from the interaction of cognitive and aesthetic processes. Furthermore, bookish religious vocabulary functions not merely as a linguistic element but as a carrier of cultural and spiritual meaning (Däribaiuly, 2017).

One limitation of this study is its cultural and linguistic specificity. The participants were contemporary Kazakh-speaking readers, and their interpretations may be influenced by their educational background, cultural experience, and familiarity with religious vocabulary. Therefore, the findings may not be directly generalizable to readers from different linguistic or cultural contexts. Future studies could compare responses across different reader groups and cultural settings.

V. Conclusion

This study aimed to empirically examine how bookish religious vocabulary in Akmulla's poetry is perceived by modern Kazakh-speaking readers. The results demonstrate that the relationship between comprehension, lexical complexity, and poetic effect is complex and non-linear.

First, the findings show that overall text comprehensibility is above average. Readers are able to construct meaning not only from individual words but from the broader context. Thus, incomplete understanding of certain lexical items does not prevent overall comprehension, highlighting the cognitive nature of poetic perception.

Second, lexical difficulty results indicate that the analyzed words are not fully familiar to modern readers but remain accessible. Although some bookish and religious terms are perceived as difficult, their impact on comprehension is limited. This confirms the importance of contextual and structural factors.

Third, the study reveals that poetic effect remains high. Even when participants do not fully understand specific words, they still positively evaluate the emotional and aesthetic impact of the text. This supports the idea that poetic language performs an aesthetic as well as an informational function. The weak but significant relationship between difficulty and effect further suggests that complex vocabulary may enhance expressiveness.

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The A/B comparison shows that modern readers tend to prefer more accessible language. However, this does not diminish the artistic value of complex vocabulary. Instead, the findings highlight a dual-level perception: comprehension is dominant at the cognitive level, while complex lexical forms retain their impact at the aesthetic level.

In conclusion, poetic text perception is a multidimensional process. Bookish religious vocabulary is not merely a source of difficulty but also an important element shaping the aesthetic and cultural meaning of the text. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how traditional lexical layers are perceived in contemporary Kazakh literary context.

Future research should expand the corpus, include works of other poets, and compare different age and educational groups. In addition, more detailed qualitative analysis would help to better identify readers' interpretive strategies.

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The Saudi 'White Dialect' Across Regions and Generations: Perception, Prestige, and National Identity

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***Abstract*—Arabic dialects in Saudi Arabia are among the most enduring markers of cultural identity, yet rapid urbanization, inter-regional migration, educational expansion, and digital communication have contributed to the emergence of a supraregional variety that speakers themselves call the "White Dialect" (*al-lahjah al-bayḍāʾ*). Production studies document its deployment in inter-regional contexts, and perceptual dialectology research indicates broad recognition of a Riyadh-centered national *koiné*, but no experimental perception study has tested whether listeners assign uniform prestige to the White Dialect across Saudi regions and generations. This study addresses that gap through a multi-regional, age-stratified perception experiment involving 508 Saudi listeners drawn from four dialect regions (Najd, Hijaz, South, Eastern) and three age groups (18–30, 31–55, 56+). Participants rated two 27-second audio clips of authentic White Dialect speech on dimensions of professional competence, modernity, institutional appropriateness, and prosodic neutrality. ANOVAs tested for regional and age effects; chi-square tests examined patterns of metalinguistic awareness. Results showed no significant regional or age differences in prestige ratings, including the absence of predicted Hijazi resistance, suggesting that positive evaluations extend across the major dialect regions and generational groups sampled. Metalinguistic awareness, by contrast, was significantly stratified by generation: younger speakers showed considerably higher conceptual awareness and terminological familiarity with the White Dialect than older speakers did. These findings provide evidence that broadly similar prestige evaluations can coexist with uneven metalinguistic awareness across generations.**

***Index Terms*—Saudi White Dialect, language prestige, enregisterment, regional variation, metalinguistic awareness**

I. Introduction

Arabic dialects in Saudi Arabia are among the most enduring markers of cultural and national identity, yet decades of urbanization, migration, and digital communication have reshaped how Saudis speak across regional boundaries. The result is what speakers themselves call the "White Dialect" (*al-lahjah al-bayḍāʾ*): a supraregional form of Saudi Arabic with leveled phonology, regionally neutral vocabulary, and few strongly local features (Al-Rojaie, 2021; Alkhamees, 2023). Unlike traditional regional varieties such as Najdi, Hijazi, and Southern Arabic, which index place-based identities, the White Dialect is used for communication across regional boundaries and involves fewer strongly localized features. These linguistic developments have occurred alongside broader social changes associated with Saudi Vision 2030, which emphasizes national cohesion while also recognizing regional heritage (Government of Saudi Arabia, 2016). Whether the White Dialect has also become associated with a broader Saudi national identity, understood here as a shared sense of collective belonging expressed through common cultural and linguistic practices (Smith, 1991), remains an empirical question.

Two recent studies have documented this phenomenon. Al-Rojaie (2021) used perceptual dialectology to show that 87% of respondents across major Saudi regions identify the Riyadh dialect as closest to an emerging national *koiné*, while Alkhamees (2023) examined how young Qassimi speakers deploy leveled features strategically in inter-regional and professional contexts. Together, these studies show that speakers both use the White Dialect and recognize it as a distinct way of speaking. What neither study addresses is whether listeners actually value it. Recognition is not the same as prestige. A speaker may recognize a variety without assigning it high status, and widespread use does not necessarily imply shared evaluations. It therefore remains unclear whether the White Dialect receives comparable prestige ratings across Saudi regions and generations, and what such evaluations may suggest about its association with national identity.

The current study addresses that question through experimental perception methods. A total of 508 Saudi listeners from four dialect regions (Najd, Hijaz, South, Eastern) and three age groups (18–30, 31–55, 55+) evaluated two samples of naturally occurring speech identified as White Dialect on dimensions of professional competence, modernity, institutional appropriateness, and prosodic neutrality. The analysis addresses four questions: (1) Do prestige ratings vary by listener region? (2) Do they vary by age, indicating generational differences in evaluation? (3) Do region and age interact, such that resistance is concentrated in particular demographic subgroups? (4) Are listeners metalinguistically aware of the White Dialect as a named sociolinguistic category?

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II. Literature Review

A. Koineization and Enregisterment: Multi-Generational Processes

When speakers from different dialect backgrounds come into sustained contact, their varieties tend to converge toward a compromise form through the leveling of marked local features. Trudgill (1986) and Siegel (1985) describe this as koineization, a multi-generational process that progresses from initial variability through stabilization to functional expansion. The generational dimension is central: Kerswill (2002) notes that full convergence typically requires two to three generations, with younger speakers socialized in contact settings showing greater leveling than those whose formative years preceded intensive inter-regional mixing.

Linguistic convergence, however, does not automatically produce prestige. A variety can circulate widely without acquiring the ideological status of a recognized register. Agha (2007) uses the concept of enregisterment to describe the process through which a linguistic repertoire becomes socially recognizable and associated with meanings such as professionalism, modernity, or education. Such associations develop through speakers' recognition and evaluation of linguistic forms and may become increasingly available for explicit metalinguistic commentary. Johnstone et al. (2006), for example, show how features associated with Pittsburgh speech acquired greater social salience through media representation and metalinguistic commentary. Contact varieties may therefore become widely used without being evaluated in the same way across communities. Holes (2018) notes a similar tension in Gulf *koiné*s, which may be valued for intelligibility and modernity while also being criticized for reducing local distinctiveness.

B. Regional Variation in Prestige Consolidation: The Saudi Case

Saudi Arabia's linguistic landscape at the time of national unification in 1932 was sharply regionalized. Ingham (2006) identifies four primary dialect zones: Najdi in the central interior and north, Hijazi in the west, Eastern along the Gulf littoral, and Southwestern in the south. Low urbanization (estimated at 13% in 1932) and limited inter-regional mobility reinforced these boundaries, keeping regional and tribal affiliations linguistically encoded and socially salient (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Over the following eight decades, urbanization reached 81% by 2004, and large-scale internal migration created dialect contact at a scale the Kingdom had not previously experienced.

Al-Rojaie (2021) provided systematic perceptual evidence of an emerging nationally recognized variety. Hand-drawn dialect maps from 674 respondents across the major Saudi regions showed that 87% identified the Riyadh dialect as closest to an emerging national *koiné*, describing it as neutral, relatively free of regional accent, and associated with government, formal work, and modern urban life. This pattern was broadly consistent across regions, with one notable exception: middle-aged women from Hijaz positioned Hijazi Arabic as an alternative national model, citing its cosmopolitan history and association with the holy cities. This exception raises a question that the study was not designed to answer. Perceptual dialectology captures how respondents recognize and conceptualize dialect differences, but it does not directly test their evaluations of speech. Whether the Hijazi orientation toward a regional alternative also entails lower evaluation of White Dialect speech, or can coexist with positive evaluation of leveled speech, requires experimental perception data. So does the generational question: do prestige ratings differ across age groups, with older speakers potentially more attached to regional varieties than younger speakers with greater exposure to inter-regional contact?

C. Production Evidence and the Usage-Ideology Gap

Alkhamees (2023) examined production in an ethnographic study of young Qassimi speakers in Riyadh. Her participants consciously deployed leveled phonological and lexical features in inter-regional and professional settings, describing the White Dialect as "a passport to smooth communication" and "what you use when you want to sound professional." The study thus provides evidence that the White Dialect is used as part of speakers' sociolinguistic repertoires rather than recognized only as a folk category.

Production evidence, however, cannot settle questions of evaluation. Labov (2006) showed that lower-middle-class New Yorkers hypercorrected toward prestige variants in formal styles without rating those variants highest in conscious evaluations. Trudgill (1974) documented systematic under-reporting of non-standard usage, illustrating that what speakers do and what they value can diverge. Alkhamees's (2023) sample of young, mobile Qassimis cannot tell us how listeners from other regions, or older speakers with different patterns of inter-regional contact, evaluate White Dialect speech. Use and evaluative prestige therefore need to be examined separately.

D. Perception Methods and the Research Gap

Perception experiments have long been used to investigate language attitudes. Beginning with Lambert et al.'s (1960) matched-guise technique, such methods use listeners' evaluative responses to speech samples to examine attitudes that may not surface in direct metalinguistic questioning. Garrett (2010) reviews substantial evidence that evaluative responses and explicit beliefs do not always coincide. In Arabic sociolinguistics, Bassiouney (2015) showed that Egyptian listeners assigned Cairene Arabic high status while associating Upper Egyptian varieties more strongly with solidarity, illustrating how familiar varieties can receive different evaluations across social dimensions.

No experimental perception study has specifically examined the Saudi White Dialect. Al-Rojaie (2021) documents perceptual recognition, while Alkhamees (2023) documents use. Alhazmi (2023) applied a verbal-guise technique to

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examine 568 Saudi listeners' attitudes toward four major dialects and identified three evaluative dimensions (dynamism-status, dynamism-language, and solidarity). That study, however, excluded Hijaz because of its complex linguistic situation and did not specifically test the White Dialect as a supraregional variety. Existing research therefore does not show whether listeners assign comparable prestige to White Dialect speech across regions or generations. This question is particularly relevant given the regional pattern reported by Al-Rojaie (2021) and the different levels of inter-regional contact experienced across generations.

E. The Present Study: Alignment Hypothesis and Theoretical Stakes

The present study examines whether three lines of evidence point in a similar direction: the use of the White Dialect in inter-regional settings (Alkhamees, 2023), its perceptual recognition (Al-Rojaie, 2021), and its evaluation by listeners. Convergence across these three lines of evidence would be consistent with an ongoing process of enregisterment, whereas differences among them would suggest that use, recognition, and evaluation have developed unevenly. Examining regional and generational variation in prestige ratings and metalinguistic awareness can therefore provide a clearer account of the White Dialect's current sociolinguistic position and its possible association with a broader Saudi national identity.

III. Methodology

A. Research Design

This study uses a perception-based experimental design to test whether prestige ratings for the White Dialect differ significantly across four Saudi regions and three age groups, or whether they remain broadly comparable. The design is motivated by enregisterment theory, which draws attention to the social recognition and evaluation of linguistic forms across communities (Agha, 2007). Particular attention is given to whether Hijazi listeners and older speakers show lower prestige ratings, as the literature review suggests these groups are most likely to exhibit evaluative resistance.

B. Participants and Recruitment

A total of 519 respondents completed the survey. Eleven were excluded because their regional backgrounds fell outside the four target dialect zones (North, n = 6; unspecified or international, n = 5), leaving a final analytical sample of N = 508. Participants were distributed across Najd (n = 228, 44.9%), South (n = 128, 25.2%), Hijaz (n = 80, 15.7%), and Eastern (n = 72, 14.2%). The South region combines Asir, Al-Baha, and Jizan, treated as a single Southwestern dialect zone following Ingham (2006). The four regions correspond to those sampled in Al-Rojaie (2021), enabling direct comparison with prior perceptual dialectology findings.

Within each region, participants were stratified across three age groups: 18–30 (younger), 31–55 (middle-aged), and 56 and above (older). This stratification allows testing of whether generational differences in inter-regional exposure and linguistic ideology predict prestige assignment. Table 1 presents the full distribution. Inclusion criteria were: age 18 or above, native Arabic speaker, born or raised in the target region or with sustained regional ties, current residency in or strong connection to the region, and internet access sufficient to complete an online survey with embedded audio.

Participants were recruited over two months through the researcher's personal networks spanning universities, government agencies, and private businesses. Distribution relied on institutional email lists, WhatsApp groups, Twitter, and QR codes, with snowball sampling encouraged. Demographic information collected included age group, gender, education level, native dialect, and frequency of inter-regional contact. As a non-probability convenience sample recruited through personal networks and snowball sampling, the sample is not nationally representative; findings should be interpreted as evidence of evaluative patterns within the educated, digitally connected Saudi population rather than as nationally representative estimates.

TABLE 1
PARTICIPANT DISTRIBUTION BY REGION AND AGE GROUP

Region	18–30	31–55	56+	Total
Najd	67	122	39	228
South	19	78	31	128
Hijaz	18	42	20	80
Eastern	20	31	21	72
Total	**124**	**273**	**111**	**508**

C. Audio Stimuli

The study used two 27-second clips of naturally occurring White Dialect speech: one from a male speaker in a conversational professional context and one from a female speaker in a conversational everyday context, both identified as Najdi speakers in their thirties. Both clips exhibited leveled phonology, regionally neutral vocabulary, appropriate Standard Arabic borrowings, and broadcast-like prosody free from salient regional intonational patterns. Clips were normalized for volume and presented to participants in randomized order.

Prior to data collection, the clips were validated by seven Saudi experts: three sociolinguistics researchers specializing in Saudi Arabic varieties and four educated professionals with extensive inter-regional communication

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experience. All seven confirmed that the clips sounded neutral and leveled, that speakers' regional origins could not be reliably identified from the audio alone, and that the rating items were clearly worded. Estimated completion time of 6–7 minutes was also confirmed at this stage. One outcome of the validation was the addition of a prosody rating item, prompted by unprompted expert commentary identifying prosodic neutrality as a defining feature distinguishing the White Dialect from marked regional varieties.

D. Survey Instrument

The survey was administered in Arabic via Microsoft Forms and organized into four sections totaling approximately 30 items, with exact counts varying by branching logic. Estimated completion time was 6–7 minutes.

Section 1 collected six demographic items: age group, gender, education level, native region, native dialect, and frequency of inter-regional contact. Sections 2 and 3 presented the male and female clips respectively, each followed by five Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) assessing professional competence, modernity, formal appropriateness, behavioral intention to use the variety, and prosodic neutrality. Each clip section also included a four-point clarity rating, an open-ended geographic origin question, and a yes/no/unsure item on whether the speech sounded like a neutral shared variety. Section 3 used feminine grammatical agreement throughout to match the female speaker. Section 4 assessed metalinguistic awareness through five items with branching logic: accommodation behavior, conceptual awareness of a neutral variety, domain associations (shown only to those affirming conceptual awareness), term recognition, and a folk definition item (shown only to those reporting familiarity with the term).

Following Al-Rojaie (2021), who found that Saudi speakers explicitly associate the White Dialect with national identity through labels such as "formal," "official," and "national," the present study operationalizes national linguistic identity through listeners' conceptual awareness of a shared neutral variety (Q18), domain associations with institutional contexts (Q19), and term recognition of the White Dialect as a named national category (Q20). Together, these items assess whether listeners recognize and orient to the White Dialect as a marker of shared national identity, extending Al-Rojaie's (2021) qualitative evidence into a quantitative experimental framework. Complete survey items appear in Appendix.

E. Procedure and Ethics

Data were collected over two months through the researcher's personal networks across academic, government, and private sector contacts. Response numbers and demographic characteristics were monitored daily to ensure that regional and age group targets were being met. Participants gave informed consent electronically before accessing the survey, with information provided on study purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any time. No identifying information was collected. The study received ethics approval from Qassim University Research Ethics Committee. The survey was accessible on both mobile and desktop devices.

F. Data Analysis

Regional differences in prestige were tested through one-way between-subjects ANOVA with Region (four levels) as the independent variable and the prestige composite score (mean of four Likert items) as the dependent variable, run separately for male and female clips. Assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were checked using Shapiro-Wilk and Levene's tests respectively; where violated, Welch's ANOVA was reported. Omnibus F-tests are reported with partial eta-squared (η^2p) as the effect size measure. Post-hoc Tukey HSD comparisons were conducted across all region pairs as exploratory tests, with particular attention to the Najd vs. Hijaz contrast as the theoretically motivated comparison, regardless of omnibus significance. Internal consistency of the four prestige items was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a target of $\alpha \geq 0.70$. Open-ended geographic origin and folk definition responses were independently coded by two raters using categories derived from pilot data. Inter-rater agreement was strong ($\kappa = 0.84$, $p < .001$), exceeding the target threshold of $\kappa \geq 0.70$. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion before final coding was applied.

Age effects were examined through a parallel one-way ANOVA with Age Group (three levels) as the independent variable, and Region × Age interaction effects through two-way ANOVA. Additional exploratory analyses included t-tests for gender effects, regression for inter-regional contact frequency as a prestige predictor, Pearson's r for the prosody-prestige correlation, and chi-square tests for metalinguistic awareness variation by region and age. A significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$ was applied throughout. Post-hoc Tukey HSD comparisons, which incorporate their own familywise error rate control, were treated separately and interpreted as exploratory given non-significant omnibus results.

G. Methodological Considerations

Four limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, the prestige composite operationalizes evaluative orientation through self-reported Likert ratings rather than behavioral measures; listeners who assign high ratings may or may not adjust their own speech accordingly. Second, the study uses only two authentic speakers, which introduces stimulus-specific variability that limits generalization: findings reflect evaluations of these particular speakers rather than the White Dialect across its full range of realization. Pilot validation confirmed that both speakers were perceived as exemplifying White Dialect features, but future research should employ larger speaker samples or matched-guise

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designs enabling more controlled comparison. Third, the metalinguistic awareness items capture reported orientation rather than observed behavior; responses may be influenced by social desirability or by the survey context itself. Fourth, the sample reflects relatively educated, internet-connected Saudis from urban and semi-urban settings, and findings should not be generalized to rural populations, speakers with limited digital access, or age groups outside the 18-and-above range sampled here.

IV. Results

Results are presented in six subsections addressing the study's research questions and additional analyses. Prestige ratings for male and female clips are reported separately, based on composite scores derived from four items per clip. Internal consistency was high for both clips (male: $\alpha = 0.876$; female: $\alpha = 0.902$). Inter-item correlations ranged from .526 to .752 for the male clip (mean r = .640) and from .579 to .820 for the female clip (mean r = .698), indicating strong convergent validity. Item-total correlations ranged from .705 to .779 (male) and .732 to .836 (female), all significant at $p < .001$, confirming that each item contributes meaningfully to the composite.

A. Overall Prestige Ratings

Across all 508 respondents, White Dialect speech received moderate-to-positive prestige ratings. The female speaker received marginally higher overall prestige ratings (M = 3.60, SD = 1.17) than the male speaker (M = 3.44, SD = 1.19). Prosody ratings were similarly moderate: M = 3.61 (SD = 1.44) for the male speaker and M = 3.50 (SD = 1.41) for the female speaker. Across regions, ratings were generally highest for the educated/professional and modern/contemporary items, while willingness to use the variety in professional contexts tended to receive lower ratings (Table 2).

Table 2
Mean Prestige Ratings by Region (Male and Female Clips)

Item	Najd	Hijaz	South	Eastern
Male Clip				
Educated/professional	3.58 (1.31)	3.56 (1.26)	3.70 (1.45)	3.69 (1.16)
Modern/contemporary	3.49 (1.35)	3.49 (1.16)	3.68 (1.45)	3.68 (1.14)
Appropriate for formal settings	3.30 (1.44)	3.36 (1.39)	3.61 (1.51)	3.51 (1.51)
Would use in professional contexts	2.97 (1.41)	3.03 (1.35)	3.55 (1.53)	3.19 (1.38)
Prosodically neutral	3.55 (1.47)	3.35 (1.49)	3.71 (1.46)	3.94 (1.22)
Composite	**3.34 (1.17)**	**3.36 (1.06)**	**3.63 (1.31)**	**3.52 (1.11)**
Female Clip				
Educated/professional	3.76 (1.30)	3.85 (1.25)	3.86 (1.34)	3.75 (1.20)
Modern/contemporary	3.73 (1.29)	3.79 (1.19)	3.86 (1.33)	3.86 (1.18)
Appropriate for formal settings	3.33 (1.40)	3.48 (1.22)	3.75 (1.39)	3.44 (1.38)
Would use in professional contexts	3.19 (1.40)	3.25 (1.36)	3.67 (1.39)	3.18 (1.39)
Prosodically neutral	3.42 (1.42)	3.41 (1.41)	3.61 (1.45)	3.61 (1.32)

Note: Values are M (SD). Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree.

B. Regional Variation in Prestige Ratings (RQ1)

One-way ANOVAs revealed no significant regional differences in White Dialect prestige ratings for either the male clip, $F(3, 504) = 1.968$, $p = .118$, $\eta^2p = .012$, or the female clip, $F(3, 504) = 1.610$, $p = .186$, $\eta^2p = .009$. Effect sizes were negligible in both cases. Given unequal variances for the male clip (Levene's $F = 3.252$, $p = .022$), Welch's ANOVA with Satterthwaite-adjusted degrees of freedom also yielded a non-significant result, $F(3, 202.94) = 1.785$, $p = .151$. A parallel Welch's ANOVA for the female clip was likewise non-significant, $F(3, 202.46) = 1.466$, $p = .225$.

Post-hoc Tukey HSD comparisons were conducted as exploratory tests. One nominally significant pairwise difference emerged: South-region listeners rated both speakers higher than Najdi listeners (male: M = 3.63 vs. 3.34, $p = .023$; female: M = 3.79 vs. 3.50, $p = .030$). This finding should be interpreted cautiously given the non-significant omnibus tests. All remaining pairwise comparisons were non-significant, including the theoretically motivated Najd–Hijaz comparison (male: $p = .877$; female: $p = .570$). Prosody ratings showed a marginal regional effect for the male clip, $F(3, 496) = 2.529$, $p = .057$, $\eta^2p = .015$, with Eastern listeners rating prosodic neutrality highest (M = 3.94, SD = 1.22) compared to Hijazi listeners (M = 3.35, SD = 1.49), though this did not reach conventional significance. No regional effect emerged for female clip prosody, $F(3, 496) = 0.725$, $p = .537$.

C. Age Group Variation in Prestige Ratings (RQ2)

One-way ANOVAs revealed no significant age-group differences in prestige ratings for either the male clip, $F(2, 505) = 1.153$, $p = .316$, $\eta^2p = .005$, or the female clip, $F(2, 505) = 0.746$, $p = .475$, $\eta^2p = .003$. Post-hoc comparisons also showed no significant pairwise differences across age groups for either clip. Table 3 presents prestige means by age group.

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TABLE 3
MEAN PRESTIGE COMPOSITE BY AGE GROUP

Age Group	Male Clip M (SD)	Female Clip M (SD)	n
18–30	3.57 (1.17)	3.49 (1.25)	124
31–55	3.42 (1.17)	3.63 (1.15)	273
56+	3.35 (1.23)	3.65 (1.13)	111

D. Region × Age Interaction (RQ3)

Two-way ANOVAs testing the Region × Age interaction yielded non-significant results for both the male clip, $F(6, 496) = 0.808$, $p = .564$, and the female clip, $F(6, 496) = 1.014$, $p = .415$. Neither Region nor Age main effects reached significance in the two-way models (male: Region $F(3, 496) = 2.324$, $p = .074$; Age $F(2, 496) = 1.691$, $p = .185$; female: Region $F(3, 496) = 1.394$, $p = .244$; Age $F(2, 496) = 0.430$, $p = .651$). Table 4 presents the cell means; no consistent interaction pattern is apparent.

TABLE 4
PRESTIGE COMPOSITE MEANS BY REGION × AGE (MALE CLIP / FEMALE CLIP)

Region	18–30	31–55	56+
Najd	3.54 / 3.52	3.34 / 3.52	2.96 / 3.44
Hijaz	3.54 / 3.57	3.27 / 3.48	3.39 / 3.85
South	3.66 / 3.47	3.56 / 3.79	3.81 / 3.97
Eastern	3.63 / 3.31	3.57 / 3.85	3.36 / 3.37

E. Exploratory Analyses: Gender and Inter-Regional Contact

Independent-samples t-tests revealed no significant gender differences in prestige ratings for the male clip (male respondents: $M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.15$; female respondents: $M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.27$; $t(506) = -0.380$, $p = .704$, $d = -0.036$) or the female clip (male respondents: $M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.16$; female respondents: $M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.19$; $t(506) = -1.726$, $p = .085$, $d = -0.166$). Simple regression analyses indicated that inter-regional contact frequency did not predict prestige ratings for either the male clip ($\beta = -.001$, $R^2 = .000$, $p = .991$) or the female clip ($\beta = -.054$, $R^2 = .002$, $p = .271$).

F. Speech Identification and Metalinguistic Awareness (RQ4)

Open-ended geographic-origin responses were coded into five categories: Najd/Riyadh, neutral/cannot tell, media/institutional, other regional, and tribal/Bedouin associations (inter-rater $\kappa = .84$). The most frequent attribution across both clips was Najd/Riyadh, followed by neutral/cannot tell and media/institutional associations.

Just over half of respondents (53.7%) reported adjusting their speech when communicating with Saudis from other regions (always: 13.0%; sometimes: 40.7%), while 46.3% reported little or no accommodation (rarely: 26.8%; never: 19.5%). Conceptual awareness of a shared neutral variety was high overall: 74.6% affirmed its existence, 15.0% denied it, and 10.4% were unsure. Regional differences in conceptual awareness were non-significant ($\chi^2 = 1.746$, $df = 6$, $p = .942$), whereas age differences were significant ($\chi^2 = 17.621$, $df = 4$, $p = .001$). Awareness was higher among respondents aged 18–30 (82.3%) than among those aged 56 and above (60.4%), with the 31–55 group between them (76.9%).

Term recognition showed a similar age pattern. Among all respondents, 61.0% knew the term *al-lahjah al-bayḍāʾ* and its meaning, 12.0% had heard it without knowing what it meant, and 27.0% had never encountered it. Regional differences were non-significant ($\chi^2 = 5.501$, $df = 6$, $p = .481$), whereas age differences were significant ($\chi^2 = 35.921$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$). The term was recognized by 79.0% of respondents aged 18–30, compared with 49.5% of those aged 56 and above; the corresponding figure for the 31–55 group was 57.5%. Among respondents who reported awareness of a neutral variety, media and television was cited most frequently as the domain where it is heard, followed by social media, public spaces, the workplace, and universities. Prosody ratings were positively correlated with prestige composite scores for both clips (male: $r = .567$, $p < .001$; female: $r = .626$, $p < .001$), indicating that listeners who perceived speakers as prosodically neutral also rated them higher on professional competence, modernity, and formal appropriateness.

V. DISCUSSION

This study investigated whether White Dialect prestige ratings vary across regions and generations. No significant regional or age differences were detected, and there was no Region × Age interaction. Metalinguistic awareness showed a different pattern. Younger speakers were significantly more likely to recognize the term *al-lahjah al-bayḍāʾ* and to affirm the existence of a shared neutral variety, despite broadly comparable prestige ratings across age groups.

A. Prestige Ratings Across Regions (RQ1)

No significant regional differences in White Dialect prestige ratings were found across Najd, Hijaz, South, and Eastern. A non-significant ANOVA cannot be taken as positive evidence of equivalence, but the broadly similar ratings across regions are consistent with the possibility that positive evaluations of White Dialect speech extend beyond its Najdi geographical base. Equivalence testing would be needed to establish regional similarity more directly.

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The Hijazi results are particularly relevant in light of Al-Rojaie (2021), where some middle-aged Hijazi women positioned Hijazi Arabic as an alternative national model in perceptual dialectology tasks. The prestige data in the present study did not show a corresponding regional difference: Hijazi listeners' ratings did not differ significantly from those of Najdi listeners for either clip (male: $p = .877$; female: $p = .570$). A regional preference expressed in a mapping task may reflect identity orientations that operate independently of how listeners evaluate speech when they hear it directly. The two methods therefore need not produce consistent results, and a regional orientation maintained in one context need not entail lower evaluation of supraregional speech in another.

South-region listeners gave somewhat higher ratings than Najdi listeners in the exploratory pairwise comparisons. Because the omnibus regional tests were non-significant and the effect sizes were small, this pattern should be treated cautiously. Further research would be needed to determine whether it reflects a replicable regional tendency.

Ratings of prosodic neutrality were positively associated with prestige ratings for both speakers (male: $r = .567$; female: $r = .626$, both $p < .001$). This association suggests that perceived prosodic neutrality forms part of listeners' positive evaluation of White Dialect speech. The present design, however, does not allow prosody to be isolated from other properties of the stimuli, so its independent contribution cannot be determined.

B. Age and Prestige Ratings (RQ2)

No significant age differences in prestige ratings emerged for either clip. Positive evaluation of the White Dialect was therefore not limited to younger respondents with potentially greater exposure to inter-regional contact. Respondents aged 56 and above gave ratings broadly comparable to those of the younger groups. This differs from the generational differentiation often reported during dialect contact and koineization, where younger speakers may lead linguistic accommodation or leveling (Kerswill, 2002). The cross-sectional design, however, does not establish when or how these evaluative patterns developed.

The age pattern becomes more informative when considered alongside metalinguistic awareness. Older respondents evaluated White Dialect speech similarly to younger respondents but were significantly less likely to recognize *al-lahjah al-bayḍāʾ* as a named category or to affirm the existence of a shared neutral Saudi variety. They respond positively to the White Dialect, in other words, without necessarily identifying it as such. This distinction is broadly compatible with Garrett's (2010) observation that evaluations of linguistic forms and explicit beliefs about language do not always coincide. In the present case, knowledge of the category and evaluation of the speech appear to be distributed differently across age groups.

C. Region × Age Interaction (RQ3)

No significant Region × Age interaction emerged for either clip. The data therefore provide no evidence that regional differences in prestige ratings are concentrated within particular age groups. This is relevant to the expectation that older Hijazi listeners might show lower evaluations of a Najdi-centered supraregional variety. Hijazi respondents aged 56 and above rated the male speaker at $M = 3.39$ and the female speaker at $M = 3.85$, and these ratings did not differ significantly from those of other regional-age groups.

The absence of the predicted interaction should still be interpreted cautiously. Failure to detect an interaction does not demonstrate that all regional-age groups evaluate the variety identically, particularly given the smaller sample sizes within some cells. Within the present sample, however, there was no statistical evidence of a distinct regional-generational subgroup with systematically lower White Dialect prestige ratings.

Young Najdi respondents and older Hijazi respondents, for example, did not differ significantly in their evaluations despite their different regional and generational backgrounds. Within the limits of the present sample, the results suggest that positive evaluation of White Dialect speech is not restricted to the demographic groups most closely associated with its geographical base or with greater inter-regional contact.

D. Metalinguistic Awareness: Generational Asymmetry (RQ4)

Metalinguistic awareness showed clearer age differentiation than the prestige ratings. Overall, 74.6% of respondents affirmed the existence of a shared neutral Saudi variety. This figure is broadly comparable to the recognition pattern reported by Al-Rojaie (2021) and suggests that awareness of a supraregional Saudi variety is fairly widespread in the present sample. No significant regional differences in conceptual awareness or term recognition were detected.

Age, however, was clearly associated with awareness. Conceptual awareness was higher among respondents aged 18–30 than among those aged 56 and above (82.3% vs. 60.4%), and the age difference in recognition of the term *al-lahjah al-bayḍāʾ* was larger still (79.0% vs. 49.5%). The 31–55 group fell between the two on both measures. These results indicate that explicit knowledge of the White Dialect is more widespread among younger respondents, even though their prestige ratings did not differ significantly from those of older respondents. Evaluation and explicit recognition therefore appear to be distributed differently across age groups.

This distinction is broadly compatible with Garrett's (2010) observation that evaluations of linguistic forms and explicit beliefs about language do not always coincide. Labov (2006) similarly observed that social evaluations of linguistic variants can be well established without corresponding levels of metalinguistic articulation. A similar distinction may be relevant here. Older respondents gave broadly similar prestige ratings to younger respondents, despite being less likely to recognize the White Dialect as a named variety. Their evaluations therefore do not appear to

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depend on explicit familiarity with the term *al-lahjah al-bayḍāʾ*. This pattern can also be considered alongside Trudgill's (1986) account of accommodation and leveling in dialect contact, although the present cross-sectional data do not establish how the evaluative pattern developed across generations.

Media and television were the most frequently reported domains in which respondents encountered a neutral variety, followed by social media, public spaces, the workplace, and universities. Media circulation may therefore provide one context in which the White Dialect and its social associations become familiar (Johnstone et al., 2006). The prominence of social media may also be relevant to the higher term recognition among younger respondents, although the present data cannot establish where individual respondents learned the term.

The relationship between prosodic neutrality and prestige adds another dimension to this pattern. Prosody ratings were positively correlated with prestige ratings for both speakers (male: $r = .567$; female: $r = .626$, both $p < .001$). This association suggests that perceived prosodic neutrality forms part of listeners' positive evaluation of White Dialect speech. It does not, however, establish prosody as the primary cue through which the variety is recognized or evaluated, since prosody was not manipulated independently of other properties of the stimuli.

E. Theoretical Implications

The present findings add an evaluative dimension to what is already known about the White Dialect. Alkhamees (2023) documented its use in inter-regional and professional settings, while Al-Rojaie (2021) found broad perceptual recognition of a Riyadh-centered national *koiné*. The present study shows that White Dialect speech also receives moderate-to-positive prestige ratings across the four regions examined. These three forms of evidence address different aspects of the phenomenon, but they point in a similar direction and are consistent with an ongoing process of enregisterment in which supraregional speech has acquired recognizable social value beyond its immediate geographical base (Agha, 2007). This does not mean that the process is complete or that the White Dialect has acquired the same social meaning for all speakers.

The age differences in metalinguistic awareness reinforce that qualification. Respondents across age groups gave broadly comparable prestige ratings, whereas younger respondents were much more likely to recognize the White Dialect as a named category. Broadly similar evaluations can therefore coexist with uneven knowledge of the variety's name and explicit conceptualization. Rather than treating use, recognition, naming, and evaluation as interchangeable evidence of register formation, the Saudi case suggests that these dimensions should be examined separately. This distinction is also compatible with Silverstein's (2003) account of indexical order, which draws attention to differences in the degree to which socially meaningful linguistic forms become available for explicit metapragmatic recognition.

The Hijazi findings add a regional dimension to this interpretation. Al-Rojaie (2021) found evidence that some Hijazi respondents maintained a distinct regional orientation and positioned Hijazi Arabic as an alternative national model. In the present study, however, Hijazi listeners did not give significantly lower prestige ratings to White Dialect speech than Najdi listeners. The prestige data therefore do not reproduce the regional contrast found in the earlier mapping task. This difference may reflect the different kinds of judgments elicited by the two methods. Identifying a variety as representative of one's region or as a possible national model is not necessarily the same as evaluating another variety negatively when it is heard. The findings suggest that a regional identity orientation need not entail lower evaluation of a supraregional variety. Regional and national linguistic orientations may coexist rather than operate as mutually exclusive alternatives.

This coexistence is relevant to the broader question of national linguistic identity in Saudi Arabia. The findings do not show that the White Dialect has replaced regional varieties as markers of identity, nor was the study designed to test such replacement. Rather, the broadly positive evaluations across the regions sampled suggest that a supraregional variety can acquire social value without requiring speakers to abandon established regional affiliations. In this sense, the White Dialect may provide an additional linguistic resource for interaction across regional boundaries rather than a substitute for regional dialects. This interpretation is consistent with the continued salience of regional varieties documented in previous Saudi sociolinguistic research (Al-Rojaie, 2021; Alhazmi, 2023).

These developments are occurring during a period of rapid institutional and social change associated with Saudi Vision 2030. Although the present study cannot determine whether those changes have directly influenced evaluations of the White Dialect, respondents reported encountering neutral speech in media, social media, professional settings, public spaces, and educational institutions. The relationship between these settings and the wider circulation of the White Dialect warrants further investigation through longitudinal and ethnographic research.

VI. Conclusion

This study examined whether Saudi listeners assign comparable prestige to White Dialect speech across regions and generations, addressing a question that prior production and perceptual dialectology research could not answer. No significant regional or age differences in prestige ratings were detected, and there was no Region × Age interaction. The anticipated pattern of lower Hijazi ratings, suggested by Al-Rojaie's (2021) perceptual dialectology findings, did not emerge in the present evaluation task. Considered alongside production evidence (Alkhamees, 2023) and perceptual recognition (Al-Rojaie, 2021), the prestige ratings documented here are consistent with the White Dialect acquiring broader social value across the regions examined.

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The relationship between evaluation and metalinguistic awareness adds an important qualification. Although no significant age differences in prestige ratings were detected, older respondents were substantially less likely than younger respondents to recognize the White Dialect as a named category. Broadly similar evaluations can therefore coexist with uneven metalinguistic awareness across generations. The Hijazi results likewise suggest that a regional identity orientation need not entail lower evaluation of a supraregional variety. Perceived prosodic neutrality was also positively associated with prestige ratings for both speakers, although the present design does not establish an independent effect of prosody on evaluation.

These findings are consistent with an ongoing process of enregisterment in which the White Dialect has acquired recognizable social value beyond the Riyadh-Qassim setting where it has previously been documented. At the same time, the generational difference in term recognition shows that explicit awareness of *al-lahjah al-bayḍāʾ* is unevenly distributed. Evaluation and explicit recognition should therefore not be treated as interchangeable indicators of a variety's sociolinguistic status. More broadly, the findings suggest that supraregional linguistic orientations can develop alongside, rather than necessarily replacing, established regional identities. To the extent that the White Dialect is becoming associated with a broader Saudi national identity, the present findings suggest that this process is reflected in broadly shared evaluative orientations rather than in uniform metalinguistic awareness across generations.

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. The sample reflects relatively educated, internet-connected, urban and semi-urban Saudis, and findings may not extend to rural populations or speakers with limited digital access. The cross-sectional design cannot distinguish generational change from age-grading effects in the metalinguistic awareness data. The use of only two speakers introduces stimulus-specific variability: findings reflect evaluations of these particular speakers rather than the White Dialect across its full range of realization. Future research should employ larger speaker samples or matched-guise designs to enable more controlled comparison across varieties.

APPENDIX. SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Complete items are presented below in the order administered. Items originally appeared in Arabic; English translations are provided for reference. Branching logic is indicated in brackets.

Part 1: Demographic Information

1. What is your gender? (Male / Female)
2. What is your age group? (18–30 / 31–55 / 56 and above)
3. What is your educational level? (Primary / Intermediate / Secondary / University / Graduate studies)
4. In which region did you grow up? (List of 11 Saudi regions plus Other)
5. Which dialect do you mainly speak? (Urban Qassimi / Riyadhi / Haili / Hijazi / Eastern / Southern / Other)
6. How often do you interact with Saudis from regions other than your own who speak different dialects? (Daily / Several times a week / Several times a month / Rarely / Never)

Part 2: Male Speaker Evaluation

Instructions: Listen to the following audio clip. You may listen more than once.

[Audio clip: 27-second male speaker, White Dialect, conversational professional context]

7. Please rate your agreement with the following statements (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree):
   - This speaker sounds educated and professional.
   - This speaker sounds modern and contemporary.
   - His way of speaking is appropriate for formal settings.
   - I would use this way of speaking in professional or formal contexts.
   - This speaker's way of speaking is free from regional or tribal intonational features.
8. How clearly can you understand the speaker in the audio clip? (Very clearly / Fairly clearly / Somewhat difficult to understand / Very difficult to understand)
9. Where do you think this speaker is from? You may name a specific region, city, or give a general description (e.g., Najd, cannot tell, neutral dialect). [Open-ended]
10. Does this speech sound like a neutral or shared variety of Arabic across Saudi regions? (Yes / No / Not sure)
11. How would you describe this person's way of speaking? For example: clear, eloquent, like television, modern, traditional. [Open-ended, optional]

Part 3: Female Speaker Evaluation

Instructions: Listen to the following audio clip. You may listen more than once.

[Audio clip: 27-second female speaker, White Dialect, conversational everyday context]

12. Please rate your agreement with the following statements (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree):
    - This speaker sounds educated and professional.
    - This speaker sounds modern and contemporary.
    - Her way of speaking is appropriate for formal settings.
    - I would use this way of speaking in professional or formal contexts.
    - This speaker's way of speaking is free from regional or tribal intonational features.
13. How clearly can you understand the speaker in the audio clip? (Very clearly / Fairly clearly / Somewhat

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difficult to understand / Very difficult to understand)

14. Where do you think this speaker is from? You may name a specific region, city, or give a general description. [Open-ended]
15. Does this speech sound like a neutral or shared variety of Arabic across Saudi regions? (Yes / No / Not sure)
16. How would you describe this person's way of speaking? [Open-ended, optional]

Part 4: Metalinguistic Awareness

17. Do you change the way you speak when talking with Saudis from regions other than your own? (Yes, always / Yes, sometimes / No, rarely / No, never)
18. Do you think there is a shared or neutral dialect that works across all Saudi regions? (Yes / No / Not sure)
19. [Shown only if Q18 = Yes] Where do you usually hear this neutral dialect? Select all that apply. (Media and television / Social media / Universities and educational institutions / Workplace / Public spaces such as airports and shopping centers)
20. Have you heard the term "*al-lahjah al-bayḍāʾ*" (the White Dialect) before? (Yes, and I know what it means / I have heard it but am not sure what it means exactly / No, I have never heard of it)
21. [Shown only if Q20 = Yes, and I know what it means] How would you describe the "White Dialect"? [Open-ended, optional]
22. Do you have any additional comments or observations about the two audio clips? [Open-ended, optional]

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Beyond Survival: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Human Needs in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*

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***Abstract*—Based on the theory of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, this study aims to analyze the needs of the main character, Bride, in Morrison's *God Help the Child* (2015). This study aims to explore and address the problem of how Bride achieves her human needs, focusing on her efforts in achieving self-actualization. Additionally, it explores the clash between Bride's external accomplishments and her inner hunger for the body, arguing that the denial of belonging in her childhood creates a psychological barrier that she must overcome to achieve true independence. The study contributes to Morrison scholarship by reframing Maslow's theory as a narrative lens and critically examining human motivation theory. Despite extensive psychoanalytic readings of Morrison's fiction, limited attention has been paid to interrogating Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a dynamic narrative structure rather than a static psychological model, thereby highlighting the significance of humanistic principles even under harsh circumstances and confirming that recovery requires a return to the basis of the self. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative psychoanalytic-textual approach, employing Maslow's hierarchy of needs as an interpretive framework rather than a deterministic psychological template. Consequently, this study demonstrates that Bride fulfills her human needs through her relationships with others.**

***Index Terms*—Abraham Maslow, *God Help the Child*, human needs, Toni Morrison**

I. Introduction

For human beings, needs are the basics for continuing their lives. They have human needs to be fulfilled in life (Nggilu et al., 2025). To achieve a need, a person has a motivating force. Larsen (2017) defines motives as "internal states that arouse and direct behavior toward specific objects or goals" (p. 352). Motives are linked to needs arising from a deficiency. These needs can be met by thinking about something valuable or by performing specific actions. The psychological approach, based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, aims to understand the text, the writer, and the reader. The core concept of this approach is that humans possess unconscious feelings, motives, and desires of which they are unaware, yet these influence their emotions and behaviors. The psychological approach explores personality motives and aims to analyze and describe the reader's response to the text. Therefore, humans have needs in their lives—essential needs for survival that cannot be avoided—and these needs may be material, objective, or moral.

This study seeks to answer the following questions: How is Maslow's hierarchy of needs reconfigured in *God Help the Child* as a dynamic narrative structure rather than a fixed, linear psychological model? To what extent do trauma and racial discrimination disrupt the traditional sequencing of Maslow's hierarchy and reorder the priorities of human needs in Bride's character? What role do love and belonging play in the reconstruction of identity and the process of trauma

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recovery in comparison with lower-level needs in the hierarchy? How does literary narrative contribute to questioning the assumed universality of Western psychological models when applied to different cultural and experiential contexts?

In addition, this study is conducted in accordance with its theoretical and practical functions. The study, theoretically, focuses on enriching the theoretical foundation related to the psychoanalysis of Bride's character in the novel by applying Maslow's theory. Practically, this study seeks to explain how motives can control an individual's behavior as he/she strives to achieve those goals. It also offers readers insight into the fundamental motivations behind human emotions from a psychological perspective.

Maslow (1908-1970) developed the theory of human needs, and the hierarchy of human needs consists of five levels and is considered "A Theory of Human Motivation" (p. 370). The four lowest levels of this pyramid are classified as deficit needs (D-needs), which correspond to the needs of physiological, safety, love and belonging, and self-esteem. The highest level is known as growth needs, which relate to self-actualization. D-needs must be satisfied, while growth needs shape behaviors. Yunita (2017) states: "The basic concept is that the higher needs in this hierarchy only come into focus once all the needs that are lower down in the pyramid are mainly or entirely satisfied" (p. 20).

Physiological needs are at the most basic level, such as the need for thirst and food. When both physiological and safety needs are adequately met, the needs for love and belonging will emerge. Esteem needs, the fourth level of the pyramid of human needs, lead to a sense of worth, strength, self-confidence, and the ability to be useful in the world. Finally, self-actualization is the pinnacle of the hierarchy of human motivations.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is presented as a five-level pyramid. Mustofa (2022) states that the main aim of Maslow's theory is to explain and arrange all types of human needs in relation to the level of human priority in fulfilling them (p. 33). The lowest level consists of basic needs, while the highest level comprises more complex needs. Once the basic needs are met, a person moves to the next level of needs. As a person progresses through the pyramid, these needs become psychological and social. According to Maslow (1987), "[m]otivation theory is not synonymous with behavior theory […]. [B]ehavior is almost always motivated, it is also almost always biologically, culturally and situationally determined as well" (p. 5). Motivation focuses on directing, initiating, and sustaining behaviors. It should not be confused with emotion or personality because it is a temporal state. Maslow views human needs as being understood through a hierarchy of needs.

Humans are social beings by nature, unable to meet their needs without the help of others. For example, humans satisfy their needs for love and belonging through others, such as family and friends. As a result, humans need others to fulfill their needs.

Hence, D-needs are needs that a person is motivated to fulfill. For Maslow (1987), physiological needs, the first level of Maslow's human needs, are "the needs that [are] usually taken as the starting point for motivation theory are the so-called physiological drives" (p. 7). They are an efficient indication of needs or lack in the body. Physiological needs are related to the need to drink, breathe, eat, regulate homeostasis, and eliminate waste. Every person needs all of these, as they are the necessities of human life. Maslow argues that most people in society meet physiological needs. Therefore, once these needs are satisfied, the next need(s) in the hierarchy emerge(s) as the hegemonic power in guiding and controlling behavior. The primary goal of physiological needs is to maintain the body's normal, healthy functioning. Physiological needs are fundamental to all humans and vital to survival. Maslow (1987) states that physiological needs "serve as channels for all sorts of other needs […]. These physiological needs are the most prepotent of all needs" (p. 36).

The second level of the hierarchy of human needs is safety needs. Boeree (2006) states: "When the physiological needs are largely taken care of, this second layer of needs comes into play. You will become increasingly interested in finding safe circumstances, stability, protection" (p. 183). Safety needs represent security in the environment, and they are triggered in emergencies. Therefore, higher needs are unimportant when a person's life is endangered. A person's behaviour reflects his/her attempts to remain secure. For example, a child needs safety and security. Inconsistency, injustice, or unfairness from family makes a child feel insecure and anxious. Maslow (1943) points out: "Parental outbursts of rage or threats of punishment directed to the child, calling him names, speaking to him harshly […] or physical punishment […] elicit such total panic and terror in the child" (p. 19). He (1943) adds: "It can also occur in completely rejected children, who seem to cling to the hating parents more for sheer safety and protection than because of hope of love" (p. 20). Every child prefers an organized, safe world; they need a parent to protect them from harm.

The third level of the hierarchy of human needs is the need for love and belongingness. For Maslow (1943), when both physiological and safety needs are met fairly well, the needs for love, affection, and belonging will emerge (p. 26). Humans yearn for friendly relationships with others, or for a place in their group, and strive to achieve their goals. Maslow (1987) asserts that a person who does not have friends, a beloved, children, or a wife, he/she "feels sharply the pangs of loneliness, of ostracism, of rejection, of friendlessness, of rootlessness" (p. 43). A person can exhibit his/her love and belongingness needs in his/her desire to marry, have a family, and be a part of society. Maslow (1987) asserts: "Love needs to involve both giving and receiving love" (p. 45). To avoid anxiety, loneliness, and depression, it is essential for people to feel loved and accepted by others.

At the fourth level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the need for respect and esteem comes into play. Esteem needs to play a significant role in motivating behavior. At this level, it is important to gain the respect of others. Esteem needs include personal worth and self-esteem. A person needs to feel that others appreciate them and their contributions to the world. Petri and Govern (2012) state that esteem needs "can be broken down into subcategories—a need for self-esteem

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and a need for esteem from others" (p. 336). On the one hand, a person who can satisfy their esteem needs by achieving positive self-esteem feels confident in their abilities. On the other hand, the person who suffers from negative self-esteem feels inadequate. Self-esteem motivates a person to quest for achievements, confidence, independence, freedom, and strength. Therefore, when this need is met, a person feels self-worth and self-confident, and sees themselves as having a purpose in life. Conversely, a person with low self-esteem feels a lack of self-worth.

The deficiency needs are seen as 'basic', while the self-actualization needs are seen as 'growth needs'. At the top of the hierarchy of human needs is the need for self-actualization. At this level, the self-actualized individual is self-aware, less concerned with the opinions of others, concerned with personal growth, and focused on realizing their potential. Maslow (1943) states: "What a man can be, he must be" (p. 29). These needs vary from person to person.

At the level of self-actualization, a person's behavior is driven more by various conditions than by other needs at lower levels. These needs are values such as beauty, goodness, truth, and honesty, which give meaning to the life of a self-actualized person. According to Maslow (1943), there are several traits of a self-actualized person: they embrace the realities of the world (including themselves), they are spontaneous in their actions and thoughts, they are concerned with solving their own problems and those of others, they feel close to others and value life, and they view all issues objectively (p. 55). According to Petri and Govern (2012), "[a] self-actualized person is a very positive one […]. [He/she is] motivated to grow all that [he/she is] capable of becoming" (p. 337). Hence, self-actualization is a process of developing and growing.

Consequently, literary writing is a psychological activity in which the writer utilizes their deepest feelings, creative abilities, and inspiration (Adel, 2023). *God Help the Child* depicts the struggle to satisfy the hierarchy of needs. According to Dar (2022), "Psychology plays a very important role in the literature whether we talk about the one who writes the story or the one who reads it", establishing a connection between the writer and the reader, as the author is not only influenced by society, but also influences it (p. 284). As mentioned, psychology helps the authors display the characters successfully, expressing their thoughts, emotions, and moods, and how various events affect their mental lives.

This study adopts a psychological approach. The data is collected through an in-depth reading of the novel, classifying and highlighting dialogues related to human needs, and analyzing them according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This novel forms a crucial basis for study, providing rich narrative material that highlights human needs. Additionally, this study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore and give an in-depth description related to the experiences, perspectives, and behavior of Bride's character to reveal and describe her hierarchy of needs. Data analysis methods are based on Maslow's framework of human psychology to understand and interpret the needs and development of the main character within the narrative, ensuring a comprehensive, accurate analysis.

Applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs to Morrison's *God Help the Child* is a useful method for understanding and analyzing the protagonist's character development. It helps writers and readers determine whether the protagonist is stuck in a survivalist stage or striving for self-actualization. This approach also helps map the protagonist's journey and understand why her purposes change throughout the story by assessing her initial level of human needs, observing her progression up the hierarchy, and providing a deeper understanding of her desires and motivations.

Regarding literature review, some studies have examined the novel from different perspectives, depending on racial, post-colonial, and feminist theories to display the suffering and the stigmatization of Afro-American women by white American standards. Hidayati (2019) believes that the oppression of black women is shaped by overlapping systems of racism and patriarchy, which would not allow characters to attain emotional security and self-esteem. Likewise, Wang (2020), using a trauma theory approach, discusses how Bride's past of childhood abuse and emotional neglect affects her divided self, as well as her lack of successful interpersonal relationships. Ajay (2021) and Roy and Saif (2023) delve into intra-racial discrimination and colorism, revealing the effect of white beauty ideals in creating an internal psychological divide within the black community. Moreover, Bern (2023) examines Morrison's inversion of the white gaze and how colour becomes a tool for negotiating identity, visibility, and self-perception. Furthermore, Princey and Puri (2019) emphasize the lingering effects of memory and emotional trauma in the novel, indicating that Morrison's depiction of trauma is not transient but rather a lasting event that shapes the characters' emotional growth. Martín-Salván (2025) especially stresses the role of the mother/daughter bond, stating that the emotional disconnect between Sweetness and Bride is an example of the devastating impact of the withholding of maternal affection and recognition. As seen, the previous studies focus on the Afro-American experience, exploring the realities of identity, historical trauma, slavery, and racism, and centering on the struggles and interior lives of black women to define belonging and cultural identity in American society.

Other literary papers by Alhourani et al. (2026) and Khalifa et al. (2025) indicate postcolonial narratives, showing how dramatic texts negotiate identity formation under systems of cultural and social oppression. Similarly, Elhalafaway et al. (2025) and Alenzi et al. (2026a) employ performance-oriented and dialogic theories to highlight how form and theatrical strategies articulate fragmented selves. In addition, Abou Adel et al. (2025) and Alenzi et al. (2026b) adopt a posthumanist lens to emphasize ethical reconfigurations of the human condition. Together, these studies resonate with Toni Morrison's novel (*God Help the Child*), supporting a psychoanalytic reading informed by Abraham Maslow's theory of human needs (Alhourani et al., 2025). *God Help the Child* is Toni Morrison's rendering of the struggle for survival as the struggle for love, identity, acceptance and emotional wholeness—an almost psychological fight (Abou Adel et al., 2026).

As seen, the previous studies assert that black women are victims of American society because of their blackness, addressing trauma/race/identity, but do not examine Maslow's hierarchy as a dynamic narrative structure in the novel—

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serving as the bridge to methodology and analysis. In doing so, the current study depends on Maslow's human needs to unlock a deeper understanding of the black's emotions, past experiences, and motivation. By combining Morrison's narrative of the black child with Maslow's needs for emotional security, this study lays the groundwork for viewing *God Help the Child* as an example of a failed psychological basis. Moreover, the study employs the hierarchy of needs to illustrate how the protagonist prioritizes her goals, defines her vision of success, and helps her understand herself better. It also develops readers' social-emotional awareness, providing insight into the fundamental motivations and emotions of human beings from a psychological perspective.

II. Discussion

God Help the Child (2015) tells the story of Lula Ann, an African-American girl with white parents. At her birth, her mother, Sweetness, is shocked by her daughter's black skin. Lula Ann's skin causes problems for her parents, leading to the breakdown of their marriage. Lula Ann's father blames his wife for their daughter's black skin, refusing to interfere in his daughter's life and never touching her. Therefore, he decides to leave his family. Sweetness is left alone, bearing full responsibility for her daughter. The novel explores the psyche of Lula Ann, as a child and an adult, in detail. Her character embodies the complexities of human existence from childhood to adulthood, and faces numerous challenges in satisfying her hierarchy of human needs.

A. Human Needs

(a). Physiological Needs

As mentioned earlier, physiological needs come first in the human quest for contentment. In *God Help the Child*, Lula Ann is a poor girl rejected by her parents. Her mother cannot find a suitable job and has no chance to improve her economic situation; so, she and her daughter remain poor. Although Sweetness's skin is brighter, her newfound status does not protect her from mistreatment by others, who still perceive her as poor.

After leaving his family, Lula Ann's father sends just fifty dollars a month. Sweetness says: "My night job at the hospital got me and Lula Ann off welfare, which was a good thing. I wish they [American society] would stop calling it welfare" (p. 14). In American society, the term "welfare" often refers to the poor. Sweetness works as a nurse and has no opportunity to increase her wealth or status. As a result, her meager salary provided by her husband is insufficient to cover her basic needs. At the same time, Sweetness should pay her rent on time and support her child financially.

Lula Ann's parents, who are ashamed of her dark skin, mistreat her. Her mother, for example, cannot look at her child and stops breastfeeding her. Sweetness states, "It's not my fault. So you can't blame me" (p. 12), justifying her fear of her daughter's skin. This behaviour leaves Lula Ann with no secure attachment or emotional closeness. Moreover, Martín-Salván (2018) states that Sweetness's reference to her daughter's skin reveals understanding of racial prejudice and color discrimination (p. 2).

Childcare includes meeting basic needs such as shelter, food, and sleep. Sweetness provides shelter and food for her helpless child, unable to cover her daughter's emotional needs. Lula Ann says: "She [her mother] had to bathe me. Rinse me" (p. 29). Moreover, Volker et al. (1999) indicate that if babies receive predictable reactions to their behavior early in life, they may feel more capable of having some control over situations and their own reactions, which could boost self-confidence. Consequently, they may be very independent but lacking in emotional bonding. Volker et al. (1999) add that individuals are capable of problem-solving and adapting with fear without social support. On the other hand, emotional attachment enables them to connect with others and "obtain social support" (p. 934). The excerpt reveals the importance of emotional needs that help a person have relationships with others. In this case, Lula Ann is deprived emotionally and physically, not economically. Therefore, she does not struggle to fulfill her physiological needs, including her needs for water, food, and shelter from her mother.

(b). Safety Needs

After physiological needs are met, safety needs rise, such as protection, dependency, stability, security, and freedom from anxiety and fear. The most significant phase in a person's life is childhood. The parents should provide their child with love and establish feelings of safety. During childhood, Lula Ann received unfair treatment from her parents. Instead of being a caring, loving parent, Sweetness distances herself from her child. For her, "[n]ursing her was like having a pickaninny sucking my teat" (p. 13). The word "pickaninny" reflects the depth of Sweetness's disgust with her child. Furthermore, Sweetness insists on hiding her daughter, refuses to go out with her, and fears that others will accuse her of adultery because of her daughter's skin color. Sweetness states that she "didn't take her outside much anyway because […], friends, or strangers would lean down and peek in to say something nice and then give a start or jump back before frowning. That hurt" (pp. 13-14). The insecure relationship between Lula Ann and her parents is the primary cause of child abuse. Lula Ann needs to be loved and accepted; therefore, she makes her goal to be accepted in life.

Lula Ann suffers from physical and psychological violence. Physical violence is any act intended to harm the victim's body. Psychological violence includes cruel actions or verbal abuse intended to humiliate or degrade the victim (Khater, 2022). For example, Lula Ann was physically abused by her mother, stating: "I didn't make a sound, didn't even raise a hand to protect myself when she slapped my face then punched me in the ribs before smashing my jaw with her fist then

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butting my head with hers" (p. 30). The above excerpt confirms the physical violence inflicted upon Lula Ann, describing Sweetness's behaviour toward her child. According to Luckhurst (2008), Morrison creates an "emphatic unstellment [sic] in the reader" (p. 91). This empathy makes the reader(s) feel Lula Ann's sorrow. Moreover, Lula Ann recalls how her mother punished her, stating: "I made little mistakes deliberately, but she had ways to punish me without touching the skin she hated—bed without supper, lock me in my room—but her screaming at me was the worst" (p. 29). Lula Ann's inner emotions toward her abusive mother confirm what Herman (1992) says: "In the abusive family environment, the exercise of parental power is arbitrary, capricious, and absolute" (p. 71). Lula Ann is a victim of violence, having been neglected by her parents, which makes her feel submissive. According to Herman (1992), "Trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality" (p. 70), adding that an abused person has to find a way to maintain a sense of trust in untrusted people, security in an insecure situation, control in a terrifyingly unpredictable situation, and strength in a helplessness situation (p. 70). In this case, Lula Ann suffers from fear, distrust, lack of self-confidence, and isolation.

As a result, Lula Ann cannot fulfill her safety needs during childhood. In other words, she cannot find peace or love in her childhood because of her family's rejection. Sweetness does not establish a comforting, secure childhood for her daughter. This means that the way the mother deals with her child will affect his/her emotional life as he/she matures.

During adulthood, Lula Ann decides to live in California and move away to eliminate the unfair treatment she receives from her abusive family. For Tull (2019), "in the setting of childhood abuse or neglect, dissociation is thought to be a self-protective survival technique in which a child (or adult) slips into a dissociative state in order to escape fully experiencing trauma that is unbearable" (p. 1). Lula Ann isolates herself to escape her horrific environment. Unable to forgive her mother as she grows up, the memories haunt her throughout her life. Moreover, she changed her name to Bride. The old name, Lula Ann, reminds her of her miserable childhood, while the new name, Bride, is a new start for a new life. According to Thompson (2020), Bride aims to be someone else and establish a safe environment for herself, hiding her darkness behind whiteness (p. 2). She also works as a cosmetics distributor and becomes successful and independent, although her past haunts her.

It can be seen that Bride's safety needs are met. These needs include independence, safety, and freedom from anxiety and fear. Moving to a safer place to begin a new life away from her past is another ordeal for recovery.

(c). Love and Belongingness Needs

If the physiological and safety needs are well met, the needs for affection, love, and belonging will emerge. As mentioned earlier, when Sweetness gives birth to Lula Ann, her life changes drastically. Sweetness cannot love her, stating: "Lula Ann, embarrassed me. Her birth skin was pale like all babies', even African ones, but it changed fast" (p. 13). Sweetness does not allow Bride to get close to her, neither emotionally nor physically. Throughout childhood, her mother set boundaries on their relationship. For example, Sweetness asks her daughter to call her 'Sweetness' instead of 'Mama'. As a result, Sweetness and Lula Ann have become emotionally and physically estranged. Sweetness's parenting does not involve closeness, emotional security, or love.

When Bride grows up, she treats her mother the same way in return. According to Maslow (1987), "love needs involve both giving and receiving love" (p. 45). Bride does not care for her oppressed mother. Sweetness realizes this when Bride moves away: "What you do to children matters. And they might never forget" (p. 36). As seen, Bride was born into a world devoid of love and affection. A chasm exists between Bride and her parents. This chasm widens, leaving Bride in a state of loss and longing. According to Mydland (2018), "Lula Ann is left with one parent physically absent from her life and the other physically present yet emotionally absent" (p. 47). Her mother never touches her. Lula Ann states, "I used to pray she would slap my face or spank me just to feel her touch" (p. 29). Therefore, Lula Ann is unable to communicate with others due to the lack of support and love during her childhood.

One incident that demonstrates Bride's longing for her mother's attention and love occurred when she was asked to testify in court against Sofia Huxley, a teacher accused of sexual harassment. She testified against an innocent teacher to please her mother. She briefly received her mother's attention and felt loved. Sweetness is pleased with Lula Ann for the first time because the latter does what her mother asks of her. Bride states: "I glanced at Sweetness, she was smiling like I've never seen her smile before […]. [S]he held my hand, [...]. She never did that before" (p. 29). Lula Ann loses her self-acceptance because she is not taught how to build pride and confidence. For Herman (1992), "the child victim often becomes a superb performer. She attempts to do whatever is required of her", hoping to find favor in the eyes of her parents (p. 76). Lula Ann is a child to realize that what she does will ruin Sofia's life; all she needs is her mother's love and attention.

Moreover, instead of providing the security, protection, and love Bride needs, Sweetness teaches her to avoid trouble and act as if she were invisible. Sweetness justifies her own shortcomings by stating: "[H]er black skin would scare white people or make them laugh and trick her" (p. 35). Therefore, a family should provide their child with nourishment and love for healthy, normal growth. Bride is ill-prepared to face future challenges.

Lula Ann was also rejected by her society, especially during childhood. She experiences stereotypes and bullying in her life. For example, at school, her friend stereotypes her. Since school is the first environment where a child interacts and communicates, Lula Ann learns about the social stigma associated with her Black skin from her friend. Bride's friends call her 'Cunt' or 'Negro', using these terms to humiliate her. She also experiences bullying at school because her white friends treat her like a stranger, put a bunch of bananas on her desk, and make monkey noises (p. 37). She experiences psychological violence because her friends insult her at school.

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Furthermore, as an adult, the stereotypical image of Bride persists in her workplace. Although Bride and her white friend, Brooklyn, love each other, and their friendship is based on mutual support and understanding, Brooklyn compares them in terms of appearance. Brooklyn states: "I shouldn`t be thinking this. But her position at Sylvia, Inc., might be up for grabs. How can she persuade women to improve their looks with products that can`t improve her own?" (p. 26). This statement confirms how Brooklyn excludes Bride from the definition of female beauty. For Brooklyn, Bride's blackness does not reflect the ideal, true image of a woman. Brooklyn believes Bride is not suited to be the manager of a cosmetics company due to her physical appearance.

Therefore, Bride suffers from the image created by the dominant. Another incident illustrates how Bride is rejected by a white-dominated society. Her former white lover and his family reject her. He asks his parents, "Isn't she [Bride] beautiful? […]. Look at her, Mother? Dad?" (p. 33). The phrase is sarcasm. They humiliate and degrade her. The behavior of her ex-boyfriend and his oppressive family is a form of psychological abuse. She is viewed as an object of ridicule.

Lula Ann did not find love in her childhood. As a grownup, Bride begins to look for safety, love, and care. She satisfies her safety needs by moving away from her oppressed mother. Actually, Bride looks for other people to help her overcome her sufferings. At the age of twenty-three, she meets Booker, a white man, and falls in love with him. After meeting Booker, her life gets a new meaning. For Booker, Bride is different; she is not like other girls. Bride never asks him about his previous life. For Bride, Booker represents a turning point in her life.

As mentioned earlier, Bride is emotionally deprived; so, she hungers for love. When she meets Booker, finally, she has one person to guide and support her. Bride shares and recalls her miserable childhood with him, telling him how he was humiliated and rejected. He acknowledges her suffering and pain. Finally, a safe environment was provided for Bride. Booker made her feel secure, confident, and a sense of belonging. Bride states: "When I told Booker about it [her childhood] I laughed at first, pretending the whole thing was just silly" (p. 44). Booker's empathic response to her old experience overwhelmed her. Booker says: "It's just a color […]. [S]o racism without race is a choice" (p. 101). Bride finds someone who can help her overcome her old life. For Herman, "when the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery" (p. 1). Bride learns to hide her real emotions because her mother educates her to avoid trouble. According to Mydland (2018), the lack of contact between Bride and Sweetness led to the former becoming a self-doubting character due to the latter's unpredictable reactions (p. 53). Therefore, Bride develops and establishes a meaningful relationship with Booker. Bride's ordeal ends by telling her story to Booker and expressing her feelings freely. In other words, Booker gains her trust and makes her open up.

When Bride finds love, she can heal from her childhood trauma. With Booker, she finds inner peace. For Herman (1992), "[s]haring the traumatic experience with others is a precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world. In this process, the survivor seeks assistance not only from those closest to her but also from the wider community" (p. 51). Bride-Booker relationship is seen as a means of recovery. She is given a chance for self-realization and healing. According to Donia and Haikal (2022), "voicing the trauma Bride suffers from is the only way that helps her to achieve full recovery" (p. 29).

Moreover, Lula Ann tells Booker about Huxley, and he encourages her to overcome her fear stemming from her miserable childhood: "You're not responsible for other folks' evil", and he advises her to "correct what [she] can; learn from [her] can't" (p. 44). Hence, Bride is freed from her miserable childhood and the false testimony that burdened her throughout her past life. Morrison (2015) suggests that after Lula Ann confessed her sins, she felt as if she had been reborn. She no longer had to endure, but rather overcome, her mother's contempt and her father's abandonment (p. 114). From the preceding explanation, Bride achieves love and belongingness after meeting Booker. In his relationship with her, Booker provides her with the stability and security she seeks. He helps her heal her painful past.

(d). The Esteem Needs

A person has a desire or need for stable, consistent, and high self-esteem, for self-respect and self-esteem, or for the esteem of others. These needs fall into two categories: first, the desire for mastery, achievement, strength, competence, proficiency, efficiency, confidence in the world, freedom, and independence; second, the desire for prestige, reputation, fame, glory, status, attention, appreciation, dominance, dignity, importance, or recognition.

Satisfying self-esteem needs leads to feelings of strength, worth, self-confidence, and the ability to contribute meaningfully to life. A person who satisfies their self-esteem needs is not dependent on others but is always ready to grow and achieve their highest aspirations.

Like all humans, Bride has a desire and a need for a solid foundation: high self-esteem, self-respect, and respect for others. Therefore, the first need for self-esteem is self-respect or self-worth. In this case, Bride desires freedom and independence. This is evident when she decides to live alone, away from her oppressive mother, to enjoy the freedom to be whoever she wants and do as she pleases. Furthermore, Bride becomes independent when she applies for a job at Sylvia's company and then becomes a manager at this cosmetics company. She then launches her own cosmetics line called "You Girl: Cosmetics for Your Personal Millennium." Thus, Bride's self-confidence is realized. Consequently, her need for self-esteem increases, and she gains a strong incentive to change and build her life. It can be concluded that her self-esteem has been fulfilled.

The second esteem need is the esteem of others. The esteem of other people is important for Bride. Even though she has achieved self-esteem and self-respect, she still desires care and appreciation from others. Thus, Booker appreciates

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her. She also gets the attention of others because she becomes a successful cosmetics distributor. Bride, finally, is accepted by herself, Booker, and society.

It can be concluded that Bride fulfills self-esteem and respect for others. In her pursuit of self-esteem, Bride experiences freedom, independence, and confidence. With respect from others, Bride gets great support and appreciation from Booker, who makes her feel loved and respected.

(e). Self-Actualization

Even if all these needs are met, it is expected (though not always) that new needs will arise. This need might be called self-actualization, that is, the human drive to realize one's full potential. The emergence of these needs is usually contingent upon the prior satisfaction of D-needs.

Bride actualizes herself by passing all the processes gradually and reaching her hopes. She leaves her miserable childhood behind to live a normal, healthy life in the present. For Mydland (2018), "[Bride] has mourned her past and enters a new stage in life" (p. 70). She changed her name to Bride to start a new life and to be visible. She has started wearing white because her friend advises her to "wear white [...]. Only white and all white all the time" (p. 30). White clothes make her black skin more noticeable. Bride becomes successful in turning negative situations into positive ones. Therefore, instead of covering up and hiding her dark skin, she uses it to assert her identity. Moreover, her dark skin, which is a source of shame for her mother, becomes a source of pride for Bride. According to Vinayakaselvi and Arunmozhi (2020), Bride's transformation makes her feel empowered (p. 1155).

One of the issues that proves Bride is a self-actualizing person is that she accepts the realities of the world. She is proud of her skin, refusing to wear any makeup. She feels her inner beauty beyond her dark skin and takes control of her life. For Herman (1992), those who are in control of their lives are known as "fortunate survivors" (p. 70), because they control their recovery and thus became the subjects of their own search for truth rather than the subjects of investigation (p. 70). Bride's friend tells her to be herself: "A panther in snow […]. Just you girl" (p. 31). Herman (1992) writes about how an abused child "must build a new life within a radically different culture from the one they left behind" (p. 196), adding that he/she can discover his/her ambitions (p. 197).

In addition, Bride can solve problems and take responsibility for her previous actions. When Bride learns of Huxley's release, she tries to make Huxley's life better by offering her money. She does this as a well-meaning act because she destroys Huxley's life.

Finally, Bride's ambition is to create a new life that she has never had. She becomes pregnant, telling Booker: "I'm pregnant and it's yours" (p. 122). Bride and Booker create a good life, or they want to re-live the childhood they never had, through the unborn child. Both help each other to recover. She challenges the past through success and achievements. People view Bride as a successful, beautiful figure. She has succeeded in gaining acceptance among white people. According to Ramírez (2016), Morrison's novel "is not only about childhood abuse and trauma, but it is also about transformation and healing" (p. 145). Bride wants a happy future with Booker. They hope to be good parents and to love and protect their unborn child. Finally, her self-actualization needs are fulfilled when her healing process is fulfilled.

III. Conclusion

Morrison asserts that human needs are not merely milestones to be reached, but rather foundations to be continually strengthened. As seen, Bride's transition to self-acceptance represents her first, true step toward self-actualization, which only comes after facing D-needs she experienced during childhood. As a result, this psychological reading highlights the central message of the novel: the necessity of healing the inner child before attaining true fulfillment in adulthood. The study concludes that Bride meets her physiological needs with her mother's help. She fulfills her safety needs —freedom from anxiety and hatred—when she leaves her abusive mother. Additionally, Bride satisfies her love and belongingness needs when she loves Booker. Furthermore, her self-esteem is positive; she gains confidence when others accept her. She also fulfills her need for self-actualization by aspiring to be a good mother. Hence, Bride's human needs are fulfilled by others. *God Help the Child* has a theme of the issues of post-colonial such as discrimination and racism, but what the main character, Bride, experiences about it also impacts her human needs and how to achieve them.

After analyzing *God Help the Child*, it is concluded that Maslow's human needs are effective, especially in the life of Bride in the novel. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is fulfilled through others. Additionally, this study stands out for its unique focus on the complexities of meeting basic needs in the context of colorism and confronting societal challenges that prevent a person with color from achieving the needs for a self-actualized life. Bride's efforts to meet her needs reflect a psychological journey of self-discovery shaped by harsh circumstances.

The significance of this study lies in enhancing readers' social-emotional awareness, fostering empathy, and deepening their understanding of others' behaviors and motivations. Furthermore, the study of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, particularly in relation to Black women who experience discrimination and stigma due to their skin color, contributes to developing a framework for exploring their deeper desires and motivations. This study expands our understanding of human self-sufficiency and resilience, offering a different perspective on how individuals achieve personal growth and find meaning in their lives by facing extraordinary adversity. It is worth noting that using Maslow's theory to analyze the personality of Black women helps others understand the motivations behind their actions and reactions.

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Cultural Motivation and Social Network Structures as Mechanisms of Oral Language Maintenance: A Case Study of the Mạ Ethnic Minority in Southern Vietnam

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***Abstract*—This study examines the determinants of language maintenance among the Mạ ethnic minority in Southern Vietnam through an explanatory mixed-methods design (N = 420; n = 25). It argues that language maintenance among the Mạ is not simply a passive result of geographic or social isolation but rather an active process of identity negotiation in response to socioeconomic pressures. The regression model explains 84.0% of the variance in linguistic persistence (Adjusted R^2 = .840), identifying a structured hierarchy of influence among the predictors. Cultural Motivation (CM, β = .333) emerges as the primary predictor, followed by Endogamous Social Networks (ESN, β = .276), Intergenerational Transmission Strength (ITS, β = .248), and Domain Functional Expansion (DFE, β = .239). These findings suggest that internal psychological attachment and dense communal interaction within the family domain act as pillars of linguistic resilience. Qualitative insights further clarify how the Mạ language serves as a crucial marker of identity in the context of contact with the national language. The study concludes that sustaining ethnolinguistic vitality requires synergy between individual conviction and the expansion of functional domains beyond the intra-communal context.**

***Index Terms*—language maintenance, ethnolinguistic vitality, Endogamous social networks, intergenerational transmission, mixed-methods design**

I. Introduction

The maintenance of minority languages in the face of the dominance of national languages is a critical subject of inquiry within sociolinguistics, involving complex interactions between cultural autonomy and social structures. In the multi-ethnic landscape of Vietnam, the Mạ people—an indigenous group belonging to the Mon-Khmer language family—are experiencing language shift driven by socioeconomic integration. While established research often focuses on macro-level assimilation trends (Moseley, 2010) or examines these processes through the lens of socioeconomic modernization (Crystal, 2011; Edwards, 2010), there is a clear need to examine the internal and communal mechanisms that facilitate linguistic persistence. This focus aligns with recent evidence from Southern Vietnam, where ethnic minority communication is increasingly defined by a strategic balance between heritage preservation and socioeconomic adaptation (Hoang & Nguyen, 2025).

This research investigates the cultural and social factors contributing to the maintenance of the Mạ language within its traditional residential areas. Historically, language maintenance was frequently attributed to geographical isolation; however, as Mạ communities participate extensively in the market economy, the traditional isolation model does not sufficiently explain continued language use. Consequently, it is important to evaluate how internal psychological drivers and social network structures function as protective factors against the influence of the national language. Accordingly, this study utilizes Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT) to assess how status, demography, and institutional support contribute to the community's linguistic health (Giles et al., 1977; Landweer, 2000).

Despite the extensive literature on language decline, a significant research gap persists regarding specific Mon-Khmer groups in Vietnam. Current studies have predominantly concentrated on linguistic descriptions or state-level policies (Nguyen, 2023), often overlooking how speakers actively make choices in their daily language choices. Furthermore, there is a lack of integrated mixed-methods evidence to quantify the relative influence of cultural motivation in comparison to social network density. Therefore, an investigation connecting individual conviction with communal structural support is required to address this gap in theory and evidence.

To address these issues, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do cultural and social mechanisms predict the maintenance of the oral Mạ language?

RQ2: Which specific mechanism emerges as the primary determinant in the hierarchy of factors influencing the persistence of Mạ in oral communication?

RQ3: How do the interactions between these mechanisms shape the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Mạ community within family and communal domains?

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This paper argues that Mạ linguistic persistence represents a form of active ethnolinguistic identity, sustained by a dual mechanism: internal cultural motivation and external endogamous social networks. Within this framework, language choice is viewed as a systematic response to social environments, where the Mạ language functions as a symbol that is crucial for identity negotiation (Baker, 2011; Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 2025). Rather than being a passive inheritance, this persistence involves speakers actively positioning their identity, in which speakers consciously use their heritage language as a a way to mark their distinct identity amid changing globalized economic and social conditions (Blommaert, 2010). This active effort aims to re-establish the language's functional relevance within integrated contexts. Utilizing an explanatory mixed-methods design (N = 420 for the quantitative phase; n = 25 for the qualitative phase), this study identifies key predictive variables to enhance the understanding of ethnolinguistic vitality and provides an empirical basis for language policy and planning in ethnic minority regions.

II. Theoretical Framework and Research Model

A. Language Maintenance Theory and Communicative Domains

Language maintenance (LM) is the preservation of a language's functional utility and communicative roles (Fishman, 1991; Baker, 2011). This process relies on dividing up communicative domains, allocating languages to specific social or symbolic contexts (Appel & Muysken, 2025). As Mackey (1962) notes, bilingual usage is dictated by the environment's functional requirements. In contact situations, LM is sustained by functional exclusivity: the minority language occupies informal domains, while the majority language serves formal domains (Fishman, 1967, 1991).

For the Mạ community, this partitioning serves as a strategic negotiation of language use. While Vietnamese is utilized in institutional domains—such as formal education and economic transactions—the Mạ language remains firmly anchored in intimate and traditional domains associated with kinship and communal rituals. This resilience depends on the stability of these functional niches (Crystal, 2011). This separation prevents domain leakage—majority language encroachment—thereby preserving the mother tongue as the primary vehicle for identity and indigenous knowledge (Pauwels, 2016; Wright, 2016).

Furthermore, the maintenance of the Mạ language within these domains is intrinsically linked to Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EVT). The synergy between demographic density in the *Bon* (village) and the psychological valuation of the language ensures that the family domain remains a normative space for oral transmission. In this context, language maintenance is not merely a linguistic outcome but a manifestation of active ethnolinguistic identity, where speakers actively draw boundaries between the pragmatic utility of the national language and the affective, symbolic power of the indigenous tongue (Giles et al., 1977; Landweer, 2000).

B. Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT)

Ethnolinguistic vitality (EVT) refers to a language group's potential to maintain its distinctiveness in intergroup settings (Giles et al., 1977). This viability is determined by three structural variables: status, demography, and institutional support. Rather than a static attribute, vitality is an ongoing interaction between macro-level ideologies and micro-level communal agency (Zuo & Wang, 2025). Within this paradigm, linguistic resilience is fostered by high social network density and geographic concentration (Landweer, 2000).

For the Mạ community, limited institutional support in formal domains is offset by demographic density in the *Bon* (village), ensuring mother-tongue continuity. This oral proficiency is sustained by social factors that strengthen group identity, providing a foundation for language maintenance even in the absence of formal literacy (Landweer, 2000).

Vitality is further mediated by subjective vitality—the speakers' internal perception of their language's socio-symbolic standing and their collective orientation within the social hierarchy (Appel & Muysken, 2025). According to Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory (Giles & Johnson, 1987), high ethnic identification prompts speakers to establish linguistic boundaries to resist assimilation. For the Mạ, this subjective dimension functions as a psychological buffer: perceiving the language as a primary symbol of ethnic heritage encourages them to prioritize intergenerational transmission. EVT thus elucidates the negotiation between the instrumental value of the national language for upward mobility and the affective necessity of the heritage tongue for cultural continuity.

C. Family Language Policy and Intergenerational Transmission

The maintenance of ethnolinguistic vitality is fundamentally rooted in the domestic domain through Family language policy, which Spolsky (2009, 2012) conceptualizes as an integrated triad of language ideologies, practices, and management. Within the Mạ community, the family functions as the primary site for intergenerational transmission, where the mother tongue is transferred through oral traditions and interactional routines (Fishman, 1991). This process is characterized by active maintenance efforts, as parents act as active language managers who prioritize the indigenous language in domestic interactions to reduce the influence of the dominant national language (Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2020; Spolsky, 2012). As observed by Nguyen and Hamid (2016), such familial decisions reflect a deliberate commitment to preserving cultural heritage and ethnic identity, helping to pass on cultural value, and ensuring the continuity of indigenous knowledge systems (Bourdieu, 1991; Maffi, 2005). Ultimately, this transmission represents a strategic effort to sustain the Mạ language as a functional tool for social cohesion within the *Bon*, effectively serving as

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a structural defense mechanism that protects the indigenous tongue against the homogenizing pressures of a wider multi-ethnic society (Baker, 2011).

D. Social Network Theory

The social structure of a community supports language maintenance through various aspects of social networks. Milroy (1987) argues that dense and multiplex social networks within ethnic communities function as norm-enforcement mechanisms, promoting linguistic conformity and resisting external pressures. In the Mạ community, the traditional village structure (*Bon*) facilitates these close-knit networks, which regulate linguistic choices and reinforce the mother tongue as the primary medium for daily interaction (Pauwels, 2016).

These networks create a sociolinguistic environment where the ethnic language remains the normal, expected choice, acting as a structural buffer against the encroachment of the national language. By maintaining endogamous social ties, the Mạ community sustains its linguistic repertoire and reinforces ethnic cohesion (Heller, 2025). This communal support is a prerequisite for domain functional expansion, allowing the minority language to maintain or increase its communicative roles across social contexts (Fishman, 1991; Baker, 2011).

From a broader perspective, these networks represent a micro-level mechanism of resilience that complements the broader structural factors of ethnolinguistic vitality—status, demography, and institutional support (Giles et al., 1977). By bridging the gap between individual agency and institutional structures, these networks ensure the language remains a viable instrument for both cultural heritage preservation and interpersonal interaction (Zuo & Wang, 2025).

E. Hypothesis Development

Cultural motivation encompasses the psychological drive and symbolic value attributed to a native tongue, serving as a primary predictor of linguistic survival (Baker, 2011). For the Mạ, the language is inextricably linked to spiritual rituals and indigenous knowledge (Maffi, 2005). This ideological commitment functions as a buffer against linguistic shift, as speakers view the language as a core marker of ethnic identity rather than a mere utilitarian tool (Nguyen & Hamid, 2016; Kroskrity & Meek, 2023). Such internal conviction establishes ideological barriers that resist the pragmatic pressures of the national language (Fishman, 1991).

H1: Cultural motivation has a positive influence on the language maintenance of the Mạ community.

The transfer of language from parents to children is the cornerstone of linguistic survival; its cessation marks a critical stage of decline (Fishman, 1991; Spolsky, 2009). In the Mạ community, where oral tradition prevails, the household is a crucial place for linguistic reproduction (Nguyen & Hamid, 2021). Consistent intergenerational transmission provides the younger generation with the symbolic capital necessary to resist external educational and social pressures (Grenoble & Whaley, 2005).

H2: Intergenerational transmission strength is a positive predictor of Mạ language maintenance.

Social structures enforce linguistic norms through dense, multiplex communal ties that promote conformity and regulate communicative behavior (Milroy, 1987; Pauwels, 2016). For the Mạ, the traditional village structure (*Bon*) and intra-ethnic marriage create endogamous networks that limit external linguistic pressure (Heller, 2025). These networks ensure the minority language remains the unmarked choice for interaction, reducing social distance through co-ethnic ties and thereby resisting assimilation (Nguyen & Hamid, 2019; Zhang, 2012).

H3: Endogamous social networks positively contribute to the language maintenance of the Mạ people.

Language maintenance is enhanced when a language occupies diverse functional domains (Grosjean, 1982; Bradley, 2023). While often restricted to private spheres, expanding language use into communal gatherings, festivals, and cultural performances provides functional legitimacy (Nguyen et al., 2023). For the Mạ, utilizing the mother tongue in broader social spaces ensures its relevance within integrated socioeconomic environments, reinforcing its status and encouraging use among younger speakers (Appel & Muysken, 2025; Sariono et al., 2025; Zuo & Wang, 2025).

H4: Domain functional expansion has a positive impact on the language maintenance of the Mạ community.

F. Proposed Research Model

Based on the theoretical framework, the proposed research model synthesizes ethnolinguistic vitality into a measurable structural framework, positioning Language maintenance (LM) as the dependent variable. As illustrated in Figure 1, the model integrates internal continuity—Cultural motivation (CM) and Intergenerational transmission strength (ITS)—with external structural supports, namely Endogamous social networks (ESN) and Domain functional expansion (DFE) (Milroy, 1987; Bradley, 2023). Utilizing an explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), this framework evaluates the hierarchy of influence among these predictors to determine their relative contribution to linguistic persistence. Ultimately, the model examines whether Mạ linguistic continuity is a manifestation of deliberate ethnolinguistic agency, with each hypothesized path predicting a positive relationship with sustained language usage.

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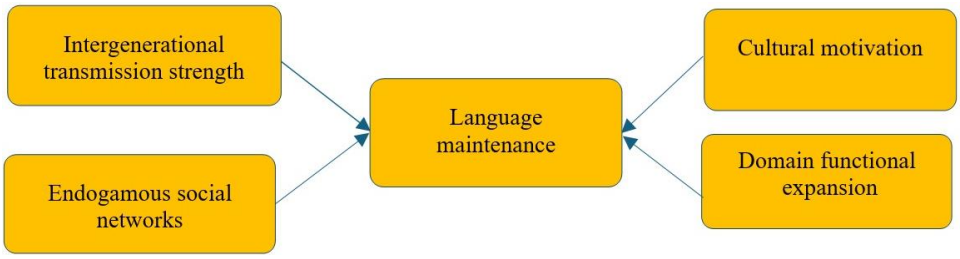


Figure 1. The Proposed Research Model

III. Methodology

A. Research Design

Based on the established framework, this study employs a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to examine the sociolinguistic complexities of the Mạ—an Austroasiatic group of 50,322 individuals (General Statistics Office, 2019) concentrated in Lam Dong, Dak Nong, and Dong Nai (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). Amidst rapid agrarian-industrial transitions, Mạ language choice serves as an important indicator of for their ethnolinguistic vitality (Giles et al., 1977), necessitating localized empirical data to document shifting linguistic landscapes (Nguyen, 2023).

The qualitative phase utilized semi-structured in-depth interviews with 25 key informants (village elders and cultural custodians) to provide ethnographically situated data on language maintenance during economic integration. These insights contextualized variables—specifically Cultural Motivation and Domain Functional Expansion—within the Mạ's unique cultural milieu. Simultaneously, the quantitative phase employed a cross-sectional survey to empirically test the proposed model and hypotheses (H1–H4), ensuring a comprehensive account of bilingualism (Mackey, 1962) and agentive maintenance within the community (as cited in Hoang, 2026b).

B. Data Collection Procedure

The qualitative phase employed semi-structured interviews with 25 key informants (n = 25), selected via purposive sampling for their expertise in Mạ oral traditions and social governance. Utilizing thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), these insights refined the conceptualization of variables—specifically Endogamous social networks and communicative domains—to reflect the community's multilayered sociopolitical context (Zuo & Wang, 2025).

For the quantitative phase, the minimum sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula. Based on a population of N = 50,322 (General Statistics Office, 2019) with a 5% margin of error (e = 0.05):

$$\mathbf{n}=\frac{\mathbf{N}}{\mathbf{1+N(e)^2}} \text{ (Equation 1)}$$

$$n=\frac{N}{1+N(e^2)}=\frac{50{,}322}{1+50{,}322(0.05^2)}\approx 397 \text{ (Equation 2)}$$

To enhance statistical power for multivariate analysis and mitigate non-response bias, the study validated 420 usable responses. This sample provides a robust basis for evaluating Intergenerational Transmission Strength (ITS) and other predictors of linguistic continuity (Fishman, 1991).

Face-to-face fieldwork was conducted from August 2025 to March 2026 in high-density Mạ regions across Lam Dong, Dak Nong, and Dong Nai. A multi-stage sampling design, integrating convenience and snowball techniques, was utilized. Given the community's predominantly oral culture, structured interviews were employed rather than self-administered questionnaires to ensure data accuracy. Strict ethical protocols regarding informed consent and anonymity were maintained throughout, framing the community's linguistic capital as a form of symbolic power within their shifting social space (Bourdieu, 1991).

C. Measurement Instrument

The primary research instrument for this study was a structured questionnaire designed to evaluate the socio-cultural determinants of language maintenance. To ensure accessibility for the Mạ people, the survey allowed for verbal clarification in the native tongue via local bilingual facilitators, thereby bridging gaps in literacy and linguistic nuance. Drawing upon the framework of Appel and Muysken (2025), the instrument integrates two complementary sections:

Socio-demographic profiling: Documented gender, age, education, and occupation (N = 420) to establish the sample's sociolinguistic landscape and the distribution of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991).

Psychometric assessment: Employed five-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to operationalize five core constructs adapted from established metrics (Giles et al., 1977; Zuo & Wang, 2025):

Cultural Motivation (CM): 4 items on the symbolic value and internal drive to preserve heritage (Maffi, 2005).

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Endogamous Social Networks (ESN): 4 items assessing intra-ethnic interaction density and traditional *Bon* structures (Milroy, 1987).

Intergenerational Transmission Strength (ITS): 4 items evaluating mother-tongue usage consistency within the household (Fishman, 1991).

Domain Functional Expansion (DFE): A 4-item measure tracking the utility of the Mạ language in public and communal spaces, reflecting strategies for managing language contact (Bradley, 2023; Grosjean, 1982).

Language Maintenance (LM): The 4-item dependent variable measuring proficiency and usage frequency as indicators of group structural strength (Wright, 2016).

A pilot study (n = 20) ensured instrument reliability, resulting in the linguistic simplification of complex terms to better capture the nuances of agentive maintenance and the community's response to language shift.

D. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were processed and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0 through a systematic three-stage approach to ensure empirical rigor. Initially, descriptive statistics established a sociolinguistic profile of the N = 420 respondents, providing a foundational overview of the sample's distribution and contextualizing the community's linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 2025).

Subsequently, psychometric validation was conducted to evaluate the reliability and structural validity of the measurement scales. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with a required threshold of ($\alpha \geq 0.70$) (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). This was followed by Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using principal component analysis with Varimax rotation. The adequacy of the data for factor analysis was determined via the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure (≥ 0.7) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < 0.001$) (Kaiser, 1974). To ensure indicator reliability, a minimum factor loading threshold of 0.5 was strictly maintained (Hair et al., 2019).

Finally, hypothesis testing was executed via Multiple Linear Regression analysis to evaluate the predictive power of the independent variables on Language maintenance. This multivariate technique identified the primary socio-cultural drivers of linguistic persistence through standardized β coefficients. To ensure model stability, diagnostic tests for normality, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity (VIF < 3) were performed (Hair et al., 2019). These rigorous procedures ensure that the findings accurately reflect the sociopolitical multilayered process of language maintenance (Fishman, 1991; Zuo & Wang, 2025).

IV. Results

A. Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive analysis of the demographic characteristics (N = 420) provides a foundational overview of the Mạ community across three provinces: Lam Dong, Dak Nong, and Dong Nai. The sample exhibits a balanced gender distribution (57.1% male, 42.9% female) and a diverse age structure, with the largest cohorts being individuals aged 46–60 (31.0%) and 18–30 (29.8%). This generational spread is essential for assessing the Intergenerational transmission strength of the Mạ language. Preliminary inferential analysis revealed no significant differences in Language maintenance scores across gender, age, or educational categories ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that the commitment to linguistic continuity is a collective endeavor that transcends specific demographic strata (Giles et al., 1977).

A systematic examination of language usage within the home domain reveals a complex state of bilingualism (Appel & Muysken, 2025). While this domain remains a primary stronghold for the heritage language, it is increasingly characterized by linguistic hybridization. Specifically, 25.5% of respondents utilize Mạ language only at home, and 37.4% use mainly Mạ language (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). Collectively, 62.9% of the sample continues to prioritize the mother tongue in domestic communication, indicating a resilient level of language maintenance (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). This underscores the role of the family as the last bastion against language shift (Fishman, 1991).

Conversely, the integration of Vietnamese into the family domain reflects a process of domain leakage where the national language permeates private communicative domains (Spolsky, 2012). Approximately 26.9% of respondents report a balanced use of both Mạ and Vietnamese, while 10.2% utilize mainly Vietnamese (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). This indicates that over one-third of the community (37.1%) now employs the national language in a substantial capacity at home (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). This transition is often associated with the structural integration of minority groups into multi-ethnic environments, where the functional distance between the heritage and national languages continues to narrow (Schwartz, 2020).

The occupational and educational data further contextualize this linguistic negotiation. With 58.3% of participants remaining in agrarian roles, the traditional village structure (*Bon*) continues to facilitate Endogamous social networks (ESN), which serve as a normative mechanism for language retention (Milroy, 1987). However, for those engaged in industrial and service sectors (36.0%), Vietnamese serves as the primary medium for socio-economic mobility. Since nearly half of the sample (48.8%) has attained high school education or higher, a functional realignment occurs. In the absence of formal support for the Mạ language in schools, Vietnamese is frequently perceived as symbolic capital for public life (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 2025), while the Mạ language functions as a specialized code for cultural and ritualistic contexts (Grosjean, 1982; Bradley, 2023).

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B. Scale Reliability Assessment

The internal consistency of the measurement scales was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). To ensure the integrity of the instrument, the study required a Cronbach's Alpha of ≥ 0.70 and a corrected item-total correlation of ≥ 0.30 for each constituent item (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). According to Hair et al. (2019), these benchmarks confirm that the items effectively represent their respective constructs for subsequent multivariate analyses.

The analysis confirmed that all items surpassed the requisite thresholds. Specifically, the corrected item-total correlations for all variables remained consistently above 0.30, indicating that each item contributed meaningfully to its respective scale (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). Furthermore, an examination of the "Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted" values revealed that removing any individual item would not yield a substantial increase in the overall reliability. Consequently, all items were retained to maintain the theoretical breadth and content validity of the model (as cited in Hoang, 2026b).

TABLE 1
THE RESULTS OF SCALE RELIABILITY ASSESSMENT

Variables	Coding	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Cultural motivation	CM	4	0.871
Intergenerational transmission strength	ITS	4	0.823
Endogamous social networks	ESN	4	0.867
Domain functional expansion	DFE	4	0.853
Language maintenance	LM	4	0.801

The finalized reliability results in Table 1 show Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.801 to 0.871, indicating a high level of internal consistency. Notably, the Cultural motivation (CM) scale exhibited the highest reliability (α = 0.871), suggesting a consistent perception among Mạ respondents regarding the symbolic value of their language in maintaining biocultural diversity (Maffi, 2005; Baker, 2011). Similarly, the coefficient for Endogamous social networks (ESN) (α = 0.867) indicates that communal dimensions and the influence of traditional *Bon* structures are perceived with consistent patterns across the sample, aligning with the social motivations for language use (Milroy, 1987; Pauwels, 2016).

The reliability of Intergenerational transmission strength (ITS) (α = 0.823) and Language maintenance (LM) (α = 0.801) further confirms that familial dynamics and self-reported proficiency—critical indicators for reversing language shift (Fishman, 1991; Schwartz, 2020)—are effectively captured. These results provide a solid foundation, confirming that the measurement instrument is reliable and minimizes potential random error (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). This stability allows the study to proceed with further empirical tests to evaluate the hypothesized relationships concerning language persistence (Hair et al., 2019).

C. Exploratory Factor Analysis

Following the assessment of scale reliability, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to evaluate the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs (as cited in Hoang, 2026a). The analysis utilized Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation to produce a clear, orthogonal factor structure, identifying distinct socio-cultural dimensions (Hair et al., 2019).

(a). Exploratory Factor Analysis of Independent Variables

The suitability of the dataset for factor extraction was verified through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, as presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.914
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	4096.313
	df	120
	Sig.	0.000

The KMO measure of 0.914 exceeds the recommended threshold, indicating that the correlations among items are sufficient for factor extraction. Bartlett's Test was significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming that the identity matrix hypothesis is rejected and the data are appropriate for EFA.

The Rotated component matrix (Table 3) produced a four-factor solution with Eigenvalues greater than 1.0. All 16 items loaded onto their respective factors with coefficients ranging from .597 to .811, comfortably meeting the .50 criterion for practical significance (Hair et al., 2019). The four-factor solution accounts for 70.79% of the total variance, which is well above the acceptable 60% threshold for social science research.

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TABLE 3
ROTATED COMPONENT MATRIX

Item	Component			
	1	2	3	4
CM4	811			
CM2	810			
CM1	734			
CM3	605			
ESN1		772		
ESN3		765		
ESN4		763		
ESN2		687		
DFE3			793	
DFE1			791	
DFE2			756	
DFE4			597	
ITS1				792
ITS4				774
ITS2				729
ITS3				675
Eigenvalue	7.814	1.341	1.111	1.060
% of Variance	48.84%	8.38%	6.94%	6.63%
Cumulative %	48.84%	57.22%	64.16%	70.79%
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.				

(b). Exploratory Factor Analysis of Dependent Variable

The dependent variable, Language maintenance (LM), was subjected to EFA to verify its unidimensionality (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). This step ensures that the items measuring LM converge into a single, cohesive construct. The results of the KMO and Bartlett's Test for this construct are summarized in Table 4.

TABLE 4
KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.784
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	510.192
	df	6
	Sig.	.000

The data showed a KMO of .784 and a significant Bartlett's Test ($p < 0.001$). The analysis extracted a single factor explaining 62.698% of the total variance. The Component Matrix, detailed in Table 5, confirms that all four items measuring LM loaded decisively onto this single factor (loadings from .733 to .830).

TABLE 5
COMPONENT MATRIX

	Component
	1
LM4	.830
LM2	.821
LM3	.780
LM1	.733
Eigenvalue	2.508
% of Variance Explained	62.698%
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 components extracted.	

D. Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

To evaluate the predictive power of the independent factors, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. Prior to the analysis, the absence of multicollinearity was confirmed with VIF values ranging from 1.692 to 2.201.

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TABLE 6
MODEL SUMMARY

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.918[a]	.842	.840	.15.865	1.894

a. Predictors: (Constant), DFE, ITS, ESN, CM
b. Dependent Variable: LM

As illustrated in Table 6, the correlation coefficient (R = 0.918) indicates a positive relationship between the set of independent variables and language maintenance (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). The adjusted coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.840) reveals that the four factors in the model account for 84.0% of the variance in the language maintenance of the Mạ community (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.894 indicates the absence of first-order autocorrelation among the residuals.

To assess the overall statistical significance of the regression model, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The results are detailed in Table 7.

TABLE 7
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE (ANOVA)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	55.599	4	13.900	552.248	.000[b]
	Residual	10.445	415	25		
	Total	66.044	419			

a. Dependent Variable: LM
b. Predictors: (Constant), DFE, ITS, ESN, CM

The ANOVA results (F = 552.248, $p < 0.001$) indicate that the regression model is statistically significant (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). This suggests that the combined independent variables provide a reliable basis for predicting language maintenance within the studied community.

The individual contribution of each factor to language maintenance was assessed using standardized regression coefficients, as shown in Table 8.

TABLE 8
THE RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics		Remarks
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF	
1	(Constant)	0.322	0.091		3.527	0			
	CM	0.274	0.024	0.333	11.489	0	.454	2.2.01	Supported
	ITS	0.238	.024	0.248	9.782	0	.591	1.692	Supported
	ESN	0.230	0.023	0.276	9.893	0	.490	2.040	Supported
	DFE	0.192	0.022	0.239	8.650	0	.499	2.006	Supported

a. Dependent variable: LM

Note. CM = Cultural motivation; ITS = Intergenerational transmission strength; ESN = Endogamous social networks; DFE = Domain functional expansion; LM= Language maintenance (as cited in Hoang, 2026b).

The statistical evidence suggests that Language Maintenance (LM) among the Mạ community is influenced by a combination of internal psychological factors and external social structures. The hierarchy of these influences is as follows:

The standardized regression equation derived from the model provides a mathematical representation of the hierarchy of influence among the predictors:

$$LM = 0.333 \,.\, CM + 0.276 \,.\, ESN + 0.248 \,.\, ITS + 0.239 \,.\, DFE \text{ (Equation 3)}$$

The statistical evidence suggests that Language Maintenance (LM) among the Mạ community is influenced by a combination of internal psychological factors and external social structures. The hierarchy of these influences is as follows:

Cultural Motivation (CM, β = 0.333, $p < 0.001$): CM is the primary predictor, suggesting that language choice is linked to the internalized value of the mother tongue. When speakers connect their language with ethnic identity, they develop a psychological orientation that supports the retention of the language (Maffi, 2005; Baker, 2011).

Endogamous Social Networks (ESN, β = 0.276, $p < 0.001$): As the second most influential factor, ESN indicates that the traditional *Bon* (village) structure provides a social environment where the Mạ language remains a regular medium for communication. These networks help maintain linguistic norms (Milroy, 1987).

Intergenerational Transmission Strength (ITS, β = 0.248): ITS shows a positive impact, confirming that the family remains a relevant site for language use. Consistent communication between generations helps maintain the language in private settings (Fishman, 1991).

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Domain Functional Expansion (DFE, $\beta = 0.239$, $p < 0.001$): The use of the language in rituals and communal events provides functional legitimacy. This helps prevent the language from being limited only to domestic use (Bradley, 2023).

The interaction between individual motivation (CM), community structures (ESN and ITS), and public utility (DFE) forms the sociolinguistic framework of the Mạ community. This hierarchy suggests that language persistence is a result of both individual agency and communal stability, which together help manage the pressures of language shift (Giles et al., 1977; Edwards, 2010). The relationship between these factors supports the continued use of the heritage language in both private and cultural contexts.

E. Qualitative Findings

To complement the quantitative results, qualitative data derived from semi-structured in-depth interviews ($n = 25$) were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; as cited in Hoang, 2026b). This phase sought to elucidate the socio-psychological mechanisms underlying the statistical predictors identified in the regression model (as cited in Hoang, 2026b). The analysis reached thematic saturation, yielding four core themes that mirror the dimensions of the conceptual framework. The distribution of these themes and their corresponding illustrative quotes are summarized in Table 9.

TABLE 9
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF QUALITATIVE THEMES ($N = 25$)

Themes	Codes	Frequency	%	Illustrative quotes
Theme 1: Cultural motivation as an identity anchor	CM	23	92.0	"The Mạ language is the core of our identity; it is the only way to truly express our culture in a way that no other language can replace."
Theme 2: Endogamous social networks as normative spaces	ESN	21	84.0	"Within our Bon (village), we only use Mạ to discuss community matters; it creates a bond of trust that strengthens our communal ties."
Theme 3: Intergenerational transmission strength and the home domain	ITS	18	72.0	"I make it a rule to speak only Mạ with my children at home; if the intergenerational chain breaks, the language dies with us."
Theme 4: Domain functional expansion and ritual legitimacy	DFE	16	64.0	"Using Mạ in our traditional ceremonies gives me the confidence that our language still holds a legitimate place in contemporary life."

The high prevalence of Theme 1 (92.0%) corroborates Cultural motivation as the primary driver ($\beta = 0.333$, $p < .001$). Informants perceive the Mạ language as indispensable to cultural continuity, acting as a psychological anchor against assimilation (Maffi, 2005). Similarly, Theme 2 (84.0%) underscores how Endogamous social networks, anchored in the traditional *Bon* structure, enforce linguistic norms and foster in-group cohesion (Milroy, 1987).

Theme 3 (72.0%) reinforces the empirical evidence for Intergenerational transmission strength, positioning the home as a vital site of linguistic resistance against the encroachment of the national language (Fishman, 1991). Finally, Theme 4 (64.0%) highlights Domain functional expansion; the language's presence in rituals and ceremonies provides the functional legitimacy and communicative confidence necessary for its survival in contemporary cultural settings (Bradley, 2023).

In conclusion, the convergence between quantitative predictors ($N = 420$) and qualitative themes ($n = 25$) establishes a sociolinguistic consensus. Language maintenance among the Mạ is an agentive process where internal conviction and communal solidarity function as primary catalysts for linguistic persistence (Giles et al., 1977; Fishman, 1991).

V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

A. Discussion

The quantitative findings indicate that language maintenance (LM) among the Mạ ethnic minority functions as a structured sociolinguistic behavior rather than a process of unsystematic bilingual alternation. The research model, accounting for 84.0% of the variance (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.840$), highlights the many dimensions of this phenomenon. According to Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT), these results reflect the structural strength of the Mạ community and their capacity to function as a distinctive collective entity within a multilingual environment (Giles et al., 1977).

In alignment with explanatory sequential mixed-methods logic (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), the qualitative insights elucidate how the Mạ mobilize specific resources to mitigate the encroachment of the dominant national language. This proactive stance aligns with established indicators of linguistic health, where the community's internal cohesion supports its long-term viability (Landweer, 2000). This adaptive strategy mirrors recent findings in other multilingual ecologies, where ethnic minorities maintain their mother tongue by strategically navigating the tension between heritage preservation and functional necessity (Yu et al., 2024).

Cultural motivation (CM, $\beta = 0.333$, $p < 0.001$): As the primary predictor, CM demonstrates that the internal drive to preserve heritage is a determinant of linguistic behavior. Language serves as a symbol of ethnic continuity (Edwards, 2010) and a psychological anchor for cultural identity (Maffi, 2005).

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Endogamous social networks (ESN, β = 0.276): This factor suggests that the traditional *Bon* (village) structure provides a social environment where the Mạ language remains a regular medium for communication, facilitating the maintenance of linguistic norms (Milroy, 1987).

Intergenerational transmission strength (ITS, β = 0.248): Descriptive data showing that 62.9% of families prioritize Mạ in the home underscores the family's role as a site of linguistic resilience. This aligns with the focus on passing language between generations in reversing language shift (Fishman, 1991).

Domain functional expansion (DFE, β = 0.239): The presence of the language in rituals and festivals provides the functional legitimacy necessary for its use in broader social contexts (Spolsky, 2009).

In summary, language maintenance among the Mạ is a structured process, reinforced by internal values, familial bonds, and communal networks. These integrated mechanisms serve as a robust indicator of sustained ethnolinguistic vitality in the face of contemporary sociolinguistic pressures (Edwards, 2010; Giles et al., 1977; Landweer, 2000).

B. Implications for Policies

Based on the influence of Cultural motivation and Endogamous social networks, this study proposes several strategic interventions:

Institutionalizing Mạ language: Authorities should establish community-based bilingual literacy programs within local Cultural Houses. This provides the institutional legitimacy needed to reinforce the language as a valid medium of communication (Spolsky, 2009; Bradley, 2023).

Integrating economic value: Linking the language to heritage-based ecotourism can transform linguistic and ecological knowledge into professional assets. This creates "linguistic capital," providing an economic incentive for continued language use (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 2025).

Expanding public domains: Normalizing the Mạ language through multilingual signage and its use in administrative communications during public festivals reduces functional displacement and fosters communal identity.

Digitalizing Mạ cultural resources: Developing digital tools, such as interactive dictionaries and social media content, is necessary to bridge the generational gap and maintain linguistic relevance for Mạ youth.

Empowering social networks: Supporting the *Bon* (village) structure and the role of elders is critical. Facilitating direct interaction between elders and children in the Mạ language strengthens the micro-level networks that mitigate linguistic erosion (Milroy, 1987; Pauwels, 2016).

VI. Conclusion

This study has assessed the many different factors influencing language maintenance among the Mạ ethnic minority (N = 420). Through an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the research establishes that the persistence of the Mạ language is a structured sociolinguistic behavior rather than a process of unsystematic bilingual alternation. The results provide empirical evidence that the Mạ community maintains ethnolinguistic vitality through a strategic negotiation between internal psychological drivers and communal social structures. This resilience is consistent with Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT), which emphasizes the synergy between status, demography, and institutional support in heritage language retention (Giles et al., 1977; Landweer, 2000).

The quantitative analysis demonstrates the explanatory power of the research model, which accounts for 84.0% of the variance in language maintenance (Adjusted R^2 = 0.840). This indicates that the selected dimensions effectively capture the primary mechanisms of linguistic persistence for this community. The empirical evidence reveals a hierarchy of influence among the predictors, where Cultural motivation (CM) emerged as the primary determinant (β = 0.333). This suggests that the internal value placed on the language as a carrier of heritage serves as a decisive factor against language shift. This psychological driver is supported by the strength of Endogamous social networks (ESN, β = 0.276) and Intergenerational transmission strength (ITS, β = 0.248), which highlight the role of communal density within the Bon (village) and primary socialization within the home domain as essential structural supports (Fishman, 1991; Milroy, 1987). Conversely, while statistically significant, Domain functional expansion (DFE, β = 0.239) exhibited the least relative influence, indicating that for the Mạ, internal conviction and domestic transmission currently outweigh the impact of language visibility in public spheres.

The qualitative findings (n = 25) further clarify these statistical relationships, confirming that language choice is a conscious act of cultural preservation. The convergence between internal conviction and communal solidarity demonstrates that the Mạ people utilize their mother tongue as a medium for identity construction and biocultural continuity (Maffi, 2005). Ultimately, the survival of the Mạ language depends on the ongoing combination between the community's psychological attachment and the availability of spaces where the language is accepted and valued for its active use.

Despite its rigorous framework, this study acknowledges certain limitations. The geographical scope was confined to specific provinces in Southern Vietnam, which may not fully reflect the linguistic diversity across all Mạ subgroups. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias regarding proficiency. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the data limits the ability to assess long-term linguistic shifts. Future research should consider longitudinal designs to track the trajectory of intergenerational transmission across decades. Expanding the comparative framework to include other Mon-Khmer speaking groups would provide a broader understanding of ethnic minority

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language resilience. Finally, subsequent studies could utilize ethnographic observations to gain deeper insights into the unspoken language rules within the private domain (Heller, 2025).

APPENDIX. QUESTIONNAIRE

Part I: Personal information

1. Gender
   □ Male □ Female □ Other
2. Age group
   □ 18–30 □ 31–45 □ 46–60 □ > 60
3. Educational level
   □ Elementary school or lower □ Secondary school □ High school
   □ Vocational school or college □ University or higher
4. Occupation
   □ Farmer □ Worker/Freelancer □ Service/Business
   □ Civil servant/ public official □ Other
5. Place of residence: □ Lam Dong □ Dong Nai □ Dak Nong □ Other
6. Language most frequently used at home
   □ Mạ language only
   □ Mainly Mạ language
   □ Bilingual (Mạ and Vietnamese)
   □ Mainly Vietnamese language
   □ Vietnamese only

Part II: Measurement scales

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements by circling the appropriate number (1: Strongly disagree to 5: Strongly agree).

Coding	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
CM	**Cultural motivation**					
CM1	I recognize the Mạ language as the most significant marker of our community identity.					
CM2	I am personally interested in ensuring that future generations remain fluent in our mother tongue.					
CM3	I find that specific cultural and traditional concepts are more accurately expressed in Mạ than in Vietnamese.					
CM4	I choose to use the Mạ language to maintain the continuity of our family and ancestral heritage.					
ESN	**Endogamous social networks**					
ESN1	I primarily utilize the Mạ language when interacting with neighbors and relatives within the *Bon*.					
ESN2	Speaking Mạ fosters a higher level of familiarity and trust during intra-ethnic interactions.					
ESN3	I tend to participate in social circles where the Mạ language is the conventional medium of communication.					
ESN4	My closest social circle consists mainly of Mạ speakers with whom I communicate in our mother tongue.					
ITS	Intergenerational transmission					
ITS1	In my household, elders actively encourage children to speak Mạ in daily life.					
ITS2	I use Mạ to share oral traditions, indigenous farming techniques, or folk knowledge with the youth.					
ITS3	The older generation (grandparents) remains the primary source of Mạ language socialization for grandchildren.					
ITS4	Younger members of my family demonstrate the ability to understand and respond fluently in Mạ.					
DFE	Domain functional expansion					
DFE1	The Mạ language is the customary medium used during traditional rituals and communal ceremonies.					
DFE2	I utilize Mạ to discuss shared community matters at the village hall.					

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DFE3	I feel comfortable using Mạ in public settings (e.g., markets or festivals) when interacting with fellow Mạ people.					
DFE4	I prioritize Mạ when performing traditional songs or exchanging indigenous environmental knowledge.					
LM	**Language maintenance** (Dependent variable)					
LM1	I maintain a consistent habit of using Mạ with my family members on a daily basis.					
LM2	I actively use Mạ when meeting acquaintances in multi-ethnic areas outside the village.					
LM3	I prefer using Mạ over the national language in intra-ethnic social contexts.					
LM4	I intend to continue using Mạ as my primary medium of communication in the long term.					

Part III. Open-ended questions

1. In your view, what is the connection between the Mạ language and the preservation of your ethnic identity? What drives your commitment to speak your mother tongue?

……

2. Which activities within your *Bon* (village) or during communal ceremonies offer the most significant opportunities for you to practice the Mạ language?

……

3. What are the primary obstacles to teaching the Mạ language to the younger generation today (e.g., media, school, or technology)? What communal actions could better support youth language acquisition?

……

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

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Reader Perception of Dystopian Narrative in Kazakh Literature: A Survey-Based Study of the Discursive Space of *"Seksen Altınşı Jyl"*

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***Abstract*—This research article examines the discursive space of dystopian elements in Tlegenov's novel "*Seksen Altınşı Jyl*" within Kazakh literature, as well as their reception by readers. The study is grounded in reader-response theory and explores not only the characteristics of the dystopian genre but also the levels of reader interpretation. The primary objective of the research is to assess readers' perceptions of society through dystopian literature, to analyze the features of their understanding and reception, and to empirically determine the cognitive and emotional impact of the work. A total of 147 respondents voluntarily participated in the study. Data were collected via Google Forms and processed using the R statistical software package. The survey was structured according to a four-factor model: the first factor addressed familiarity with the work; the second examined the perception of its dystopian nature; the third focused on historical consciousness and social interpretation; and the fourth considered emotional impact and social significance. The results indicated that readers' level of familiarity with dystopian prose is relatively low. This trend is characteristic of countries that have experienced totalitarian regimes and gained independence only toward the end of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the historical period depicted in the novel was highly rated in terms of comprehensibility, and the political system and its ideology were perceived as realistic. The findings suggest that while dystopian literature may be challenging for readers to engage with, it holds significant social importance.**

***Index Terms*—political system, totalitarianism, dystopia, reader perception, utopia**

I. Introduction

One of the widely studied issues in world literature is the theme of dystopia. Emerging as a counterpoint to utopian literature, the concept of "dystopia" has, to date, developed considerable depth in both genre and typological terms. Dystopian works artistically depict totalitarianism, the conflict between the individual and society, and the struggle between freedom and control. A literary work not only shapes the literary process but also reflects the political landscape

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of the era it portrays. In today's globalized world, it is evident that the political profiles of individual countries are becoming increasingly complex. Therefore, the dystopian genre has attracted timely and growing interest.

In contemporary Kazakh literary studies, the dystopian genre remains insufficiently systematized and deeply explored, which makes it a relevant scholarly issue. To achieve the stated objective, this study employs a survey method to determine readers' levels of reception of Tlegenov's novel *"Seksen Altınşı Jyl"* (Tlegenov, 2024). In addition, a descriptive-analytical analysis of the novel is conducted to identify dystopian features and narrative structures directed against the totalitarian system within Kazakh literature.

Totalitarianism is a political system that exerts complete control over all spheres of social life (politics, economy, culture, and spirituality), restricting – and often entirely negating – individual freedom. In such a system, power is centralized, and citizens are deprived of freedom of thought and choice. In a totalitarian society, the state functions not only as a governing body but also as a force that intrudes into individuals' private lives and shapes their consciousness.

Its main characteristics include dictatorship – that is, unlimited and absolute power – the suppression of human rights, the establishment of strict control and censorship, the dominance of a single ideology, the formation of a personality cult, the erosion of national identity, and the subordination of law to political authority. Under such conditions, individual opinion and free thought are perceived as threats to the system, instilling fear and submission in public consciousness.

Historically, totalitarian systems have driven societies into isolation not only politically but also culturally and spiritually. By destroying trust and free thought among individuals and imposing a false sense of collective unity, they distort genuine human values.

The term "totalitarianism" emerged in 1923 (Roberts, 2020). Most scholars associate this concept with the state's control over society (Mikhaylenko & Nesterova, 2000). Initially, such systems may exploit democratic conditions for their own purposes, but later suppress these freedoms and transform them into mechanisms of control (Arendt, 1953).

The system of totalitarianism not only eradicates truth but also obscures public consciousness (Löfgren, 2021). It is characterized by comprehensive control over both individual lives and all sectors of society, reflecting an authoritarian stance (Baykent, 2023). The key features of this political system are vividly represented in world literature, particularly in the works of Orwell (2023), Zamyatin (2024), and Huxley (2025). These literary works can be considered foundational in the development of the dystopian genre (Babaee & Singh, 2015).

Considering the prefix "anti-," if dystopia is recognized as an independent genre, it should also be acknowledged that it develops by negating utopia while relying on its genre foundations (Shishkina, 2007).

Today, works within this genre also exist in Kazakh literature. For instance, one may cite Aktan Tökish's novel "Mänggürtstan" (Tökish, 2020) and Nurzhan Quantaiuly's dystopian short story "Three Days of Fear" (Quantaıuly, 2021). The novel *"Seksen Altınşı Jyl"* by Tlegenov, which serves as the object of this study, likewise contains dystopian elements.

II. Literature Review

Although resistance to utopian thinking in literature began to develop intensively in the second half of the twentieth century, it is evident that comprehensive scholarly research on the dystopian genre by researchers from countries that have experienced totalitarianism was relatively delayed. This is clearly influenced by the political system. Nevertheless, there is a substantial body of research examining the characteristics of the dystopian genre in contemporary literature.

For instance, the theory of the dystopian genre and its classification have been explored on the basis of American literature (Setyorini, 2016). Other studies have examined lexical units in the translation of dystopian works into different languages (Votinova, 2018), and, through the analysis of dystopian texts written in different countries and time periods, have demonstrated both the existence and the significance of dystopian literature in literary studies during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Alihodžić & Jeviković, 2016).

Scholars have also investigated the defining features of dystopia, its historical stages of development, and its function not merely as a literary genre but as a form of political and social critique expressing resistance to societal threats (Stoner, 2017; Palavalli, 2024). Other research focuses on the characteristics of dystopian literature for young adults (Ryan, 2014), while some studies propose feminist dystopia as a distinct genre (Pigmans, 2018). Additionally, research has explored how queer-feminist dystopian novels resist patriarchal and colonial power structures through the interconnection of gender themes and innovative narrative forms (Boller, 2025).

Further studies analyze utopian and dystopian novels from a content-based perspective, defining them as a meta-genre (Zhurkova & Khomutnikova, 2019), examine how complex global conditions have been anticipated in dystopian fiction (Lanin, 2024), and highlight the role of the dystopian genre in addressing contemporary social issues such as surveillance, authoritarian governance, gender oppression, ecological decline, and the alienating effects of technology (Saleem, 2025; Abdedaim, 2024). There are also studies that investigate political ideologies represented in dystopian-themed television series (Donstrup, 2025), as well as research focusing on technological surveillance in modern dystopian literature (Khadicha, 2025). Through these approaches, scholars provide comprehensive analyses of the aesthetic and thematic features of the genre.

In contrast, within Kazakh literature – which has experienced totalitarianism – works in this genre remain scarce and undoubtedly require fundamental scholarly investigation. In this regard, analyzing readers' reception of Tlegenov's novel *"Seksen Altınşı Jyl"* as the object of this study serves as an important step toward assessing the place of the dystopian genre within Kazakh society.

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III. Methodology

This study aims to determine the specific features of the reception of the novel *"Seksen Altınşı Jyl"*, including readers' levels of comprehension and their evaluation of its content. The research was conducted in an empirical framework, with a survey method employed as the primary source of data.

Research Materials

The empirical basis of the study consists of the results of an online survey conducted among Kazakh-speaking respondents. A total of 147 participants took part in the survey. Responses were collected via the Google Forms platform and subsequently prepared for quantitative analysis.

The questionnaire was structured into several thematic blocks:

1) Familiarity with the work
2) Perception of the dystopian nature of the work
3) Historical consciousness and social interpretation
4) Emotional impact and social significance

All questions were designed using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represented the lowest rating and 5 the highest.

Data Processing

The collected data were initially stored in Microsoft Excel format and later imported into the R statistical software environment for analysis. During data processing, all responses were converted into numerical format and prepared for statistical examination.

Descriptive statistics were calculated for each question, including: mean, standard deviation (SD), and median. These indicators made it possible to identify general response trends and the degree of variability among respondents.

Statistical Analysis

Considering the nature of the data (Likert scale, i.e., ordinal measurement), non-parametric statistical methods were applied. The Friedman test was used to compare respondents' answers across multiple related questions. This test allows for the comparison of ratings provided by the same group of respondents under several conditions and is designed to identify statistically significant differences between responses. It is particularly effective when the data do not follow a normal distribution.

The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Results with p-values below this threshold were considered statistically significant.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical requirements were strictly observed during the study. Participation was voluntary, no personal data were collected, and all responses were processed anonymously.

IV. Discussion and Results

Dystopian Features in "Seksen Altınşı Jyl": A Literary Analysis

In Tlegenov's novel *"Seksen Altınşı Jyl",* the totalitarian nature of Soviet power is revealed at an artistic level. The author's statement, "There must be the vigilant eye of the Party in every sphere and a hand that probes and inspects" (Tlegenov, 2024), reflects the proximity of the Soviet system to a panoptic model of control. According to the philosopher Michel Foucault, the primary function of the panopticon is to ensure that the subject is constantly and consciously visible, thereby guaranteeing the automatic functioning of power. Even if surveillance is not continuous, its effects must be permanent (Foucault, 2023). Thus, not only the actions but also the consciousness of members of society were subjected to strict ideological supervision.

Decisions made by Party leadership were perceived as absolute law for society, while those who opposed them were subjected to repression. The portrayal of officials – particularly regional secretaries – becomes a symbol of the Soviet party nomenklatura, which distanced itself from the people and functioned as a bureaucratic apparatus serving only the interests of the central authority. This depiction clearly illustrates the unlimited dictatorship of power.

When compared with analogues in world literature, in Nineteen Eighty-Four by George Orwell, the figure of Big Brother serves as a symbol of absolute authority. In a totalitarian society, control is exercised not only through political institutions but also through the semiotic space of everyday life. Every object, every element of daily existence, becomes an ideological code that reminds individuals of the presence of power. Orwell's satirical definition of authority alludes to the sadism and cruelty manifested in the mass killings carried out by Hitler and Stalin (Banks, 2017).

Similarly, in We by Zamyatin, the figure of the Benefactor represents a comparable form of centralized authority. In all circumstances, individual subjective will is constrained, and resistance to the system is equated with crime. The fundamental principle of totalitarian power here lies in the complete eradication of individuality and the absorption of the individual "I" into the collective "We." In this way, the system legitimizes the process of deindividualization through the numbering of citizens.

Tlegenov's novel *"Seksen Altınşı Jyl"* not only presents an artistic representation of totalitarianism in Kazakh literature but also connects it with a national historical event, thereby forming an ethno-model of dystopia.

During the Soviet era, official ideology dominated all spheres of society. In *"Seksen Altınşı Jyl",* Tlegenov portrays the peaceful resistance of youth as being labeled "nationalism," with their actions interpreted through the lens of a

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distorted ideological framework. Here, power imposes its principles upon public consciousness through manipulative slogans, placing them above individual will. The concept of "collective consciousness," systematized in sociology by Durkheim, is described as follows: "Collective consciousness transforms everything within its domain, blending different spheres of reality, reconciling contradictions, and overturning the natural hierarchy of being" (Durkheim, 1991, pp. 106-107). This definition aligns closely with the content of the novel, where the promotion of artificial values is evident.

Totalitarian power systematically shapes public consciousness, transforming the ordinary individual into a participant in a political theater. In this context, it is not genuine belief but artificially constructed emotion that prevails. Ceremonial parades and collective rituals serve not only to induce temporary euphoria among the population but also to neutralize their potential for resistance.

Such a phenomenon can also be observed in Tlegenov's novel. Although Soviet authority presented official celebrations and slogans as a unifying force for the people, in reality these practices were aimed at suppressing national consciousness. The December events clearly demonstrated the collapse of this artificial collective illusion. A distinctive feature of the work lies in the way false ideology is directed against national identity and positioned in opposition to the Kazakh youth's aspiration for freedom.

In dystopian literature, the protagonist is typically distinguished by individuality, worldview, and independent thinking (Mustoyapova, 2024). In *"Seksen Altınşı Jyl",* the central characters Aydın and Nəzik symbolize individuals who resist the system. Their relationship is not merely a psychological or emotional bond, but also serves as a metaphor for the pursuit of freedom and longing.

However, this resistance ultimately proves unsuccessful, and the characters' fate ends tragically. Such an outcome represents one of the fundamental principles of dystopian poetics: the tragedy of the individual who opposes the system functions as an artistic device that highlights the repressive power of totalitarian structures. Thus, the love story between Aydın and Nəzik appears in Kazakh prose as a metaphor for freedom and affection, yet within a totalitarian context, their individuality is destroyed, and their personal lives become victims of political oppression.

One of the central concepts in Tlegenov's novel *"Seksen Altınşı Jyl"* is national nihilism. Soviet authority sought to impose an internationalist ideology by disregarding the language, culture, traditions, and historical memory of the Kazakh people. From the perspective of postcolonial theory, this phenomenon can be interpreted as a manifestation of cultural assimilation.

The actions of the youth who participated in the December uprising reflect a resurgence of national consciousness in opposition to this policy. Their resistance to authority was not merely a political protest, but also a movement aimed at preserving historical memory and safeguarding national identity.

Tlegenov's novel reveals the problem of national nihilism not only as a flaw of the Soviet system but as an ideological consequence of totalitarian power. By portraying the systematic marginalization of national values, the author establishes a new typological model for representing national issues in Kazakh literature through a dystopian form. The policies pursued by Soviet authority – aimed at achieving cultural standardization by displacing the Kazakh language, culture, historical memory, and traditional values – distinguish this novel from global models and highlight the ethnospecific nature of dystopian elements in Kazakh prose.

Results

The conducted survey enabled a comprehensive analysis of respondents' reception of the novel *"Seksen Altınşı Jyl",* including their levels of comprehension and evaluative judgments of the work. A 5-point Likert scale was employed in the study, with each response converted into a numerical value. Based on the collected data, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and median) were calculated, and Friedman's rank-based analysis of variance was conducted to identify differences between groups.

The results of the Friedman test indicated statistically significant differences $(\chi^2 = 257.98, df = 41, p < 0.001)$. This finding suggests that respondents' answers were not uniform across the questions and that their reception of the work varied depending on different aspects. In other words, while participants rated certain thematic or conceptual elements of the novel highly, their evaluations of other aspects were comparatively lower.

Factor 1: Level of Familiarity With the Work

The analysis of respondents' level of familiarity with the work showed that the majority were only partially acquainted with the content of the novel. The response option "I am only familiar with the content" demonstrated the highest mean value (M = 2.52) compared to the other responses. Meanwhile, the indicators for "I have read it in full" (M = 2.29) and "I have not read it" (M = 2.26) were relatively close in value.

This suggests that a significant proportion of participants had not read the work in its entirety, although they possessed a general understanding of its main content. The results of responses to the question "Have you read the novel *"Seksen Altınşı Jyl"*?" are presented in Table 1.

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TABLE 1
LEVEL OF FAMILIARITY WITH THE WORK (QUESTION 1)

Answer	mean	sd	median	p_value
Yes, I have read it in full	2,28571429	1,49428134	2	2,9815E-33
Partially, I have read it.	2,32653061	1,34043167	2	2,9815E-33
I am only familiar with its content	2,5170068	1,3259979	2	2,9815E-33
No, I have not read it	2,2585034	1,50837132	1	2,9815E-33

At the next stage, the results related to the level of comprehension of the work also demonstrated moderate average values. Although the responses "I understood it very well" (M = 2.50) and "I understood it at an average level" (M = 2.39) were predominant, the options "It was somewhat difficult to understand" (M = 2.24) and "I did not understand it at all" (M = 2.08) also accounted for a certain proportion.

These findings indicate the complexity of the novel's content and suggest that it is not equally accessible to all readers. Furthermore, the relatively high standard deviation values (SD ≈ 1.2-1.4) confirm the variability in respondents' answers. Table 2 presents the responses to the question "How well did you understand the work?"

TABLE 2
LEVEL OF COMPREHENSION OF THE WORK (QUESTION 2)

Answer	mean	sd	median	p_value
I understood it very well	2,50340136	1,48681027	2	2,9815E-33
Moderately	2,39455782	1,28509806	2	2,9815E-33
It was somewhat difficult	2,24489796	1,236388	2	2,9815E-33
I did not understand it at all	2,08163265	1,37746145	1	2,9815E-33

The level of familiarity of survey participants with the dystopian genre was also found to be moderate. The majority of respondents indicated "I know a little about it" (M = 2.32) and "I am familiar with it to some extent" (M = 2.31). Although the proportion of those who selected "I am not familiar with it at all" (M = 2.14) was somewhat lower, overall, it can be observed that participants do not possess comprehensive and systematic knowledge of the genre.

This factor may, to some extent, influence the reception of the work. The results regarding participants' familiarity with the dystopian genre are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
READERS' KNOWLEDGE OF THE DYSTOPIAN GENRE

Answer	mean	sd	median	p_value
I am familiar with it to some extent	2,30612245	1,35794085	2	2,9815E-33
I have a basic understanding of it	2,31972789	1,17033185	2	2,9815E-33
I am not familiar with it at all	2,13605442	1,32230318	2	2,9815E-33

Factor 2: Perception of the Novel's Dystopian Nature

Among the evaluations of the novel's content, the highest scores were attributed to statements reflecting its socio-philosophical dimension. In particular, the statement "the novel prompts reflection on freedom and power" received the highest mean value (M = 2.82). Additionally, the responses "the author's main idea is clear" (M = 2.76), "the work realistically portrays society" (M = 2.75), and "the novel helps to understand historical events" (M = 2.71) were also rated highly.

These results indicate that the content of the novel is perceived by respondents as thought-provoking, socially significant, and historically meaningful.

Furthermore, the statements "the work is relevant to contemporary times" (M = 2.66), "it leaves an emotional impact" (M = 2.65), and "the characters' fates are portrayed convincingly" (M = 2.67) were rated above average. This suggests that the novel demonstrates a considerable level of artistic and emotional effectiveness.

At the same time, the statements "dystopian features are clearly evident" (M = 2.50) and "it encourages critical thinking" (M = 2.57) highlight the importance of both genre-related and cognitive aspects.

The responses to the questions concerning the perception of the novel's dystopian nature, based on its content, are presented in Table 4.

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TABLE 4
EVALUATION OF THE NOVEL'S DYSTOPIAN NATURE

Answer	mean	sd	median	p_value
Dystopian features are clearly evident in the novel	2,50340136	1,3617784	2	2,9815E-33
The society depicted in the work is portrayed realistically	2,74829932	1,28661996	3	2,9815E-33
The novel encourages critical thinking about society	2,57142857	1,37492216	2	2,9815E-33
The events depicted in the work are relevant to contemporary times	2,65986395	1,28477171	3	2,9815E-33
The novel helps to understand historical events	2,71428571	1,38484953	3	2,9815E-33
The work leaves an emotional impact	2,6462585	1,33346146	3	2,9815E-33
The characters' fates are portrayed convincingly	2,67346939	1,27764373	3	2,9815E-33
The novel prompts reflection on freedom and power	2,81632653	1,34988791	3	2,9815E-33
The author's main idea is clear	2,75510204	1,3168655	3	2,9815E-33
The work is relevant for contemporary readers	2,65986395	1,34722749	3	2,9815E-33

Factor 3: Historical Consciousness and Social Interpretation

The role of the work in shaping historical consciousness was also highly evaluated. The majority of respondents agreed with the statement in Table 5, "Does the work prompt reflection on a particular historical period?" selecting "Yes" (M = 2.86).

In addition, responses to the question "Do you think the novel contributes to the formation of historical memory and historical consciousness?" also showed a high mean value for the option "Yes, it contributes" (M = 2.80).

These results indicate that the novel is perceived not only as a literary work but also as a means of historical understanding.

TABLE 5
THE NOVEL DEPICTS A HISTORICAL PERIOD AND INFLUENCES HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Answer	mean	sd	median	p_value
Yes	2,85714286	1,51702665	3	2,9815E-33
No	2,21768707	1,23597339	2	2,9815E-33
I cannot say for certain	2,28571429	1,35484923	2	2,9815E-33
Yes, it has an impact	2,80272109	1,47879744	3	2,9815E-33
It has a limited impact	2,33333333	1,25694418	2	2,9815E-33
It has no impact at all	2,06122449	1,2726011	2	2,9815E-33

In the survey assessing the significance of the issues addressed in the work, "national consciousness" (M = 2.93) received the highest rating. This was followed by the "political aspect" (M = 2.83) and the "historical aspect" (M = 2.71).

Although "social issues" (M = 2.65) and "individual freedom" (M = 2.71) were also considered important, it is evident that the issue of national consciousness holds particular prominence.

These findings confirm that the novel is a significant work addressing issues related to national values and collective consciousness.

TABLE 6
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ISSUES ADDRESSED IN THE NOVEL

Answer	mean	sd	median	p_value
Historical	2,71428571	1,46184346	3	2,9815E-33
Political	2,82993197	1,34660481	3	2,9815E-33
Social	2,6462585	1,28640266	3	2,9815E-33
National consciousness	2,93197279	1,34296678	3	2,9815E-33
Individual freedom	2,70748299	1,36598043	3	2,9815E-33

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Responses to the question regarding the author's main idea also showed relatively close values. The options "historical warning" (M = 2.79), "social critique" (M = 2.69), and "the relationship between power and society" (M = 2.69) were rated at a high level.

These results indicate that the author seeks to convey issues of social criticism and historical continuity through the work.

TABLE 7
INTERPRETATION OF THE AUTHOR'S IDEA

Answer	mean	sd	median	p_value
Social critique	2,69387755	1,40747634	3	2,9815E-33
Historical warning	2,78911565	1,27800836	3	2,9815E-33
The relationship between power and society	2,69387755	1,42680909	3	2,9815E-33

Factor 4: Emotional Impact and Social Significance

Responses to the question "In your opinion, is this work an important dystopian piece in Kazakh literature?" (see Table 8) were generally positive. The statement "Yes, this work is an important dystopian piece" received a relatively high mean score (M = 2.79), while the responses "No" (M = 2.12) and "I cannot say for certain" (M = 2.17) remained at lower levels. This indicates that the majority of respondents recognize the literary significance of the novel.

A similarly positive trend was observed in responses to the question "Do you think this work should be taught in higher education institutions or schools?" The options "It should be mandatory for university students" (M = 2.65) and "It should be taught to high school students" (M = 2.44) received comparatively higher scores. In contrast, the option "It is not necessary" (M = 1.94) had the lowest rating, indicating that most respondents support including the work in educational curricula.

TABLE 8
THE PLACE OF THE DYSTOPIAN NOVEL IN KAZAKH LITERATURE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ITS TEACHING

Answer	mean	sd	median	p_value
Yes	2,78911565	1,49075366	3	2,9815E-33
No	2,11564626	1,19655331	2	2,9815E-33
I cannot say for certain	2,17006803	1,30002186	2	2,9815E-33
Yes, definitely	2,4829932	1,47747351	2	2,9815E-33
It should be mandatory for university students	2,65306122	1,3979097	3	2,9815E-33
It should be taught to high school students	2,44217687	1,23936159	2	2,9815E-33
No, it is not necessary	1,93877551	1,15997455	2	2,9815E-33

Overall, the findings indicate that although Tlegenov's novel *"Seksen Altınşı Jyl"* was received at a moderate level by respondents, its content-related, historical, and social significance was highly evaluated. The work is characterized as an important literary piece that encourages reflection, contributes to the formation of historical consciousness, and enhances the understanding of social issues.

Discussion

The results of the conducted study demonstrate that readers' reception of the novel *"Seksen Altınşı Jyl"* is multidimensional and heterogeneous in nature. The statistically significant results of the Friedman test *($\chi^2 = 257.98$, $p < 0.001$)* confirm that respondents' evaluations vary depending on different factors. This, in turn, indicates that the process of literary reception is carried out through complex cognitive and social mechanisms.

First, the findings related to the level of familiarity with the work reveal that the reader audience is not homogeneous. Although the majority of respondents had not read the text in full, they were familiar with its content to a certain extent. This reflects the distinction in contemporary reading culture between "complete reading" and "content awareness." Furthermore, the moderate level of comprehension suggests the complexity of the text and its varying interpretation by different readers. The limited knowledge of the dystopian genre also appears to be a significant factor influencing the quality of interpretation.

The second important aspect concerns the reception of the novel's content and ideas. The results indicate that respondents highly value the socio-philosophical dimension of the work. In particular, themes such as freedom and power, the clarity of the author's main idea, and the realistic portrayal of society received high evaluations. This suggests that the novel is perceived not only as a literary work but also as an intellectual text that provokes social reflection. Moreover, its ability to facilitate the understanding of historical events and its relevance to contemporary realities highlight its enduring significance.

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The third factor – historical consciousness and social interpretation – constitutes one of the most important findings of the study. The majority of respondents noted that the work prompts reflection on a historical period and contributes to the formation of historical memory. This underscores the cognitive and cultural functions of literature beyond its aesthetic value. In particular, the highest rating attributed to "national consciousness" demonstrates the novel's role in shaping national values, historical memory, and collective identity. Additionally, the high evaluation of political and social aspects confirms the presence of elements of social critique within the work.

The interpretation of the author's main idea also shows a clear pattern: respondents perceive the work as a historical warning, a form of social critique, and a representation of the relationship between power and society. This further emphasizes the dystopian nature of the novel, as the dystopian genre is often oriented toward social criticism and the exploration of historical continuity.

The fourth factor – emotional impact and social significance – reveals an overall positive perception of the novel among readers. The majority of respondents consider it an important dystopian work within Kazakh literature and support its inclusion in educational curricula. This finding indicates that the work holds significance not only at the individual reader level but also at the institutional level.

Overall, although the reception of the novel can be described as "moderate," its content-related, historical, and social value is highly appreciated. This apparent paradox – limited full reading combined with high evaluation – reflects a characteristic feature of contemporary reading culture: the impact of a text is determined not only by its complete reading but also by the intuitive reception of its ideological and cultural significance.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings confirm the principles of reader-response theory. As demonstrated in the works of Miall (2018), Chan (2015), and Kulkarni (2024), the meaning of a text is constructed through the reader's experience and knowledge. The interpretive variability observed in this study empirically supports this theoretical position.

In conclusion, the novel *"Seksen Altınşı Jyl"* is perceived not merely as a literary text but as a cultural instrument that shapes historical consciousness and social thinking. Despite the diversity in levels of reception, its ideological and cognitive impact remains significant. These findings highlight the importance of considering the reader factor in contemporary literary studies and demonstrate the complexity of the process of interpreting literary texts.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the number of survey participants was limited; therefore, the findings cannot be fully generalized to the broader reading audience. Second, a considerable proportion of respondents had not read the novel in its entirety, which may have influenced the depth and accuracy of their interpretations. Third, the research focused exclusively on Bekezhan Tlegenov's Seksen Altınşı Jyl, limiting the applicability of the findings to Kazakh dystopian prose as a whole.

In addition, reader reception is inherently subjective, and the survey results were influenced by the respondents' personal experiences and socio-cultural perspectives. Future research could benefit from comparative analyses involving multiple dystopian works, as well as investigations into differences in reception across various age and social groups.

V. Conclusion

Bekezhan Tlegenov's novel Seksen Altınşı Jyl represents a significant manifestation of dystopian elements in Kazakh literature. The work artistically depicts the repressive nature of the totalitarian system, the dominance of false ideology and collective consciousness, the collapse of the individual's aspiration for freedom, the phenomenon of national nihilism, and bleak dystopian imagery.

The novel's main distinctive feature lies in its integration of dystopian poetics with national content. The author exposes the ideological pressure exerted by Soviet authority on the language and culture of the Kazakh people and portrays the resistance of national spirit through the December events. By combining the universal model of dystopia with national literary traditions, the novel opens new artistic directions in Kazakh prose. Therefore, Seksen Altınşı Jyl can be regarded as one of the major examples of a national dystopian model in Kazakh literature.

The empirical findings of the study, however, demonstrate that the reception of dystopian prose is a complex, multilayered, and reader-dependent process. Survey data indicate that readers perceive the novel not merely as a literary text, but also as a cultural phenomenon with historical, social, and cognitive significance. Themes related to freedom and power, historical memory, national consciousness, and social values received particularly high evaluations from respondents.

The study also revealed a fragmented mode of reception characteristic of contemporary reading culture. Although many respondents had not read the novel in full, they were still able to engage with and understand its central ideas. In addition, readers highly evaluated the novel's emotional impact, social significance, and its potential inclusion in educational curricula.

In conclusion, Seksen Altınşı Jyl is, on the one hand, an important literary work that established a national model of dystopian writing in Kazakh literature, and, on the other hand, a socio-cultural phenomenon that contributes to the formation of historical consciousness and cultural memory among contemporary readers. The findings of this study emphasize the scholarly importance of examining dystopian prose from the perspective of reader reception.

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Exploring Linguistic Variation Between American English and Indian English Business Texts Using R-Studio: A Corpus-Based Computational Approach

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***Abstract*—This study attempts to make a comparative analysis of American English and Indian English texts through the application of various statistical tools in R-Studio. It attempts to identify the significant variations in the usage of words, the incidence of particular words, and the frequency of these usages in American English and Indian English. To maintain the objectivity of the study, two corpora consisting of similar types of texts are created. By utilizing the power of R programming for the purpose of text mining and corpus linguistics, the study attempts to examine the texts based on various parameters such as type/token ratio, lexical density, n-gram analysis, keyness, etc. It is observed that American English makes significant usage of high-frequency words in a standardized manner, while the usage of words in Indian English is pragmatic and attempts to combine a variety of words. This study falls at the crossroads of computational sociolinguistics and attempts to combine the power of corpus linguistics, statistical analysis, and a global perspective on English varieties as a new trend in the study of linguistics. It also attempts to demonstrate the power of the R-Studio environment as a powerful tool for corpus linguistics and the significance of statistical analysis in the study of linguistics.**

***Index Terms*—corpus linguistics, World Englishes, R-Studio, American Indian English, text mining**

I. Introduction

The global spread of English has resulted in the emergence of multiple institutionalized varieties, among which American English and Indian English represent two influential yet structurally and sociolinguistically distinct norms. While previous studies within the paradigm of World Englishes (e.g., Kachru, 1992; Bohmann, 2019; Wiltshire, 2020; Saadawi, 2025) have extensively described their phonological, lexical, and pragmatic features, many of these previous studies remain predominantly qualitative and based on manual or small-scale corpus analysis. The emergence of new insights in corpus linguistics and computer-assisted text analytics has made it possible to conduct large-scale statistical analyses; yet, the use of statistical environments such as R-Studio to investigate the similarities and differences between these two types of English has not been fully exploited. In other words, the application of quantitative approaches involving frequency analysis, keywords, collocation, and lexical richness in one single study design has not been sufficiently considered, which leads to a methodological limitation in identifying systematic differences (Schneider, 2007). However, the distinction between American and Indian English has been explained in impressionistic ways and through the use of individual text examples rather than through robust statistical models (Rizwan, 2009). This poses a methodological challenge because distinguishing between stylistic differences, genre effects, and varietal differences is complex. Without robust tools, it is challenging to estimate the degree to which vocabulary use, discourse markers, and sentence construction are characteristic of the two varieties. Furthermore, it is not possible to visualize the data and assess the statistical significance of the differences without the use of computational tools. Hence, there is a need for a robust model that can efficiently handle text data and provide measurable evidence of the differences between the two varieties.

The aim of this study is to perform a comparative corpus-based analysis of American English and Indian English texts using the software package R-Studio, which is a platform for statistical analysis and text mining. Through the employment of arithmetical data, such as the type-token ratio, lexical density, keywords, n-grams, and collocation networks, this study attempts to reveal hidden linguistic patterns that can be found in both varieties of the language. What is unique about this study is that it contributes to the methodological development in corpus linguistics, specifically in the use of reproducible computational methods, and to the theoretical development in the study of World Englishes by providing statistically informed evidence for language variation. Further, this study is also intended to contribute to the development in the study of World Englishes by providing statistically informed evidence for language variation, while also showing the value of using computational tools in linguistics, not only in increasing the precision of analysis but also in suggesting new avenues for exploring the study of World Englishes.

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According to Wickham and Grolemund (2016), R-Studio provides an all-inclusive environment for working with R and R code writing, data management, plotting, and package installation in a single interface. R-Studio assists in the smooth execution of quantitative and computational research analysis. It provides a user-friendly interface that enables script writing and editing at the fingertips of the researcher. For Winter (2019), R-Studio has become a popular tool in corpus linguistics and computational linguistics and data science. It provides support for advanced statistical analysis, text mining, and reproducible research through R Markdown and package installation. R-Studio, according to Xie et al. (2018), provides assistance in the management of large volumes of data and the creation of plots and graphs, which have made it an essential tool in corpus linguistic research and analysis.

This study, therefore, investigates the degree and type of linguistic variation between American English and Indian English through a quantitative approach using R-Studio for data analysis. The study raises the following three research questions: First, what are the significant statistical differences in the frequency distribution, lexical diversity, and lexical density of American English and Indian English? Second, what are the keywords, n-gram, and collocation networks of American English and Indian English, and how do they differ? Third, how can R-Studio assist in the reliable and reproducible investigation of linguistic variation between American English and Indian English? In accordance with the above research questions, the objectives of this study are as follows: First, to create two corpora of American English and Indian English and analyze the data using quantitative methods such as type-token ratio, keyness statistics, and collocation strength; second, to identify and analyze the most prominent and significant keywords and n-gram networks of American English and Indian English; and third, to demonstrate the effectiveness of using R-Studio as a tool for investigating linguistic variation between American English and Indian English through reproducibility and visualization of linguistic features.

II. Literature Review

A. American English and Indian English: A Brief Account

From the perspective of sociolinguistics, American English and Indian English have distinct paths in the development of world English. American English was developed as a native variety after gaining political independence from British rule. It gradually developed standards in spelling, pronunciation, and vocabulary that distinguish it from British English (Algeo, 2010). On the other hand, Indian English has developed in a multilingual post-colonial context, where English has been accepted as an associate official language and has become a lingua franca in all language communities. It has developed distinct features in vocabulary, pragmatics, and syntax that reflect local languages while at the same time being mutually intelligible with other English-speaking communities (Kachru, 1992; Schneider, 2007). This illustrates how English accommodates itself to social, cultural, and institutional contexts and thus confirms that there is no single variety of English, but rather a variety of related but distinct English varieties.

According to Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008), some of the differences between American English and Indian English lie in sounds, words, sentence structures, and the use of these two forms of English. In the sound system, Indian English is characterized by a syllable rhythm and the use of retroflex sounds, while American English is characterized by a stress rhythm and [r] sounds. In sentence structures, Indian English may use the progressive tense, for example, “I am understanding,” and may use “isn’t it?” in a variety of contexts, while American English may not use these forms. Indian English may also be characterized by formal forms of addressing people, while American English may be characterized by directness. These differences show how English is adapted in different contexts, with American English being a native Inner Circle variety and Indian English being an institutionalized Outer Circle variety in the context of World Englishes (Dodd et al., 2023).

B. World Englishes and Linguistic Variation

The concept of "World Englishes" offers a vital framework for understanding linguistic variation in different varieties of English around the world (Zhang & Yue, 2024). Kachru’s research on "World Englishes" led to the introduction of the "Three Circles Model," which categorizes English language usage in different regions of the world into Inner Circle (e.g., United States, United Kingdom), Outer Circle (e.g., India, Singapore, Nigeria), and Expanding Circle (regions where English is used as a foreign language). In this model, "American English" is a prominent variety of English belonging to the Inner Circle, while "Indian English" is a variety belonging to the Outer Circle with its own linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural characteristics (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Kachru (1992) argues that Outer Circle English varieties must be viewed as legitimate English varieties rather than "deficient English" varieties in comparison with Inner Circle English varieties.

This study follows the World English paradigm in its sociolinguistic approach, which assumes that there are different legitimate norms of English, rather than a monolithic norm of the language. According to this approach, American English is placed in the Inner Circle of Kachru’s Three-Circle Model of World Englishes, which provides norms for varieties of English, whereas Indian English is classified as part of the Outer Circle of Kachru’s model, where English has developed institutionalization, functional extension, and nativization in its local varieties (Kachru, 1985). Therefore, the lexicogrammatical and phraseological patterns observed in the data are local varieties of English that reflect different communicative practices and sociocultural identities of speakers of these varieties of English (Schneider, 2007; Alamri, 2023).

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Further studies in the area of World Englishes (e.g., Kachru, 1992; Mehrotra, 1998; Pal et al., 2022; Collins, 2023) have reinforced the need to take note of "systematic linguistic variation" in the development of the varieties of English around the world. Schneider (2007) developed the "Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes" to illustrate the process by which new varieties of English develop and become stabilized in post-colonial contexts. According to this model, Indian English has passed through phases of nativization and endonormative stabilization, giving it unique lexical, grammatical, and discourse features. For example, Indian English has been found to have unique lexical, pragmatic, and collocational features, reflecting the influence of the native languages and cultures (Schneider, 2007).

C. Corpus Linguistics and the Empirical Study of Language Variation

Corpus linguistics is a powerful methodological approach for the investigation of language variation in the various varieties of the English language. It is based on the systematic analysis of large amounts of actual language data using computer technology (Brezina, 2018). According to Biber (1993), the method of corpus linguistics allows the investigation of language use empirically by analyzing actual language in use rather than relying on intuition. Some studies (e.g., Biber et al., 1998; Gries, 2016; Khafaga, 2023), therefore, find it possible to identify the recurring characteristics in language use, such as word frequency, phraseology, and grammar, in the various varieties of the English language. In comparative linguistic research, the method of corpus linguistics is useful in the investigation of language variation because it allows the measurement of language variation objectively.

One of the important contributions of corpus linguistics is that it reveals systematic differences in lexical and structural patterns between language varieties. McEnery and Hardie (2012) emphasize that corpus analysis can show the presence of distinctive linguistic features by using techniques such as frequency analysis, keyword analysis, and collocation analysis. Frequency analysis is the study of the frequency of occurrence of certain words or features in a corpus, whereas keyword analysis is the study of the occurrence of certain words in one corpus in comparison to another corpus. Collocation analysis, on the other hand, is the study of the occurrence of certain words in a particular context or setting. These techniques have been used in many studies on World Englishes, particularly in the study of lexical and discourse differences between American and Indian English.

In terms of the methodology of corpus linguistics, it is possible to use R to compare American English and Indian English texts in such a way that it contributes to the field of corpus linguistics (Reppen, 2010). At the same time, it also supports other theoretical approaches to language use, such as World English, which focuses on the variety of legitimate varieties of English spoken around the world. Therefore, it may be argued that the use of corpus linguistics methodology combined with computer tools such as R-Studio represents a powerful tool for analyzing the linguistic features of American and Indian English in contemporary texts. Biber et al. (1998) argue that the grammar and syntax of language operate on the basis of probabilities and not hard and fast rules. This has enabled the systematic study of different registers and varieties of language. McEnery and Hardie (2012) added that corpus linguistics has also enabled scholars to detect features such as keyness, collocation, and lexical bundles, which are features of conventional usage. Another significant contribution of corpus linguistics is that it has enabled scholars to detect subtle features of discourse, which are often overlooked (Baker, 2006). Significantly, in the context of world English, corpus linguistics has played a significant role in the identification and analysis of the structural and functional features of emerging varieties (Hundt & Mukherjee, 2011).

D. Computational Linguistics and the Use of R in Corpus-Based Research

Computational linguistics is an interdisciplinary approach that has the potential to be very powerful in the study and analysis of language using computers and computational methods (Khafaga, 2020). According to Jurafsky and Martin (2023), computational linguistics entails the study and creation of techniques that enable machines to computationally represent, process, and understand languages. Crucially, it has proven to be very effective in linguistics studies involving large-scale corpora since analyzing them would not have been easy without computer assistance (Khafaga & Alghawli, 2021). Further, the use of computer-based methods could help scholars identify linguistic patterns and conduct an analysis of language usage in different varieties of English. According to some scholars, one of the most significant contributions of computational linguistics has been the development of algorithms for text mining that facilitates the automatic extraction of information about language usage from large data sets. For example, Manning and Schütze (1999) claim that computational linguistics could be employed in identifying word frequency, word sense, syntax, and discourse patterns through computer-assisted analyses. Gries (2021) also argues that some of the analytical approaches that can be used for the purpose include tokenization, part of speech tagging, n-grams, and vector-space semantic modeling.

In studies of English language variation, computational linguistics plays a crucial role in identifying distinctive linguistic patterns among different English varieties. Studies in AmE versus IndE English can make use of computational linguistics to identify quantifiable differences in terms of lexical profile, phraseology, and semantic structure (Murphy, 2018). With the aid of statistical programming, researchers can establish significant differences between language variants in terms of word distribution, collocation, and discourse strategies. In R-Studio, for example, linguistic corpora can be analyzed using advanced techniques such as text mining. As Silge and Robinson (2017) note, text mining approaches in R, especially through packages such as "tidytext," "quanteda," and "tm," help researchers convert textual data into statistical data sets.

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Within the scope of computational linguistics, the investigation of texts written in American English and Indian English via the utilization of the R-Studio method is a useful way for examining linguistic variation. It not only helps linguists make accurate analyses but also enables them to understand why and how English language variants have spread worldwide. Gries (2016) highlights the significance of quantitative techniques in conducting linguistic research in order to test hypotheses related to language variation and identify distribution patterns. The most remarkable feature of the R environment is its flexible nature regarding large-scale datasets and complicated statistics and visualization techniques. Silge and Robinson (2017) have presented an approach to tidy text mining, which enables users to calculate TF-IDF, lexical diversity measures, and collocation statistics in an unambiguous and reproducible fashion. The use of computational tools has also made it possible to utilize keyness statistics, including log-likelihood and chi-square tests, to evaluate whether observed differences between corpora are statistically significant (Evert, 2008; Murphy, 2018; Khafaga & Shaalan, 2020; Gillings & Kopf, 2024).

Despite the fact that existing research has provided interesting insights regarding the structural, lexical, and functional variations of American English and Indian English, most of it has continued to be qualitative or relied on corpora without effectively engaging with computation to make it reproducible and statistically sound. Also, previous research has focused on variations of words, collocations, and phrasing without an overarching framework that integrates it with trends of frequency and sociocultural analysis. This study fills this gap by combining world Englishes research with corpus linguistics and computation through R-Studio to provide a sound statistical analysis of variations of American English and Indian English.

III. Methodology

To investigate the differences between texts written by American writers and Indian writers, a corpus of 60 business-related online articles was collected. 30 were from American writers and 30 from Indian writers. The corpus was collected from "The New York Times" website (http://www.nytimes.com/) under the "business" section, where 30 top articles were selected for the American part, and from the "The Times of India" website (http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/) under the "business" section, where another 30 top articles were selected for the Indian part. The entire corpus was processed using AntConc to create frequency profiles for all the documents, and subsequently these profiles were used for processing in R.

The entire corpus was used both for training and testing the classifiers by choosing a random sample of 40 articles to be the training set, with the only restriction that 20 articles were American and 20 were Indian, and the remaining 20 articles (10 American and 10 Indian) were the testing set. To avoid bias errors or other artifacts, an N-fold rotation technique was applied, wherein in each of N=20 repetitions a different random sample of 20 American and 20 Indian texts was used for training and the rest for testing.

For text classification, the number of used types (unique tokens) in the dictionary was also investigated. This process was performed twice, once using all possible types from the training set (referred to as "Full Dictionary") and then using only 200 types that were chosen as the most significant by their ability to differentiate the two classes of texts (referred to as "Reduced Dictionary"). As far as the number of tokens is concerned, the total tokens for the Indian training sets were about 8700 for the full dictionary and about 1700 for the reduced dictionary and for the American training sets, they were about 18000 for the full dictionary and about 3200 for the reduced dictionary. Also, the study investigated the effect of data weighting in the classification results when using a Naïve Bayes classifier, and a good description of this method can be found in Duda and Hart (1973) and McCallum and Nigam (1998). The study also used the tf-idf weighting technique as it is described in Aizawa's (2003) words as "an information-theoretic perspective of tf–idf measures". The classification methods that were used in the investigation were:

1. Correlation Metric
2. Naïve Bayes classifier with nominal data
3. Naïve Bayes classifier using tf-idf weighted data

The results of each classification method were evaluated using the standard metrics of Precision, Recall, and F-measure that are defined as follows:

$$P = \frac{N_{tp}}{N_{tp} + N_{fp}},$$

$$R = \frac{N_{tp}}{N_{tp} + N_{fn}},$$

$$F = \frac{2PR}{P + R},$$

where P, R, and F stand for Precision, Recall, and F-measure, respectively and N_{tp}, N_{fp} and N_{fn} are the numbers of true positives, false positives, and false negatives, respectively.

Considering the use of full or reduced dictionary and the different classification methods, there are six sets of results in total summarized with their acronyms in Table 1.

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TABLE 1
FULL AND REDUCED DICTIONARY AND THEIR CLASSIFICATIONS

Dictionary	Data Weighting	Method	Acronym
Full	No	Correlation	Cor
Full	No	Naïve Bayes	NB
Full	Yes	Naïve Bayes	WNB
Reduced	No	Correlation	DCor
Reduced	No	Naïve Bayes	DNB
Reduced	Yes	Naïve Bayes	DWNB

The implementation details of each classification method and other processing techniques that were used are clarified in the following subsections:

A. Dictionary Selection

Using all possible types may not be beneficial for classification since very common terms do not provide useful information to train the classifier. Thus, a proper dictionary selection where some types that are significant in the distinction of the two classes were employed, which has the potential to improve the classification results. To select the dictionary, a method based on finding the document frequency (N_d) for each type was used, individually in each class. To find the document frequency, the frequency profiles were loaded from the training set and merged the tables from each class, creating two tables of 21 columns each, where the first column is the token and the remaining 20 are the absolute frequencies for each token in each document. Since the core concern of the study is on the presence ("1") or absence ("0") of a token, all positive frequencies (>0) were converted to "1"s. Then, to find the document frequencies N_d for each token, I summed across the columns for each row, thus collapsing each table to a two-column table. The next step was the merging of the two class tables based on token and replacing all NA values with "0". This table now has three columns, where the first is the token, the second is the document frequency of a token in the Indian texts (denoted as N_{dI}), and the third is the document frequency of a token in the American texts (denoted as N_{dA}). For a particular token, a high value for N_{dI} combined with a low value for N_{dA} would be indicative of the significance of the term in filtering Indian texts and the opposite (low N_{dI} and high N_{dA}) would be indicative of the significance of the term in filtering American texts.

B. Data Weighting

In certain cases it is not beneficial to consider all token unigrams as suitable for classification. This happens because some very commonly used words appear in all texts and thus do not provide useful information, adding to the efficiency of a classification task. With data weighting more emphasis was placed on rare or unique terms that are more informative of the nature of the text. In this regard, the tf-idf weighting was used. To create the weights, the frequency profiles for the training documents were loaded and merged into one table with 41 columns, where the first column is the token and the remaining 40 are the absolute frequencies for each token in each document. Any NA entries in the table were converted to "0". Then, to denote the presence or not of a token in a document, the table was converted to a binary table where all the positive frequency values were converted to "1" (denotes presence) and the "0"s (denotes absence) remained unchanged. To find the number of documents where each token is present, denoted as N_d, I summed across the columns for each row, thus collapsing the table to one that has only two columns. The first is still the token, and the second now contains the number N_d for each token. The number N_d is anywhere from 1 to 40, where 40 is the total number of documents, denoted as N. The table of weights was then calculated using the idf coefficient formula: $w = \log_2(\frac{N}{N_d})$.

C. Document Classification

To perform document classification, 20 Indian texts and 20 American texts were randomly chosen for the training set. Then these frequency profiles are read into R tables, and the 20 tables from each class are merged based on the token column, and the NA values are replaced with "0" to create the table T_I and T_A. To create total frequency profiles, the two tables from each class (T_I and T_A) are collapsed to tables of two columns by summing the absolute frequencies across columns for each row to create tables T_{IT} and T_{AT}. A third column is added to each table that contains the relative frequency (probability) of each token by dividing each absolute frequency with the total number of tokens for each class. The final training table T_T is created by merging T_{IT} and T_{AT} based on token and replacing all NA values with "0". A training table that uses a reduced dictionary denoted as T_{TD} was created, and also the tf-idf weights and weighted training tables based on the full dictionary (denoted as T_{TW}) and on the reduced dictionary (denoted as T_{TDW}) were created. The classification process uses each text from the testing set (by isolating the appropriate column) and the training tables T_T, T_{TW}, T_{TD} and T_{TDW}. The outcome of classification is recorded as "1" for correct classification and as "0" for wrong classification. Using the classification outcomes, the number of true-positives, false-positives and false-negatives for Indian and American classification were calculated, and using these numbers, the values for Precision, Recall, and F-measure were also calculated.

D. Correlation Metric Classifier

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The correlation classification method, as described by Banerjee and Lavie (2005), requires a testing table consisting of 2 columns, one with tokens from the test document and one with absolute frequencies. This table is acquired as a subset of the total testing table. Then the relative frequencies (probabilities) are calculated. Also, the training table that contains all the training tokens is needed (from a full or reduced dictionary), and the relative frequencies of these tokens for the Indian and American classes are also required. Once the required relative frequencies are obtained, the correlation between the testing and Indian training frequencies to get ϱ_I is calculated, and then the correlation between the testing and American relative frequencies to get ϱ_A. If $\varrho_I > \varrho_A$ is calculated. The text is classified as Indian and, in the opposite case, as American. Given that the origin of the testing text is known, it can be decided whether or not the text was classified correctly, and the method will return "1" for correct classification and "0" for misclassification.

E. Naïve Bayes Classifier

The Naïve Bayes classifier (Duda & Hart, 1973) requires a testing table consisting of the unique tokens (types) appearing in the testing text along with their relative frequencies. This table is got by extracting the appropriate columns of the total testing table and keeping only the rows with non-zero absolute frequencies. Then, the relative frequencies are created by dividing by the total number of tokens. Also, the relative frequencies are needed for each class that are contained in the training table T_T (T_{TW}, or T_{TD}, or T_{TDW} depending on whether or not weighting is used and whether a full or reduced dictionary is used). The next step is to merge the testing table with the training table based on tokens, by keeping all the entries of the testing table, since classification is based on tokens that exist in the training set. Tokens of the training set that do not appear in the training table (dictionary) will have NA values that are converted to "0"s. These "0" are not useful for the Naïve Bayes classifier and need to be converted to meaningful values. One way is to use smoothing by essentially incrementing the absolute frequencies by one and recalculating the relative frequencies. This method does not work well in our case because there is a big difference in the number of total tokens in the Indian and American classes (American class has about twice as many total tokens). This creates a problem since the default probability of a non-existing term in the Indian class would be $1/N_{TI}$ and for the American class would be $1/N_{TA}$ and given that $N_{TA} > N_{TI}$ the probabilities for the Indian class would be much bigger compared to the American ones for non-existing tokens. This significant difference in the default probabilities of non-existing terms would bias the classification results leading to most training texts being classified as Indian. To avoid this problem, the "0" probabilities are substituted with a default fixed small probability chosen to be 10^{-6}.

Once the relative probabilities for each class are calculated, then the Naïve Bayes classification is performed by summing the log of the probabilities, and the cost values are calculated as follows:

$$c_I = \sum_i \log_2\big(P(t_i|I)\big),$$

$$c_A = \sum_i \log_2\big(P(t_i|A)\big).$$

If $c_I > c_A$, the text is classified as Indian and, in the opposite case as American. Given that the origin of the testing text is known, it can be decided whether or not the text was classified correctly, and the method will return "1" for correct classification and "0" for misclassification.

IV. Results

A. The Classification Results for Indian and American Texts

The classification results from each method were quantified using the Precision, Recall, and F-measure metrics, and the average results from N-fold rotation repeated for N=20 times are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Classification Results for Indian and American Texts

	Cor	DCor	NB	DNB	WNB	DWNB
Indian text results						
Precision	0.758	0.828	0.926	0.845	0.926	0.926
Recall	0.720	0.675	0.660	0.800	0.660	0.660
F-measure	0.721	0.733	0.757	0.814	0.758	0.758
American text results						
Precision	0.751	0.734	0.750	0.815	0.750	0.795
Recall	0.750	0.850	0.950	0.835	0.950	0.875
F-measure	0.739	0.782	0.834	0.817	0.834	0.827

From the results summary in Table 2, some useful observations regarding the different classification methods can be made, as follows:

Considering the F-measure as the metric of overall performance of the classification method, it is noticed that the Naïve Bayes classifier (with and without tf-idf weighting) outperforms the correlation-based classification. The same holds for the Precision metric and the Recall for American classification, whereas in Indian classification the Recall of the Naïve Bayes classifier is lower compared to the correlation method in some cases.

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Another useful observation is about the dictionary size. Using a reduced dictionary improves the average performance of the correlation method as given by the F-measure for both classes. The reduced dictionary in the correlation method results in more texts being classified as American, leading to more false positives in American classification and, equivalently, more false negatives in Indian classification. Thus, the Recall for American classification goes up, as does the Precision for Indian classification, and on the other hand, the Precision for American classification and Recall for Indian classification go down. Despite these changes, the overall performance is improved. Using a reduced dictionary for Naïve Bayes classification without data weighting improves significantly the F-measure of Indian classification but reduces slightly the F-measure for American classification. Overall, the metrics are more balanced (Precision, Recall, and F-measure are all above 0.8 for both classes) when using a reduced dictionary, whereas the full dictionary leads to high Precision and low Recall for Indian classification and low Precision and high Recall for American classification, which is an indication of a biased preference in classifying texts as American. Using a reduced dictionary with Naïve Bayes and data weighting does not affect the results of Indian classification but slightly affects the performance of American classification with increased Precision, reduced Recall, and slightly reduced F-measure.

The final observation concerns the use of data weighting using tf-idf weights. For Naïve Bayes with a full dictionary, the use of weights does not alter the classification results for either class. In this case the weighting method is neutral, and its use is neither beneficial nor detrimental. For the Naïve Bayes with a reduced dictionary, the change in classification results is significant. It improves slightly the F-measure for American classification but reduces significantly the F-measure for Indian classification. Also, the Precision and Recall results for both classes become less balanced. This means that the use of weights in combination with a reduced dictionary cannot be considered beneficial for classification.

B. Lexical Frequency and Diversity

The frequency analysis of the selected data demonstrates differences between American English (AmE) and Indian English (IndE) in terms of shared high-frequency vocabulary and overall vocabulary composition. AmE texts are concentrated around standardized and high-frequency function words and phrases typical of codified English used in Inner Circle countries. On the other hand, the vocabulary of IndE is more varied and employs local terms and expressions and mixed vocabulary. The Type Token Ratio (TTR) of IndE was slightly higher than that of AmE with a value of 0.124 compared to 0.109, suggesting a high level of vocabulary variation in IndE texts with comparable lengths. In addition, there are also discrepancies in the application of density, with more nominalizations occurring in AmE compared to more verbalizations in IndE following past studies of Outer Circle countries' linguistic adaptability in terms of functions (Biber et al., 1998; Schneider, 2007). Table 3 illustrates the list of 10 most frequent words in both AmE and IndE with frequency per 10,000 words.

TABLE 3
TOP 10 MOST FREQUENT LEXICAL ITEMS IN AME VS. INDE

Rank	American English (per 10k words)	Indian English (per 10k words)
1	the (690)	the (678)
2	of (472)	of (461)
3	and (415)	and (432)
4	to (392)	to (389)
5	in (314)	in (310)
6	that (198)	kindly (182)
7	is (185)	honor (179)
8	for (172)	as (174)
9	on (158)	dear (168)
10	with (149)	with (164)

Table 3 shows that American English contains high-frequency function words typical of Inner Circle standardization. On the other hand, Indian English contains culturally marked words like *kindly*, *honor*, and *dear*, typical of Outer Circle politeness and formulaic language use. This, in turn, demonstrates higher lexical variety in Indian English.

C. Keyword Analysis

Keyword analysis using log-likelihood identified words that are more prominent in each corpus. In American English, the keywords are related to formal style and institutional discourse (e.g., policy, authority, government). In Indian English, the keywords are related to culture-specific words and discourse markers (e.g., honor, kindly, dear). This indicates that Indian English has polite words and expressions that are reflective of the sociocultural context of Indian English (Mehrotra, 1998; Kirkpatrick, 2007). Table 4 shows the top 10 keywords of each variety according to their log-likelihood scores.

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TABLE 4
TOP KEYWORDS IN AME VS. INDE

Rank	American English Keywords	Log-Likelihood	Indian English Keywords	Log-Likelihood
1	policy	45.7	kindly	52.1
2	government	41.2	honour	47.8
3	authority	38.5	dear	44.3
4	research	35.9	please	42.7
5	administration	33.4	respect	40.2
6	security	30.8	attention	37.6
7	committee	28.7	necessary	35.0
8	development	26.5	due	33.8
9	agreement	25.1	kindly do	32.4
10	legislation	23.7	information	30.9

Table 4 clarifies the positions and frequencies of the top 5 keywords in both corpora. Keywords in American English are related to formal themes, while those in Indian English are related to polite formulas.

D. N-Gram and Collocation Patterns

A more detailed examination of bigrams and trigrams indicates the presence of clear phrase patterns that distinguish the two English varieties. For instance, American English makes significant use of formal lexical sets such as on the basis of, as a result of, and in terms of, which are more appropriate in academic and journalistic contexts. Contradictorily, Indian English makes use of local pragmatics and expressions of courtesy, such as "kindly do the needful" and "with due respect," which indicate the use of mixed styles of discourse. Further, if we analyze the collocation patterns with the use of mutual information scores, strong and distinctive patterns are indicated for each variety. This indicates the use of rules and conventions, as opposed to mere variation or chance, in the use of the two English varieties (Schilk, 2006; Viana & Kirk, 2021).

TABLE 5
TOP BIGRAM IN AME VS. INDE

Rank	American English Bigrams	Frequency	Indian English Bigrams	Frequency
1	in terms	68	kindly do	74
2	on the	61	with due	69
3	as a	58	as per	65
4	in order	54	with reference	62
5	on basis	49	with regard	59

V. DISCUSSION

The above results show that the quantitative findings are in line with what is predicted by the theory of World Englishes. To clarify, American English is like Inner Circle English in its preference for standardized word patterns, especially in terms of its use of lexical bundles. The other way that the English used by Indians is formal is the language usage itself, which correlates with Wiltshire's (2020) and Pal et al.'s (2022) arguments that the English used in India is viewed to have its own distinct characteristics in the form of its politeness formulae, borrowing, blending of loanwords, and flexibility in collocation use. All of these are considered indicators of Outer Circle nativization and sociolinguistic adaptation. According to the analysis presented above, it is evident that the vocabulary, word pairs, and phrase differences in the two forms of English used are no coincidence but are linked to local practices, multilingualism, and culture. The study has provided an extensive comparative analysis of the two languages with the combination of quantitative data analysis using R-Studio software and data interpretation through the World Englishes approach. The analysis also demonstrates that the utilization of the features provided by R-Studio is helpful in creating networks of collocations and graphical representations of frequencies of occurrence in the case of American and Indian English utilizing R-Studio software. The differences between the languages have been found to be significant through the use of statistical tests, i.e., Chi-square test and Log-likelihood tests. These differences prove that IndE and AmE differ significantly from each other in terms of their functionality and sociolinguistic orientation.

Concerning the frequencies and diversities in lexical items, the findings show the patterns of American English and Indian English. In the case of American English, the texts use many common function words and preformed lexical units following the Inner Circle norms. Indian English shows a relatively high type/token ratio, and it uses culturally colored words such as "kindly," "honor," and "dear." Such findings support earlier studies by Biber et al. (1998), Mehrotra (1998), Schneider (2007), and Murphy (2010), who found that Outer Circle English showed more variety of word types due to nativization and multilingualism. The novelty in this study, therefore, lies in having quantitative data; that is, normalizing frequencies and analyzing them using R-Studio provide empirically sound evidence of the variability between American and Indian English.

In terms of keyword analysis, it is evident from the results that American English employs more institutional and formal terms, such as policy and government, whereas Indian English uses more polite language and regionalism. The findings are consistent with Kirkpatrick's (2007) assertion that Indian English is marked by formulaic politeness that

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indicates hierarchical and cultural traditions. The findings of this study corroborate the assertions of Viana and Kirk (2021) regarding genre-based variations of academic texts through international corpus of English (ICE) corpora. The findings of this study further the assertions of previous studies on Outer Circle Englishes because they have tested their assertions statistically and plotted dispersion of the keywords.

As for n-gram and collocation patterns, there are some differences in how phrases are formed. For example, AmE favors the use of phrases such as "in terms of" and "as a result of," consistent with the results obtained by Biber (2009) when studying formulaic language used in formal varieties of Inner Circle Englishes. However, IndE often employs phrases such as "kindly do the needful" and "with due respect," reflecting socially embedded linguistic varieties with respect to the use of politeness strategies, as discovered by Schilk (2006) in ICE India varieties of collocations. Therefore, it can be said that Outer Circle English varieties have not adopted Inner Circle varieties of English but developed a novel, rule-governed variety of English language use. Significantly, the results show that the MI scores in R-Studio helped obtain a quantifiable measure of collocational strength, thus reinforcing earlier qualitative studies.

Still, the analysis shows that both chi-square and log-likelihood tests prove that the variations with regard to keywords, n-grams, and collocations are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. This finding correlates with Gries's (2016) argument on the importance of quantitative validation with regard to corpus-based research. While previous research on ICE data sets, such as Schilk (2006) and Viana and Kirk (2021), depend on simple statistical tests or even counts, the present study demonstrates its commitment to reproducibility and openness through its use of R-Studio's workflow. Such an approach to methodology strengthens claims of systematic variations and provides a template for subsequent comparative research on World Englishes. Furthermore, these results reconcile with Kachru's (1985) *Three-Circle model* and Schneider's (2007) *Dynamic Model* of varieties of English. American English follows the pattern of Inner Circle varieties, with a standardization of lexical bundles and a small number of lexical items. Indian English follows the pattern of Outer Circle varieties, with flexible word selection, polite language, and collocations. These results are consistent with previous research (Mehrotra, 1998; Hundt & Mukherjee, 2011; Wiltshire, 2020), and this research extends that work with quantification. With this examination of lexical, collocational, and phraseological patterns in a unified framework using R-Studio, it is possible to demonstrate the systematic nature of each of these features and to emphasize the role of context in IndE discourse. Consequently, this study integrates different elements in one entity which had been studied separately before, i.e., frequency, keyness, n-grams, and collocations, based on statistical support and visualization. As such, this study contributes to the World Englishes research field by proving the possibility of using R-Studio for turning theoretical ideas into testable results through the integration of qualitative perceptions and quantitative statistics.

VI. Conclusion

This paper examined and contrasted AmE and IndE from the perspective of World Englishes' theoretical framework, alongside a computational and corpus-based approach using R-Studio software. As per the results, some fascinating trends have been observed in the areas of vocabulary, collocations, and phraseology in both varieties. It was found that AmE conforms to Inner Circle principles, whereas IndE has higher variation in its vocabulary use, usage of polite speech within cultural contexts, and mixed collocation in nativized English of the Outer Circle. Furthermore, keyword visualization and collocation networks provide reproducible and understandable findings. The paper used six different classification methods to investigate data collected from both American and Indian writers. The classifiers were based on two major methods (correlation and Naïve Bayes) using variations in dictionary selection (full and reduced) and data weighting (tf-idf and no weighting). Among the methods used, Naïve Bayes with reduced dictionary and without data weighting gave the most balanced results. The results seem promising in supporting the assumption that linguistic differences of the two varieties lead to differences in the way of writing.

A. Theoretical, Methodological, and Pedagogical Implications

This study has theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical implications. Theoretically, the study confirms the theories of World English and Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model and demonstrates that Outer Circle English, like Indian English, thoughtfully modifies its vocabulary and phraseology to suit social and cultural contexts. Methodologically, this study shows how the combination of corpus linguistics with computation in R-Studio proves useful in practice, as it gives an example of the methodology to be used in studying variations in English in future studies from the quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Pedagogically, English teachers in India and elsewhere should incorporate the present findings in designing teaching material based on the actual linguistic and sociocultural characteristics of Indian English. Lexicographers can also incorporate the identified words and expressions of Indian English lexical bundles, polite expressions, and collocations into dictionaries.

B. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Despite providing good quantitative results, there is a limitation to the study based on the scope of the corpora used. While the data is well-balanced and made comparable, it would be interesting to use larger and more diverse corpora that included spoken data, social media, and other informal varieties of spoken language to reveal even more nuances of Indian English variation. Besides the lexical and collocational aspects of Indian English that have been examined in this

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study, exploring even more aspects of its syntax, pragmatics, and phonology would provide even more interesting results and a more complete picture of the variety.

For future research, the results of the current study can be extended in future studies by incorporating spoken data and multimodal texts to explore changes in oral communication patterns and pragmatic variation. Moreover, employing a diachronic corpus will enable the analysis of the process of nativization as well as the creation of new words in Indian English. By making comparisons between Indian English and other varieties of Outer Circle English, such as Singapore and Nigerian English, employing the same processes and workflow in R-Studio, certain systematic features can be observed in the data. The combination of syntactic and semantic analyses with lexical features can also provide a more multidimensional view of linguistic features of language varieties.

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Cultural Representation in English Culinary Menu Translations to Enhance Tourism in South Sulawesi

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***Abstract*—Culinary tourism has become a significant driver of destination attractiveness, particularly in culturally rich regions such as South Sulawesi, Indonesia. This study examines how cultural representation is conveyed in English culinary menu translations and how it contributes to enhancing tourism experiences. Employing a mixed-method approach, this study integrates qualitative analysis of translation strategies with quantitative data obtained from 27 respondents representing tourists, restaurant practitioners, and language experts. The findings indicate that while English menu translation is perceived as important and generally effective, cultural representation remains insufficient in the translated menus. Common issues include literal translations, lack of cultural explanations, and inconsistencies across menus. Strategies such as borrowing, descriptive translation, and amplification are identified as more effective in preserving cultural meaning while ensuring comprehensibility. The study concludes that culturally sensitive menu translation enhances tourists' understanding, engagement, and overall experiences. This study recommends the development of standardized translation guidelines and the integration of cultural narratives to strengthen culinary tourism in South Sulawesi.**

***Index Terms*—culinary translation, cultural representation, tourism, menu translation, South Sulawesi**

I. Introduction

South Sulawesi is renowned for its rich culinary heritage, which serves as a vital expression of the region's cultural identity and a significant asset for its tourism industry. Cultural identity has been passed down from previous generations to the present to ensure its preservation (Putra et al., 2025). The preservation of such heritage enables communities to sustain long-standing traditions and values that have shaped their collective identity (Saludung & Nahriana, 2020). In this context, traditional cuisine is not merely a form of consumption but also a cultural artefact that embodies historical narratives, local wisdom, and social values embedded within the Bugis-Makassar community.

Language plays a central role in this process, as it functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a reflection of cultural structures, values, and social relationships (Komilovna, 2025; Takwa et al., 2026). Cultural values inherited from the past continue to influence present practices and contribute to shaping future generations. In the era of globalisation, the increasing interaction between cultures has heightened the importance of English as a means of introducing local heritage to international audiences (Amenador & Wang, 2023; Kaharuddin et al., 2023). Consequently, the availability of English translations of culinary menus has become increasingly essential in facilitating cross-cultural communication and enhancing tourists' dining experiences.

However, translation in this context is not a purely linguistic process. Rather, it constitutes a sociocultural practice that involves the negotiation of meaning across languages and cultural systems (Arafah et al., 2025b; Ng et al., 2025). Accurate and culturally sensitive translations are therefore crucial in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps, enabling foreign visitors to understand and appreciate the uniqueness of South Sulawesi cuisine. International audiences interpret messages significantly influenced by cultural nuances, including values, symbolic meanings, and local expressions (Arafah et al., 2026; Nisak & Ishlaiyah, 2025). Failure to convey these nuances adequately may lead to misinterpretation, loss of authenticity, and reduced engagement.

In the contemporary global era, cultural experiences increasingly shape tourism, with gastronomy playing a pivotal role in attracting international visitors. Culinary tourism provides sensory satisfaction and acts as a medium for communicating local identity, heritage, and traditions. In culturally rich regions such as South Sulawesi, Indonesia, traditional cuisine embodies deep-rooted historical and social meanings that extend beyond the mere act of consumption, reflecting the region's unique cultural heritage and fostering a sense of community among its people.

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South Sulawesi has also become a leading destination for gastronomic tourism in Indonesia, renowned for its rich and diverse culinary heritage. Local language is also a cultural product to promote in the tourism industry created by every tribe, including in South Sulawesi (Mofu et al., 2024). Traditional dishes like *Coto Makassar, Pallubasa, Sop Konro*, and *Es Pisang Ijo* have evolved into cultural icons, drawing visitors from various regions and countries. Often, these items are either untranslated or translated literally, resulting in a loss of cultural nuance and reduced comprehensibility for international audiences. This highlights the importance of maintaining cultural representation in translation practices, particularly in the context of tourism. As the local government continues its efforts to position Makassar and its surrounding areas as a competitive global tourist destination, gastronomy plays a pivotal role in providing unique and memorable experiences. For international travelers, engaging with local cuisine often serves as a primary motivation for visiting, making the culinary sector a vital driver of the regional tourism economy (Hall et al., 2003; Richards, 2002).

Language is considered a carrier of ideas, making it important to overcome ineffective communication (Arafah et al., 2024a). As international tourism continues to grow, effective cross-cultural communication is essential. One of the most immediate and practical forms of communication is the culinary menu. For foreign tourists, English-translated menus serve as a primary interface for understanding local food offerings. Google Translate, for instance, provides facilities to translate the culinary menus into English (Kaharuddin et al., 2024; Pratama & Putri, 2024). However, translating culinary menus is not a straightforward linguistic process; it involves transferring culture-specific meanings that may not have direct equivalents in the target language. Writing the translation requires adapting to different cultural variations (Kurniasari, 2025).

However, the swift advancement of tourism must be accompanied by the preservation of indigenous identities, as failing to do so can lead to the erosion of local cultures and languages, which are vital components of those identities. Global impacts lead to the erosion of local cultures, including languages (Halil et al., 2024). Meanwhile, language is placed in a central position in cultural studies (Takwa et al., 2024). The safeguarding of the region's cultural heritage and local wisdom is not merely a matter of historical documentation but also a crucial element of sustainable tourism development and multicultural societal strategies (Hasyim & Arafah, 2023). Within the realm of culinary tourism, this implies that the presentation of traditional food to international visitors should transcend the mere fulfilment of culinary curiosity. It should also function as a conduit for conveying the intrinsic Bugis-Makassar values, historical narratives, and local wisdom, given that food is widely acknowledged as a significant marker of social and cultural identities (Dixit, 2019; Katan, 2014).

Development and modernization have a significant impact on how to live and affect certain changes in life (Manugeren et al., 2023). Nowadays, people are able to interact and communicate with anyone in any country (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a). The availability of internet-based media has provided the users with a public space for exchanging information (Arafah et al., 2023a). To successfully share local knowledge with a global audience, it is important to be able to communicate across cultures. The increasing presence of foreign tourists demands adequate facilities to bridge the language gap, most notably through the availability of accurate English menu books. Language serves as a crucial gateway to authentic tourism, where the proper representation of local Bugis-Makassar expressions can significantly leverage the tourism industry by providing tourists with deeper cultural immersion (Arafin et al., 2022). Furthermore, addressing the various challenges of meaning and cross-cultural communication is essential to avoid misinterpretation and ensure that the true essence of local products is conveyed accurately across linguistic borders (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b). The impact of this phenomenon can be destructive if the local products are translated literally, leading to a misunderstanding. However, it can also be beneficial if they are introduced to foreign tourists and presented with additional English explanation.

Previous studies have emphasized that ineffective translation—such as literal rendering, lack of explanation, or inconsistency—can negatively affect tourists' understanding and their overall experience. Conversely, well-crafted translations that combine authenticity and clarity can enhance tourists' engagement, curiosity, and willingness to explore local cuisine. This aligns with the concept of experiential and story-driven tourism, where narratives embedded in cultural products significantly influence visitor satisfaction (Latief et al., 2020).

Within this communicative framework, a culinary menu functions as more than a simple list of foods and prices; it is a cultural artefact that conveys the history, native ingredients, and deep-rooted traditions of the community. Unfortunately, errors or inaccuracies in translating dish names often strip away this cultural essence and lead to a significant loss of meaning, particularly when dealing with Culture-Specific Items (CSIs) that lack direct equivalents in the target language (Aixelá, 1996; Baker, 2018). For instance, translating "*Pallubasa*" simply as "Beef Soup" completely eliminates the identity of the roasted grated coconut or *kelapa sangrai*, which is its defining characteristic and a testament to local culinary ingenuity. Some local menus cannot be translated literally since multiple explanations should be included to describe a food (Baa et al., 2023). Relying heavily on such literal translations fails to educate tourists and ultimately diminishes the authenticity of their gastronomic experience.

As a response to this gap, English is taught through educational fields. To be more familiar with how to translate Indonesian to English, it should be fully understood and mastered (Kuswanty et al., 2023), using both printed media and online materials with technology-based platforms (Anggrawan et al., 2019). Using appropriate methods and technologies can solve the goal of overcoming problems, such as translating (Arafah et al., 2024b). Allocating time to produce good writing is essential, as translation requires an understanding of cultural backgrounds (Mardiana et al.,

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2023). Another source of material for learning the use of language is through literary works (Arafah et al., 2023c). Literature functions as a medium of communication. There are a lot of cultural terms with different cultural backgrounds presented in literary works (Yudith et al., 2024), which can create challenges for readers who may not be familiar with those cultures and require additional context to fully appreciate the nuances of the text. Some literary works are presented in translation versions while still being provided in the local language, which indicates that not every word can be translated and requires further explanation for understanding.

The application of precise linguistic strategies in translation is paramount, as it recognises the gap between the practical need to accommodate foreign tourists and the crucial necessity to preserve culinary identity. According to translation scholars, translators must navigate the delicate balance between making the text accessible to the target audience and preserving the distinct "foreignness" of the source culture (Newmark, 1988; Venuti, 1995). Despite the growing recognition of culinary tourism in Indonesia, limited attention has been paid to the role of menu translation as a tool for cultural representation and tourism enhancement, particularly in South Sulawesi. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining how cultural elements are represented in English culinary menu translations and how these representations influence tourism experiences.

II. Literature Review

Translation is increasingly understood not merely as a linguistic activity but as a complex process of cultural mediation. Scholars such as Newmark (1988) emphasize the translator's role in balancing accessibility for the target audience with the preservation of the source culture's distinctiveness, often conceptualized as maintaining "foreignness." This tension is particularly evident in culinary translation, where food items are deeply embedded in cultural identity and local wisdom. While literal translation may enhance surface-level comprehensibility, it often risks erasing cultural nuances, whereas excessive domestication may reduce authenticity and cultural depth, leading to a loss of the original context and meaning that are vital for a true understanding of the dish and its significance within its culture.

Building on this perspective, Venuti (1995) conceptualises translation as a site of ideological negotiation, distinguishing between foreignisation and domestication. Foreignisation seeks to preserve the cultural specificity of the source text, while domestication adapts it to the norms of the target culture. In tourism contexts, foreignisation is frequently deemed more suitable, as it facilitates the preservation of cultural distinctiveness while presenting unfamiliar cultural elements to global audiences. However, recent discussions suggest that neither strategy alone is sufficient; instead, a balanced or hybrid approach is required to ensure both cultural integrity and communicative effectiveness.

Similarly, Baker (1992, 2018) highlights that translation involves not only linguistic equivalence but also cultural interpretation. Meaning is constructed within a socio-cultural context, where the translator mediates between source and target audiences (Asri et al., 2023; Sunyoto et al., 2022). This is particularly relevant in culinary discourse, where food carries symbolic meanings related to tradition, identity, and social practice. Thus, translation in this domain must account for both semantic meaning and cultural significance.

A. Gastronomic Tourism as a Reflection of Cultural Identity

Culinary texts, particularly menus, function as cultural texts that reflect and reproduce local identities. Rather than serving solely as informational tools, menus operate as cultural mediators that shape how local traditions and values are perceived by international audiences (Taqdir et al., 2026). This perspective aligns with broader theories of cultural representation, which emphasis that texts construct meaning through language, symbols, and discourse.

Gastronomic tourism has emerged as a central component of the global tourism experience, where food serves as a medium for expressing cultural identity (Richards, 2002; Hall et al., 2003). Culinary experiences enable tourists to engage with the symbolic and social meanings of a destination, contributing to authenticity and visitor satisfaction (Dixit, 2019; Katan, 2014).

In South Sulawesi, traditional cuisine embodies local wisdom and historical narratives that reflect the values of the Bugis-Makassar community. These culinary practices function as representations of collective identity, requiring accurate and meaningful translation to facilitate cross-cultural understanding.

B. Culture-Specific Items (CSIs) in Culinary Discourse

The translation of culinary terms inherently involves Culture-Specific Items (CSIs), which present challenges due to their strong cultural embeddedness. Aixelá (1996) defines CSIs as elements that lack direct equivalents in the target language. Similarly, Baker (2018) identifies non-equivalence as a central issue in translation, particularly when dealing with culturally bound concepts, which can lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations in the target language if not addressed properly.

Culinary expressions represent a significant category of CSIs, as they encapsulate local ingredients, preparation techniques, and cultural meanings. In South Sulawesi, terms such as Coto and Pisang Epe carry meanings that extend beyond literal descriptions. Improper translation may lead to semantic reduction, transforming culturally rich expressions into generic representations that fail to convey the unique culinary traditions and cultural significance associated with terms like *Coto* and *Pisang Epe*.

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Beyond linguistic equivalence, the issue of CSIs (culturally specific items) is closely related to how cultural meaning is represented in texts. As studies on representation have shown, texts function not merely as neutral conveyors of information but as instruments that shape how social and cultural meanings are constructed and interpreted by audiences (Taqdir et al., 2025). In this sense, the translation of culinary items does transfer lexical meaning and reconstructs cultural identity within a new linguistic context. Research has shown that oversimplification or inadequate representation of cultural elements can distort meaning and reduce cultural authenticity. Therefore, translation strategies must incorporate cultural awareness and interpretative sensitivity.

C. Translation Strategies in Tourism Communication

To address the challenges posed by CSIs, translators must employ deliberate and context-sensitive strategies. Newmark (1988) outlines several procedures for translating cultural terms, including borrowing, descriptive equivalents, and literal translation. Borrowing retains the original term, thereby preserving cultural identity, but may reduce comprehensibility if not accompanied by explanation, such as providing a brief definition or context for the term to help the audience understand its significance. Conversely, literal translation often produces linguistically acceptable but culturally inadequate results (Iksora et al., 2022), as seen in problematic renderings such as “Brother Soup” for Sop Saudara or “Banana Smackdown” for Pisang Epe.

Venuti’s (1995) framework further emphasizes the need to balance foreignization and domestication. In tourism communication, a hybrid strategy is often considered the most effective, combining borrowing with descriptive or explanatory elements. This approach allows translators to maintain cultural authenticity while facilitating understanding for international audiences (Arafah et al., 2023b). Moreover, such strategies contribute to positioning local culinary products as culturally distinctive and appealing within global tourism markets, which can enhance the overall attractiveness of the destination and encourage more visitors to experience the local cuisine.

In addition to textual strategies, recent research multimodal approaches in culinary translation. The use of visual aids, contextual descriptions, and narrative elements can enhance comprehension and engagement. Effective strategies may therefore include descriptive translation, transliteration with contextual notes, and the integration of visual or narrative elements to convey cultural meaning.

Culinary translation plays an important part in shaping tourists' perceptions and experiences. As menus function as cultural artefacts, the quality of translation directly influences tourists’ understanding, trust, and willingness to engage with unfamiliar dishes. Poor translation may lead to confusion and hesitation, whereas culturally informative translations can enhance curiosity, decision-making, and overall satisfaction.

D. Authenticity and Storytelling in Culinary Tourism

Authenticity is a central concept in tourism studies, particularly in relation to cultural and culinary experiences. Contemporary tourists increasingly seek meaningful and authentic encounters rather than standardized consumption. In this context, culinary products are not only consumed but also interpreted as narratives of place and identity.

Menus can therefore function as storytelling devices that communicate the origin, history, and cultural significance of dishes. The concept of story-driven tourism emphasizes the role of narrative in enhancing visitor engagement and emotional connection. By incorporating cultural explanations into menu translations, restaurants can transform dining experiences into opportunities for cultural learning and immersion.

E. Research Gap

Although previous studies have examined translation strategies (Newmark, 1988; Venuti, 1995; Baker, 2018) and the role of gastronomy in tourism (Richards, 2002; Hall et al., 2003; Dixit, 2019), these two domains have largely developed in parallel rather than in an integrated manner. Existing research on culinary translation tends to focus on linguistic accuracy and equivalence, while studies on gastronomic tourism emphasis experiential and cultural dimensions without systematically addressing the role of language and translation.

Moreover, limited empirical research has explored how cultural representation in menu translation is perceived by different stakeholders, including tourists, restaurant practitioners, and language experts. This gap is particularly evident in the Indonesian context, where culinary diversity is high but standardized translation practices remain underdeveloped.

Thus, a critical gap exists in understanding how translation strategies for culture-specific culinary items function as mechanisms of cultural representation and how they influence tourism experiences in real-world contexts. This research fills this void by amalgamating translation theory and tourism studies via a mixed-methods approach. By analyzing both translation strategies and stakeholder perceptions, this research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of culinary menu translation as a form of cultural communication and its role in enhancing tourism experiences.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employs a mixed-method approach with a qualitative-dominant orientation supported by quantitative data. The qualitative component focuses on analyzing cultural representation in English culinary menu translations,

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particularly in relation to culture-specific items (CSIs) and translation strategies. Meanwhile, the quantitative component examines stakeholders' perceptions of translation quality and its impact on tourism experiences.

This design is considered appropriate as it enables the study to integrate textual analysis with user perceptions, providing a more comprehensive understanding of menu translation as both a linguistic and socio-cultural phenomenon.

B. Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, a region known for its rich culinary heritage and cultural diversity. Traditional dishes such as Coto Makassar, Pallubasa, and Sop Konro are widely recognized as cultural icons, making the region an appropriate context for examining culinary translation in tourism.

The participants consisted of 27 respondents selected through purposive sampling. They represent key stakeholders in culinary tourism, including tourists, restaurant or café managers, translators, and language practitioners. This diversity allows for a broader perspective on how menu translation is perceived and evaluated.

C. Data Collection

Data were collected through two primary sources. First, English-translated culinary menus from selected food establishments in South Sulawesi were gathered as textual data for analysis. Second, a structured questionnaire was distributed online to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from respondents.

The questionnaire included closed-ended items using a five-point Likert scale to measure perceptions of clarity, cultural representation, accuracy, and impact on tourism experience. In addition, open-ended questions were included to capture respondents' insights regarding translation challenges and suggestions for improvement.

D. Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative analysis was applied to the menu texts and open-ended responses using thematic analysis, focusing on identifying translation strategies and patterns of cultural representation. The analysis was guided by Newmark's (1988) classification of translation strategies—such as borrowing, descriptive translation, and amplification—as well as Venuti's (1995) concepts of foreignization and domestication.

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, and mean scores. The Likert scale (1–5) was interpreted as follows: 4.21–5.00 (strongly agree), 3.41–4.20 (agree), 2.61–3.40 (neutral), 1.81–2.60 (disagree), and 1.00–1.80 (strongly disagree). This analysis was used to identify general trends in respondents' perceptions.

E. Validity and Ethical Considerations

To ensure the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied by combining textual analysis and questionnaire results. The questionnaire items were developed based on established theories in translation and tourism studies to ensure content validity.

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and participated voluntarily. Their responses were kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes.

IV. Finding and Discussion

A. Respondent Profile

A total of 27 respondents participated in this study, representing diverse stakeholder groups, including tourists, restaurant practitioners, translators, and language experts. This composition provides a broad perspective on culinary menu translation from both user and professional viewpoints.

As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents fall within the 20–40 age range (66.67%), indicating that the data are largely drawn from individuals within the most active demographic in tourism. Travel and cross-cultural interaction generally engage this age group more, making their perceptions particularly relevant to the study of culinary tourism and communication.

Table 1
Distribution of Respondents by Age

No	Age Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	< 20 years	1	3.70%
2	20–30 years	10	37.04%
3	31–40 years	8	29.63%
4	41–50 years	6	22.22%
5	> 50 years	2	7.41%
	Total	**27**	**100%**

B. Perceptions of English Culinary Menu Translation

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The quantitative findings indicate that respondents generally hold positive perceptions of English culinary menu translation. Mean scores across key variables range from 3.80 to 4.30, reflecting agreement to strong agreement regarding the importance and effectiveness of translated menus in tourism contexts.

TABLE 2
SCORES OF RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

No	Statement	Mean Score	Interpretation
1	Menu translation helps in understanding the food	4.30	Strongly Agree
2	The menu reflects local culture	4.10	Agree
3	The menu translation is accurate	3.90	Agree
4	The translation is easy to understand	3.80	Agree
5	Translation influences interest in trying the food	4.20	Strongly Agree

The highest mean score is observed for the statement that menu translation helps in understanding the food (M = 4.30), indicating that respondents strongly recognise its functional role in facilitating comprehension. A similarly high score is found for the influence of translation on interest in trying the food (M = 4.20), suggesting that translation quality contributes to shaping culinary curiosity and decision-making.

The perception that menus reflect local culture is also rated positively (M = 4.10), although slightly lower than other indicators, indicating that cultural representation is present but may not yet be fully optimised. Meanwhile, accuracy (M = 3.90) and ease of understanding (M = 3.80) receive comparatively lower scores, pointing to potential limitations in clarity and linguistic precision.

These findings suggest that while English menu translation is perceived as effective, improvements in clarity and cultural representation are necessary to enhance its role in supporting meaningful tourism experiences.

C. Cultural Representation and Translation Strategies in Menu Translation

The analysis of culinary menus indicates that translation practises vary considerably in representing cultural elements and communicating meaning to international audiences. Across the data, four dominant strategies were identified: borrowing, literal translation, descriptive translation, and hybrid strategies. Each of these reflects a different approach in balancing cultural preservation and communicative clarity.

Table 3 presents selected examples of menu items and their corresponding translation strategies, illustrating how cultural meaning is either preserved, reduced, or enhanced in the process of translation.

TABLE 3
CULTURAL REPRESENTATION AND TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

Menu Item	Original Term	English Translation	Strategy	Cultural Representation
Sarabba	*Sarabba*	Special Makassar Spices Drink	Hybrid	Strong
Gado-gado	Gado-gado	Indonesian salad of boiled vegetables served with peanut sauce	Descriptive	Strong
Nasi Goreng	Nasi Goreng	Fried Rice	Literal	Moderate
Mie Goreng	Mie Goreng	Fried Noodles	Literal	Moderate
Rica-rica	*Rica-rica*	–	Borrowing	Weak
Parape	*Parape*	–	Borrowing	Weak
Es Kopi Skema	*Es Kopi Skema*	–	Borrowing	Weak
Pisang Goreng	Pisang Goreng	Banana fritter	Literal	Moderate
Kikil Soup	Kikil	Kikil soup (with explanation)	Descriptive	Strong
Nasi Goreng Arum Pala	Nasi Goreng	Fried rice cooked with special Arum Pala spices	Hybrid	Moderate–Strong

The findings show that borrowing is frequently used to preserve local culinary identity, particularly for culture-specific items such as *Sarabba*, *Rica-rica*, and *Parape*. While this strategy maintains authenticity, its effectiveness depends on the presence of additional explanatory elements. When borrowing is used without explanation, as seen in *Rica-rica* and *Parape*, the result is limited accessibility for international audiences, reducing the communicative value of the menu.

Literal translation is commonly applied to general food categories such as Nasi Goreng and Mie Goreng, which are rendered as "Fried Rice" and "Fried Noodles." Although this strategy ensures immediate comprehension, it tends to simplify the original meaning and does not convey the distinctive culinary characteristics embedded in the source culture. As a result, cultural representation is partially reduced, even though functional understanding is achieved.

In contrast, descriptive translation provides a more comprehensive representation of cultural meaning. This strategy includes additional information that explains the composition or cultural context of a dish, as illustrated in the translation of Gado-gado as "Indonesian salad of boiled vegetables served with peanut sauce." Such descriptions enhance clarity while simultaneously introducing cultural elements to the reader, allowing for a more profound understanding of the dish.

A more balanced approach is observed in hybrid strategies, where borrowing is combined with descriptive elements. For example, *Sarabba* is translated as "Special Makassar Spices Drink," preserving the original term while offering an

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explanatory description. Similarly, menu items such as “Fried rice cooked with special Arum Pala spices” retain local identity while improving comprehensibility. This combination appears to be the most effective strategy, as it maintains cultural authenticity while ensuring accessibility.

The analysis also reveals that translation practises differ depending on the type of establishment. More locally orientated venues tend to rely heavily on borrowing and informal naming, whereas restaurants with a broader target audience employ descriptive and hybrid strategies more consistently. For instance, the menu from Arum Pala demonstrates a more structured approach, combining Indonesian terms, English translations, and explanatory descriptions. This layered strategy reflects an attempt to accommodate both local identity and international understanding.

The chosen strategy closely relates to the effectiveness of menu translation, according to the findings. Borrowing alone tends to preserve cultural identity but limits comprehension, while literal translation facilitates understanding but reduces cultural depth. Descriptive and hybrid strategies, on the other hand, provide a more balanced representation by integrating clarity with cultural meaning. These results highlight the importance of strategic translation choices in ensuring that culinary menus function not only as informational texts but also as mediums of cultural communication in tourism contexts.

D. Common Issues in Menu Translation

The analysis of culinary menu translations reveals several recurring issues that affect the clarity and effectiveness of communication, particularly in conveying cultural meaning to international audiences. These issues are closely related to the choice of translation strategies identified in the previous section and reflect inconsistencies in how cultural elements are represented across different menu types, such as the use of literal translations versus more adaptive approaches that consider the target audience's cultural context.

One of the most prominent issues is the use of literal translation, which, although advantageous in conveying general meaning, often results in the reduction of cultural specificity. For instance, common dishes such as Nasi Goreng and Mie Goreng are translated as “Fried Rice” and “Fried Noodles.” While these translations are easily understood, they fail to communicate the distinctive characteristics of Indonesian cuisine, including its use of specific spices, preparation methods, and cultural context. In some cases, literal translation also leads to unnatural or overly rigid expressions, such as “Fried rice cooked with special Arum Pala spices,” which may be grammatically acceptable but does not reflect natural English usage in menu contexts.

Another significant issue is the lack of cultural explanation, particularly in cases where borrowing is used without additional descriptive support. Menu items such as *Rica-rica*, *Parape*, and *Es Kopi Skema* are presented without any explanation, making them inaccessible to international customers who are unfamiliar with these terms. While borrowing helps preserve the original linguistic form, the absence of contextual information limits its communicative function. As a result, these items may fail to attract or inform potential customers, reducing the effectiveness of the menu as a tool for cultural communication.

Inconsistency in translation practises also emerges as a recurring problem. Within the same menu, some items are translated descriptively while others are left untranslated or translated literally. For example, *Sarabba* is accompanied by an explanatory description, whereas other culturally specific items such as *Rica-rica* are not. This inconsistency creates uneven levels of comprehension and may confuse readers, as there is no clear standard guiding the translation approach. The variation in strategies suggests that translation decisions are often made without a systematic framework, resulting in a lack of coherence across menu items.

Current menu translation practices are not yet fully optimised to balance cultural representation and communicative clarity, as these issues indicate. While certain strategies successfully preserve cultural identity, their effectiveness depends on consistent and context-sensitive application. Without such consideration, translation may either obscure cultural meaning or fail to provide sufficient information for international audiences.

E. Impact on Tourist Experience

The findings indicate that the quality of menu translation has a direct and meaningful impact on tourists’ experiences, particularly in terms of comprehension, interest, and decision-making. Quantitative results indicate that respondents generally perceive English menu translation as important in helping them understand food items and encouraging them to try local dishes. High mean scores for statements related to clarity and influence on food choice suggest that translation plays an important part in determining tourists' engagement with local cuisine.

However, actual translation practices observed in the menu data do not uniformly support this positive perception. The presence of untranslated terms and literal translations often limits tourists’ ability to fully understand the dishes. For instance, menu items presented solely in their original forms, such as *Rica-rica* or *Parape*, may create confusion for international visitors who lack cultural familiarity. In such cases, the absence of explanatory information reduces the communicative effectiveness of the menu and may discourage tourists from selecting unfamiliar dishes.

Conversely, menu items that include descriptive or hybrid translations tend to facilitate better understanding and increase interest. Descriptions that explain ingredients, preparation methods, or cultural context provide additional cognitive support, allowing tourists to make more informed choices. This is consistent with respondents’ preferences for clear and informative translations, as reflected in their agreement that translation influences their willingness to try local food.

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The findings also suggest that translation functions not only as a linguistic tool but also as a mediating factor in the overall tourism experience. When menus successfully integrate cultural information with accessible language, they contribute to a more meaningful interaction between tourists and local culture. In contrast, inadequate translation—whether through excessive literalness or lack of explanation—can create barriers that limit cultural engagement.

The results demonstrate that effective menu translation enhances tourists' understanding, supports decision-making, and increases their interest in local cuisine. This highlights the importance of adopting translation strategies that balance clarity and cultural representation, ensuring that culinary menus serve not only as informational guides but also as gateways to cultural experience.

V. Conclusion

This study examines how cultural representation is conveyed in English culinary menu translations and how it influences tourism experiences in the context of South Sulawesi. The findings demonstrate that menu translation plays a crucial role not only as a linguistic tool but also as a medium of cultural communication.

The results reveal that translation practices vary across establishments, with four main strategies identified: borrowing, literal translation, descriptive translation, and hybrid strategies. Descriptive and hybrid approaches emerge as the most effective strategies for balancing cultural preservation and communicative clarity. In contrast, borrowing without explanation and literal translation tend to limit cultural representation and reduce accessibility for international audiences.

The analysis also identifies recurring issues in menu translation, including the overuse of literal translation, lack of cultural explanation, and inconsistency in translation practices. These issues highlight the absence of a systematic approach in translating culture-specific culinary items, resulting in uneven levels of comprehension and cultural engagement.

From the perspective of users, the findings indicate that English menu translation significantly influences tourists' understanding, interest, and decision-making. Clear and culturally informative translations enhance engagement with local cuisine, while inadequate translations may create confusion and reduce the attractiveness of unfamiliar dishes. This study emphasizes the necessity of employing translation strategies that combine clarity with cultural profundity. Culinary menus should not be treated merely as informational texts but as cultural interfaces that facilitate meaningful interaction between tourists and local culture.

In terms of contribution, this study bridges the gap between translation studies and tourism research by providing empirical evidence on how translation strategies affect cultural representation and user experience. It also offers practical implications for restaurant practitioners and translators, emphasising the necessity of more consistent and culturally sensitive translation practices. Future research may expand the scope by involving a larger number of participants, incorporating cross-regional comparisons, or exploring the role of digital menus and multimodal translation in shaping tourism experiences.

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Research on Certain Structures of Contemporary English Expressing the Concept of Comparison

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Abstract—**The article provides an in-depth examination of the complexities involved in contemporary English language usage when it comes to expressing comparisons, particularly through the lens of examples drawn from English-language fiction. It navigates the nuanced relationship between various methods of introduction and the structural components of comparative design. The discussion emphasizes how particular words and expressions conform to specific syntactic structures, indicating the existence of a sophisticated and intricate system for articulating figurative comparisons within the context of the English language. Moreover, the authors elucidate how the choices made in comparison - ranging from similes and metaphors to more direct forms of comparison -reveal deeper layers of meaning and context in literary works. Overall, the article underscores the importance of understanding the intricacies of language as a tool for effective communication and artistic expression.**

Index Terms—**comparison, metaphor, simile, figurative language, syntactic structures**

I. Introduction

This article delves into the grammatical expression of comparison in contemporary English. The concepts of comparison, metaphor, and trope were present in the works of ancient philosophers, evident in Aristotle's differentiation between metaphor and analogy (Aristotle, 1957; Vázquez, 2013). Historically, the study of comparison has primarily been approached from the standpoint of literary studies and stylistics, with limited investigation into its grammatical structure until recent times (Kytö &Romaine, 1997; Wałaszewska, 2013). Definitions of comparison and simile were found in works on literary criticism and stylistics, as well as in reference works on literary terms (Abrams & Harpham, 2015).

Notably, English and American dictionaries typically categorize terms equivalent to the Russian word “comparison” as “Rhet”. Several definitions of comparison from diverse sources were presented, including one stating that “simile expresses a likeness between two things which do not ordinarily belong in the same category” (Abrams & Harpham, 2015; Emirova, 2017).

The most recent studies on comparative constructions provide valuable insight into this problem. Firstly, Alexiadou et al. (2025) offer a great analysis of morphological and syntactic elements necessary for creating comparative constructions, stressing the significance of the syntactical approach in building the compared form. In addition, Kovaliuk (2023) focus on the problem of the influence of speech registers on comparison creation since idioms are typical only for colloquial

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syntax, whereas the formal variety of speech register remains flexible.

Watanabe and Iyeiri (2020) examine the tendency towards the formation of comparative and superlative forms in English, paying attention not only to their stability but also to the factors influencing their use and variation.

Moreover, the influence of dialects on comparative constructions is discussed by Gu (2017). For example, one can consider the significant role played by dialects in constructing comparatives. Huddleston and Pullum (2002) investigate the grammatical structures of comparative constructions.

"In a simile, a comparison between two distinctly different things is 'like' or 'as.'" (Abrams & Harpham, 2015).

The technique of imagery, commonly employed in speech, involves comparing two objects or phenomena based on their similarities. This comparison helps clarify and make our thoughts more tangible, as things are best understood through comparison (Shukhratova, 2024). The artistic technique of comparison hinges on three conditions: Comparison of the subject or phenomenon being described, highlighting the relevant feature of the object or phenomenon for a more comprehensive and clear comparison, and identifying a common feature based on which two objects or phenomena are compared (Karamysheva, 2019).

For convenience, we will use the terms "referent of comparison" for the subject of description, «agent of comparison» for the subject involved in the comparison, and "comparison module" for the common feature, also known as "*tertium comparationis"*. While the terms "agent" and "referent" have long been used in linguistics, this article assigns them a different meaning.

Comparison to a certain extent models the process of human cognition, which, as is known, is carried out according to the principle - from the particular to the general, from the simple to the complex, from the unknown to the known. This cognitive function of comparison is closely related to the human ability to identify similarities between objects and interpret relationships between concepts (Emirova, 2017; Vázquez, 2013).

This dialectical law is also applicable to comparison. It is no coincidence that various authors emphasize the role of comparison in explaining relationships between objects and phenomena, as the phenomenon used for explanation may help make a less familiar phenomenon more understandable (Gentner, 1983).

As for the first statement – about the belonging of the agent and the referent to different "classes" – it is difficult to fully agree with him, but it is no less difficult to argue since the authors do not indicate on what basis or at what level the "classes" are distinguished.

In any case, we are not talking here about grammatical subclasses of class words. For verification, we took a thousand examples of figurative comparison with an erroneous sample from five English authors and selected those cases where the reference of comparison is a grammatical subclass of words N with the meaning of "persons" – John, he, the man, etc. After analyzing this material, we insist on the term grammatical subclass, since the allocation of the latter has a formal justification: first of all, the ability to be replaced by the pronoun he. In addition, in approximately 41% of cases, an agent of the same subclass occurs with a referent with the meaning of "person" (Shukhratova, 2024).

II. Methods

In the context of using the sufficiency formula to compute the following expression:

$t = \frac{P_1 - P_2}{\sqrt{P}(1-P)(\frac{1}{n_1}+\frac{1}{n_2})}$

the designated parameters are:

$P_1 = 0{,}95$;

$P_2 = 0{,}59$;

$P = 0{,}82$;

$n_1 = 614$;

$n_2 = 386$.

Upon calculation, the outcome is as follows:

$t = \frac{0{,}95-0{,}59}{\sqrt{0{,}82}(1-0{,}82)(\frac{1}{386}+\frac{1}{614})} = 14$ (Field, 2013; Larson-Hall, 2015).

The calculated t-value suggests that a randomly selected sample size effectively demonstrates, with high definiteness, the comparative occurrence of an agent characterized as a "person" and a non-person agent within the same specified value range (Gries, 2013; Levshina, 2015).

Furthermore, it aligns with other empirical observations indicating that comparisons between the agent and the referent tend to fall within the same grammatical subclass (Biber et al., 1999; Haspelmath, 2010). For instance, when focusing on a subclass of N words representing inanimate objects, our data reveals that the agent and referent fall within the same subclass in 57% of instances (Croft, 2001; Murphy, 2010).

Likewise, our calculations illustrate that expressions by an abstract noun representing the referent align with the agent's subclass in 70% of cases (Langacker, 2008; Taylor, 2002).

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III. Results and Discussion

To verify the sufficiency of the number of examples used, we use calculations based on the "2 × 2 feature conjugacy table" 4, taking as a basis the oppositions: agent – referent and "person" – "non-person"; the corresponding literary examples are given in Table 1, and the results are given in Table 2 (Agresti, 2019; Field, 2013).

Table 1
Distribution of Agent and Referent by Grammatical Subclass ("Person", "Non-Person") With Illustrative Examples

	Agent "person"	Agent "non-person"
Referent "person"	You have treated *me* like a child (Wodehouse, 1935).	...*he* is as helpless as a fly (Maugham, 1963).
Referent "non-person"	Fish can't swim like *me* (Wodehouse, 1935).	..*they* (rooms) are like *booths* in a crowded fair (Maugham, 1963).

Table 2
Frequency Distribution of Agent–Referent Combinations Across Grammatical Subclasses

	Agent "person"	Agent "person"	Total
Referent "person"	158	228	386
Referent "non-person"	18	596	614
Total	176	824	1000

We concur with P.V. Palievsky's viewpoint that certain expressions, such as "just like a rectangle, a square has four right angles", should not be categorized as figurative comparisons (Palievsky, 1979; Bredin, 1998). However, it is imperative to recognize figurative comparisons where both the agent and the referent belong to the same grammatical subclass (Croft, 2001; Haspelmath, 2010). This can be effectively illustrated through the following examples: You have treated *me* like a *child..."* (Wodehouse, 1935). ...they are like *booths* in a crowded fair or the *cages* of animals in a circus (Maugham, 1963). *Snobbishness* in like *Death...* (Thackeray, 1959).

By "formal expression", we mean a division of nouns into two categories based on definiteness and indefiniteness. This is illustrated in Table 3 below.

Table 3
Definiteness and Indefiniteness Patterns in Comparative Constructions

	A definite agent	An indefinite agent
A definite referent	the N^1 like the N^2	the N^1 like a N^2
An indefinite referent	a N^1 like the N^2	a N^1 like a N^2

Since words of other classes, such as V class, do not have a category of definiteness or indefiniteness, we will exclude them from our analysis. Therefore, the following example will not be considered:

To take money from him was like robbing a child... (Maugham, 1963).

The results of our calculations are very clear, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Quantitative Distribution of Definite and Indefinite Agents and Referents in Comparative Structures

	A definite agent		An indefinite agent		Total	
	Absolute	Relative	Absolute	Relative	Absolute	relative
A definite referent	145	0,21	560	0,79	705	1,00
An indefinite referent	19	0,47	22	0,53	41	1,00
Total	164	0,22	582	0,78	746	1,00

According to the significance formula, the calculated difference "*t"* is approximately 4. Among the four possible permutations involving definite and indefinite agents and a referent, 79% of cases align with a specific variant: a definite referent is an indefinite agent. We assume that the comparative construction of N_1 like an N_2 is nuclear and that the uncertainty in the referent's category is a result of syntactic relations, which are "stronger" than the internal relations of the comparison itself (Fillmore, 1968; Taylor, 2002).

For instance, in the sentence "She has a nose like a pump-handle" (Thackeray, 1959), we tend to infer that the indefinite article of the N-referent "nose" is clarified by its association with the N_1 "HAVE" a N_2 construction. If we choose a comparative construction with a simple transformation, the referent of comparison will gain an indicator of definiteness.

the HAVE a N_2 like a N_3 ⟵ { the N_1 HAVE a N_2 ; the N_2 BE like a N_3 }

In the specific example under consideration, the operation takes the following form:

She has *a* nose like *a* pump-handle. ⟵ { She has *a* (funny) nose. ; *Her* nose looks like a pump-handle. }

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The variations from the initial nuclear structure of the N^1 like a N^2 also involve the pairing of a specific agent with a particular reference.

For instance, the quote "*The* rogue, like *the* artist and perhaps *the* gentleman, belongs to no class..." exemplifies a comparison with a high level of definiteness. This definiteness can be ascertained by several factors, such as when N is used for comparison as a representative of an entire class or when it represents a word expressing a philosophical concept, as demonstrated in the provided example:

He could as little escape her as *the* cause can escape the effect (Maugham, 1963).

Another instance is when a proper name is used for comparison, as shown in the quote: "Fate put him there as it sent Napoleon to St. Helena" (Thackeray, 1959).

Occasionally, a comparison is made to an object that is prominently visible to the interlocutor. This kind of comparison, which involves a specific agent and referent, is defined as emphatically specific. An example of this can be found in the quote: "*She's forty, and as tough and as sour as this bit of lemon peel".*

We respectfully challenge J.G. Birenbaum's classification of comparisons into subject-logical and figurative (Birenbaum, 1966). While Birenbaum situates our presented comparison within the "subject-logical" category, we believe it to be figurative (Jakobson, 1960; Searle, 1979). Furthermore, the certainty of the agent can be constructively determined as exemplified by: "*They are as little their own master as the slaves chained to the benches of a galley"* (Maugham, 1963). If the agent in this example lacked a limiting definition, it would not meet the criteria for certainty (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Jespersen, 1924). We find deviations from the construction of "the N^1 like a N^2" to "a N^1 like the N^2" particularly intriguing. In these cases, the content of the comparisons demands attention (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), as seen in: Even a penny-in-the-slot machine treats you better than *that. ...a* dog would be better off in his kennel with *an* old bone... than *I* was with *her* (Sillitoe, 1961).

"Historians of the social life of the later Roman Empire speak of a certain young man of Ariminum, who would jump into rivers and swim... When his friends said, "You fish!" he would answer, "*Fish* can't swim like *me"* (Wodehouse, 1935).

It is evident from the provided examples that the roles of the referent and the agent appear to have interchanged (Fillmore, 1968; Talmy, 2000). Specifically, in the last example, the description subject pertains to a young man, as opposed to a fish, despite the word "fish" assuming the role of a referent, and "me" serving as the agent. In essence, the formal referent in this context acts as a logical agent, akin to what occurs in passive transformation (Chomsky, 1957; Perlmutter, 1978).

It is postulated that the structure "an N^2 like the $N^{1"}$ should be regarded as a converse transformation of the nuclear construction "the N^1 like an N^2". Alternatively, the construction "a N^2 like the N^{1}" can be represented as (the N^1 like a N^2) + along with an inversion morpheme (Harris, 1951; Mel'chuk, 1988). Additional evidence can be presented to validate the notion that the inverse comparison is a derivative of a nuclear design featuring a specific referent and an indeterminate agent. In two out of the three examples provided, the formal referent is the word "animal", while the agent is a word with the semantic meaning of "faces". This combination of a referent and an agent deviates from the general pattern; out of 1000 continuous examples, 97 examples involve an agent "animal" associated with the referent "person", whereas only five cases entail a comparison of "animal" with "person" (Nida, 1975; Lyons, 1977).

According to Apresyan's terminology, the distinction between the subclasses "person" and "animal" is delineated formally: "person" is denoted by the pronouns "he" and "she", (Apresyan, 1995; Wierzbicka, 1996), but not "it", whereas "animal" encompasses all three pronouns: "he", "she", and "it" It is imperative to discern the (the N^{l} like a N^2) + the inversion morpheme from the structurally analogous construction " a N^1 like the $N^{2"}$ where the use of indefinite and definite determiners is contingent upon situational or constructive factors (Heim, 1982; Kamp, 1981).

"...an inkstand on the center table like *the coffin of a baby..."* (Thackeray, 1959). *Lights* appeared, like "*the blazing eyes of a dragon swooping down to devour its prey"* (Wodehouse, 1935).

We have previously discussed instances of definiteness and indefiniteness arising from situational or constructive conditions, particularly concerning constructions such as "the N^1 like the N^2" and "a N^1 like the $N^{2"}$ (Christophersen, 1939; Wierzbicka, 1996). Now, let us delve into the relationship between the method of introducing comparison and the formal content of comparative construction (Taylor, 2002).

The introducing comparison method involves using a specific functional word or construction to connect an agent and a referent, essentially conveying a comparative connection (Jakobson, 1960). To clarify the concept of comparative turnover, we define it as the segment of the utterance containing the comparison agent and the functional word introducing this agent (Nida, 1975). To delineate the boundaries of comparative construction, you can employ the following techniques (Perlmutter, 1978); a) Identify and highlight the keyword in the sentence, serving as a formal marker of comparison; b) Rearrange the sentence to position the identified functional word as close as possible to the end of the utterance; this, together with the functional word, will constitute the desired comparative construction; c) Substitute a word expressing the comparison module instead of the resulting construction (Mel'chuk, 1988).

Let us use an example to apply these techniques: He was *like* Hitler in the face ^{1} ← → In the face, he was *like Hitler* ← → In the face, he was *ugly* (Sillitoe, 1961; Chomsky, 1957; Lyons, 1977).

Compare

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Well, then – now they are all away, let us frisk at our ease and have at everything, like the bull in the China shop (Thackeray, 1959). In this specific case, to maintain grammatical correctness, it is necessary to position the phrase "like the bull" before the concluding part of the sentence. Consequently, the comparative structure is formulated as "like the bull in the China shop" (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Jespersen, 1924). Comparative phrases can be categorized based on the introductory words as follows (Lyons, 1977; Leech, 2006): Initiated by the functional word "like". Initiated by the functional word "as" (Fillmore, 1968); Introduced by the functional word "as" with a prepositive correlate "as/not so" (Jespersen, 1924); Introduced by the functional word "as" with a postpositive correlate "so"; Introduced by the conjunction "as if" (Chomsky, 1957), Equivalent to the conjunction "as though"; Introduced by the way conjunctions (Harris, 1952); Phrases introduced by the verb "BE" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Searle, 1979); Phrases introduced by the verb ""SEEM"; Expressions introduced by the preposition "of" (Christophersen, 1939); Phrases introduced by the combination of "a sort of" (Wierzbicka, 1996); The construction of *an* N^1 *of a* N^2 from the number of constructions introduced by the preposition "of", where N^2 is the referent, and N1 is the agent (Mel'chuk, 1988); examples where the comparison is expressed in a single word (Jakobson, 1960); Various types of isolated cases, consolidated in Table 5 under the column "other" (Nida, 1975).

Based on the content of the construction, the following distinctions are made: (Talmy, 2000; Taylor, 2002): a. Type N; b. Type AN; c. Prep type N; d. Type N prep. N (phrase); e. Type V (non-finite form); f. Type NV (subordinate comparative).

Table 5 delineates the relationship between the method of introducing comparison and the content of comparative construction. Additionally, the table denotes the frequency of module expression in the statement for various methods of introducing comparison. By using the data from this table, the description of the comparison system can be outlined, with the initial principle of classification based on the method of introduction of comparative construction.

The phrases introduced by the functional word "*like*" in 74% of cases contain either a single word of class N. For example: "I am going to work *like a horse"* (Wodehouse, 1935).

Or a word of class N with an attribute: "Yes", she said, casting away diplomacy "*like the crumpled cake paper she let fall to the floor"* (Sillitoe, 1961).

There are examples when "like" introduces the prepositional construct. For example, in the phrase "*like in Hungary"* (Sillitoe, 1961). When we encounter the structure "like N^1 prep. "N^2", we believe that there are two main cases to consider: The comparison is between one of the two nouns in a comparative form: "she goes parading abroad like Solomon in all his glory..." (Thackeray, 1959); Both nouns in the comparative form are part of the comparison, each having two referents: His *clothes* hung upon *him* like *rags* on a *scarecrow* (Maugham, 1963). From a phrase of this type, two sentences containing a comparison can be derived.

His clothes hung upon him like rags on a scarecrow. ⟨ He (was) like a scarecrow. / His clothes (were) like rags.

The functional word like also introduces phrases that include words of class V: It was like quarrelling with Westminster Abbey (Wodehouse, 1935).

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TABLE 5
DISTRIBUTION OF COMPARATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS BY INTRODUCTION METHOD, PHRASE CONTENT, AND FREQUENCY OF EXPRESSED COMPARISON MODULUS

The method of introduction of comparison	phrase content							The number of cases of expressed modulus
	N absolute / relative	A N, Absolute / relative	pr.N, absolute / relative	Npr.N, Absolute / relative	V, Absolute / relative	NV, Absolute / relative	Total	
Like	136 / 0,35	155 / 0,39	2 / 0,01	75 / 0,19	5 / 0,01	21 / 0,05	394 / 1,0	8 / 0,02
As	9 / 0,15	16 / 0,26	5 / 0,08	7 / 0,11	-	25 / 0,40	62 / 1,0	5 / 0,08
as/not so…as	20 / 0,33	14 / 0,23	1 / 0,02	3 / 0,05	-	22 / 0,37	60 / 1,0	60 / 1,00
as…so	-	-	-	-	-	6 / 1,0	6 / 1,0	1 / 0,16
as if	-	-	3 / 0,03	-	15 / 0,13	97 / 0,84	115 / 1,0	12 / 0,10
as though	-	-	1 / 0,02	-	3 / 0,05	58 / 0,93	62 / 1,0	3 / 0,05
the way	-	-	-	-	-	6 / 1,0	6 / 1,0	-
Than	8 / 0,36	5 / 0,23	-	2 / 0,09	2 / 0,09	5 / 0,23	22 / 1,0	22 / 1,0
Be	17 / 0,32	30 / 0,56	-	4 / 0,08	-	2 / 0,04	53 / 1,0	-
Seem	1 / 0,04	5 / 0,19	-	-	20 / 0,73	1 / 0,04	27 / 1,0	-
Of	12 / 0,50	10 / 0,42	-	-	2 / 0,08	-	24 / 1,0	18 / 0,75
a sort of	5 / 0,42	7 / 0,58	-	-	-	-	12 / 1,0	-
N of N	32 / 0,70	14 / 0,30	-	-	-	-	46 / 1,0	-
"Morpholo gic"	74 / 1,00	-	-	-	-	-	74 / 1,0	-
Others	12 / 0,37	10 / 0,27	2 / 0,04	-	-	13 / 0,35	37 / 1,0	4 / 0,11
Total	327	265	14	92	46	256	1000	133
The average weighted by the number of examples	0,33	0,26	0,01	0,09	0,05	0,26	1,00	0,13

The following transformations of phrases into constructs with N occur: It was like quarrelling with Westminster Abbey ←→ It was like a quarrel with Westminster Abbey. “It was like quarreling with Westminster Abbey” becomes “It was like a quarrel with Westminster Abbey”. Special attention should be paid to the ability of “like” to introduce two-part NV turns, with various distributions: ...his paws closed over the box like he'd squash it to nothing (Sillitoe, 1961). It is worth noting that the like NV construction has a stylistic colouring, as it is used exclusively to create a colloquial flavour.

The most common type among the phrases introduced by the functional word “as” is “as NV”, indicating the predominantly allied nature of “as”. Fate put him there *as it sent Napoleon to St. Helena* (Thackeray, 1959).

A careful comparison of the comparative rotations introduced by “as” with the supporting structures may suggest a weakening of the allied character of “as” in comparison. For example, in the vast majority of cases, the reference phrase and comparison use either verbs that are extremely close in meaning or the same ones. I would find him poring over the poems of Mallarme, and he *read* them *as a child reads...* (Maugham, 1963).

In other cases, auxiliary verbs are used to avoid repetition.

I like to see an old aristocrat swelling with pride of race, the descendant of illustrious Norman robbers, whose blood has been pure for centuries, and who *looks down on common Englishmen* as a free-born American *does on a niger.* (Thackeray, 1959).

Turning to the quantitative distribution of comparative constructions introduced by “as”, the combined instances of “as N” and “as AN” constitute 31% of all instances of comparative rotations introduced by “as”. For instance: “I should have treated him as a brother...” (Sillitoe, 1961). “He started buoyantly, but by evening he was *as a punctured balloon”* (Wodehouse, 1935).

The constructions “as N” and “as AN” are synonymous with the constructions “like N” and “like AN”, as exemplified in “I should have treated him as a brother” and “I should have treated him like a brother”. Likewise, they are also homonymous with the constructions “as N” and “as AN” with an indicative function, illustrated in the examples:

(A) “I should have treated him as a brother (as if he were my brother)” and

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(B) “I should have treated him as a brother (because he was my brother)”.

To differentiate these two homonymous constructions formally, we propose the following approach: positioning the referent and the agent as the subject and predicate, respectively. An affirmative sentence indicates an indicative construction, whereas a negative sentence implies a comparative construction. For an indicative construction: N^1 as N^2 ← → BE N. For the comparative construction: N^1 as N^2 ← → N^1 BE not N^2. In our case:

(A) “I should have treated him as a brother”. “He is not (my) brother” (comparative construction);

(B) “I should have treated him as a brother”. “He is (my) brother” (indicative construction). Another method of formally differentiating homonymous constructions in the form of “as N” and “as AN” can be derived from J.G. Birenbaum's indication that the indicative construction is not used with the correlate.

So, for comparative constructions, it is possible to have as N as^1 Adv_m /Aas^2 N (where Adv_m /A_m is the comparison module), which is impossible for indicative constructions.

For example (A): should have treated him *as a brother.* I should have treated him *as *tenderly as a brother.*

Among the structures introduced by “as”, constructions are also mentioned *as prep. N* и *as N^1 prep. N^2.*

I could only drawback in horror *as from a monster of hardly human shape* (Maugham, 1963).

Once upon a time, there was erected in Longacre Square, New York, a large white statue, labelled “Our City” the figure of a woman in Grecian robes holding aloft a shield. Critical citizens objected to it... The sculpture should have represented New York *as a conjurer in evening dress* (Wodehouse, 1935).

Concerning the constructions “as *prep. N* и *as N^1 prep. N^2*”, all that has been stated about “*like prep. N* и *like N^1 prep. N^2*” constructions apply equally.

Phrases with constructions introduced by “as”, which have a prepositive correlate “*as/not so”*, differ from phrases with “like” (without a correlate) in two ways. Firstly, in such sentences, the comparison is necessarily expressed. For example:

Children with cheeks *as red as the apples* in the orchards bobbed curtsies to us at the cottage-doors (Thackeray, 1959).

Cf.: ...woman with cheeks like apples, toiling away from morning to night (Maugham, 1963).

If a comparative phrase is used in conjunction with the words “as” or “like”, the phrase may be placed either before or after the referent it compares, or the phrase may be split into two distinct sentences. In constructions using the format “as^1 Adv_m /A_m as^2 N”, there is a fixed sequence: the referent being compared is the agent of the “as/not so” module, which is expressed through an adverb or adjective. This sequence remains consistent regardless of any linear expansion of the construction.

As with the “*as/not”* so correlate most often (in 66% of cases) introduces the construction *N* or *AN*: She's *as thin as a thread-paper...* (Thackeray, 1959). I felt as happy *as a little child that evening* (Wodehouse, 1935).

The fact that when construction is entered “*as/not so ... as*” there is certainly a comparison module, it makes it possible for the speaker to enhance the effect of comparison, for example, with the help of irony, when the module expresses something opposite to what follows ...Wimpole Street, that is *as cheerful as the Catacombs...* (Thackeray, 1959).

Other artistic techniques used in the turnover introduced as/not so ... as are: expression of several modules with one referent and one agent: *She's forty, and* as tough *and* as sour as this bit of lemon peel. ... of several agents with one referent and one module: ...and she is *as poor as you or I.* (Thackeray, 1959) multiple modules and multiple agents with one referent:

And O, stars and garters! How she would start if she heard that she – she, as chaste as Diana, she, as solemn as Minerva — that she too was a Snob! (Thackeray, 1959).

Then, “as*/not so ... as*” can introduce a structure containing NV: He took and executed orders as automatically as the penny-in-the-slot musical box in the corner took pennies and produced tunes. Phrases of this type should be distinguished from homonymous phrases with the compositional pair “as ... as”, for example: “An understanding, as pleasant as it was new and strange...” (Wodehouse, 1935).

To formally distinguish the above phrases, we propose a test for the exclusion of as^1 Adv_m /$A_{m”}$, correlating as/not so with the subsequent module, for example: Did not take and executed orders *as the penny-in-the-slot musical-box in the corner took pennies and produced tunes*.

The phrase with the compositional pair “as ... as”, as you can see, does not make sense if you omit “as pleasant”.

The designs of as^1 Adv_m /A_m as^2 prep. N^2 и as^1 Adv_m /A_m N^1 prep. N^2:

They are *as fond of gossip in Tahiti as in an English village...*

...he is *as helpless as a fly in a* spider's *web* (Maugham, 1963).

In many cases, N^1 prep. N^2 can be deployed in N^1V prep. N^2. For example, in the sentence:

It is the mother of Rev. F. Hugly, as proud of her son in his white choker as Cornelia of her Jewes at Rome (Thackeray, 1959).

We could not have made a syntactic connection between “Cornelia” and “her jewels” unless it was for the predicative phrase “is proud”, which is part of the supporting clause in the sentence.

In some cases, we may need to highlight phrases that are introduced by the subordinating conjunction “as”, which often has a correlative word “so”.

For example, in the phrase Just *as* we select a number on which to stake our money, *so* do we select a type of girl whom we think we should like to marry. The phrase “just as”, introduces a comparison, while the phrase “so” acts as a correlative to the preceding clause. Such phrases have the following features: The comparative element is always prepositional; The

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comparative phrase has a structure of "as + noun or pronoun + verb"; After "so", the verb in the second clause is often in an emphatic inversion or analytical form. For instance, as he had felt then, so *did he feel* now; Most (84%) comparisons introduced by "as if", follow the pattern "as if + noun". These comparisons compare entire situations or events. For example, it was to make him feel *as if he had been laughing in the cathedral*. He shot forward *as if some strong hands were behind him with a needle* (Wodehouse, 1935).

The main feature of this construction is the use of a verb in the subjunctive mood, which indicates unreality. Another type of construction involves using "*as if V"*, which includes a non-person form of the verb, such as the infinitive, present participle, or past participle. Examples include: And what was our astonishment when Fanny got up *as if to go*\ (Thackeray, 1959). She kept her eyes to herself still, *as if not daring* to look at the old things around her... "No", she said, *as if not interested*. Additionally, there is the construction using "as if the preposition". For instance: He had watched her... stand at the counter *as if in a trance* (Sillitoe, 1961). Both "as if", and "as though" constructions are similar, but there is a slight difference that leads us to divide them into two types. This difference lies in the use of as with "if" compared to "as with though". - I'm *as* indifferent to him *as if* he were a stranger (Maugham, 1963). As *if* is twice as common as *though,* indicating greater mobility and flexibility. *As though*, on the other hand, is more conservative, as indicated by the figures showing the relative frequency of use of *as if* and *as though* in constructions involving the non-verbal element (NV). As if NV is used 84% of the time, while NV is used 93% of the time.

The constructions introduced by way, on the contrary, have only one form - *the way + NV*. These constructions differ from those introduced by as if and as though in that the predicate verb can express both real and hypothetical relations and can therefore take the form of the indicative mood. For example: "You enter these palaces by back-doors. "That was *the way* the Calabasas got their peerage", the misanthropic Ponto said after dinner (Thackeray, 1959).

Phrases introduced by the word "than" have a specific feature. In phrases with comparative turns introduced by "than", the comparison is always expressed by a comparative degree of an adjective or an adverb. Thus, the construction: (Adv_m /A_m)-er than N или (Adv_m /A_m)-r than AN, "N or AN + (Advm/Am)-er than" can be represented as "(Adv_m / A_m) -er than N", for example, "*...blood* is *thicker than water..."* (Wodehouse, 1935). *You* have *no more* spirit *than a mongrel cub* (Maugham, 1963), etc.

These constructions account for 50% of all cases with "than". The next most frequent type is "Adv_m /A_m)-er NV", (23%): *...a dog* would have been *better* off in his kennel with an old bone... *than I was with her* (Sillitoe, 1961). The remaining constructions are "Adv_m /A_m)-er than V и (Adv_m/A_m)-er than N^1 prep. N^2: In the latter case, N^2 is the object of the preposition: A single family has *no more right to build* itself a temple of that sort *than to erect a Tower of Babel* (Thackeray, 1959). He lived in Paris lonelier *than an anchorite in the deserts...* (Maugham, 1963).

In Table 5, comparative phrases with the verb "BE" not introduced by any special functional word are highlighted and referred to as "comparisons" introduced by the verb "BE". However, they differentiate between the referent and agent, which allows us to discuss the presence of comparison, albeit this construction may be on the peripheries of the system. As this comparison is somewhat implicit, it is not explicitly expressed in the module.

The most common comparative structures without the use of "like" include BE N and BE AN, where N represents the agent and BE represents the verb for becoming, being, or remaining in a prior state. The BE (A)N structure can be viewed as an intensified version of the BE (A)N formation. The expressivity of this comparison is further enhanced by the fact that the comparative relation often coincides with the predicative relation that underpins the sentence structure. Love *is* a sickness (Maugham, 1963). The BE N and BE AN structures can also be employed for negative comparisons: *I am not* a racehorse at all... (Sillitoe, 1961). In some instances, we encounter constructions featuring BE NV and BE N^1 prep. N^2. It (beauty) *meant* to him *what God means to the believer...* (Maugham, 1963). Affinities *are the zero on the roulette-board of life* (Wodehouse, 1935). The differences between the structures introduced by the verbs "to be" and "to seem" are slight in terms of construction. Some common features of these structures include: The absence of conjunctions; The presence of comparative and predicative relationships, and an unexpressed subject.

Design differences can be seen in the following ways: If the typical content of a "to be" turn is a noun or adjective, the "to seem" turn typically consists of "seems to be V", with V being an infinitive. For example, "Something *seemed* to twist his heart" (Maugham, 1963). Due to the nature of verbal comparisons, it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish the referent from the subject in a sentence, since situations and actions are being compared.

The "seeming" structures do not have an emphatic quality. In some cases, the structures "seems N", "seems AN", and "seems NV" are used. For instance, in the sentence "For what felt like an eternity, George kept staring at her", it is unclear who is acting staring, as the duration of the action is compared to a vague amount of time. To Maud it *seemed a hopeful silence*. It *seemed* to her *that in these few words was contained the kernel of her trouble* (Wodehouse, 1935). The constructions introduced by the preposition "*of"* often have the structure "and a/an": ...you must have something *of an actor* in you... ...her face... gave you an impression *of almost indecent nakedness...* (Maugham, 1963).

Various structures of *V-ing* are observed in linguistic analysis linguistic analysis, various structures of V-ing are observed. The waiter was a tall, stringy man who gave an impression *of having no spine* (Wodehouse, 1935).

These structures involve prepositional phrases introduced by the preposition "of" and the word preceding it, both of which play significant roles in the intended meaning. Two distinct cases have been identified:

a) When the word preceding "of" represents subjective perception, such as impression, idea, or effect, it produces phrases such as "He gave you somewhat *the idea of* a coachman dressed up for the occasion" (Maugham, 1963).

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b) Alternatively, when the word preceding "of" functions as a substantive comparison module, phrases like "George passed through the ocean with the silent *dignity of* a torpedo" (Wodehouse, 1935) are generated. This differentiation can be formalized and articulated through specified transformations. Additionally, comparisons involving the structure of N are juxtaposed with possessive form comparisons. Both categories involve the word preceding the preposition "of" and necessitate distinct transformations for analysis N's $N_m \leftarrow \rightarrow N_m$ BE as that of N_a: ...she led me *a dog's life* (Sillitoe, 1961), a dog's life $_a\rightarrow$ (my) life was as that of a dog. Moreover, a distinct construction, "a sort of A", has been identified, characterized by the absence of the module in the sentence, confinement to N or AN in the phrase's content, and the weakened lexical meaning of the word "sort". She's *a sort of literary onion* (Wodehouse, 1935).

Finally, there is a need to distinguish another construction with the preposition "of", possessing the form N^1 *of* N^2, which differs qualitatively from the aforementioned cases, such as *"the dignity of a torpedo".* In this context, N^1 represents the agent, and N^2 represents the referent. For instance, "The black rose of 'Bert's hand..." (Sillitoe, 1961). Comparisons between these two entities can be accurately expressed using the transformation of " N^1 of $N^2 \leftarrow \rightarrow N^2$ like $N^1$is similar to N^2, "such as" *The black rose of Bert's hand ← → Bert's hand (is) like a black rose*." Such comparisons can often be emphasized, as in "These pigs of chauffeurs!" (Wodehouse, 1935).

It should be noted in a specific instance that there are words that convey the concept of comparison within one term. These words appear to encapsulate the full comparative structure and can thus be described as morphological expressions of comparison. Words expressing comparison can be created through affixation, the addition of suffixes, or word composition. One common suffix used to create such words is "-like" An example of this is the phrase "A *frog-like* croak was the best George could do..." (Wodehouse, 1935).

The base to which the "*-like*" suffix is added is a comparative agent. A word that is formed by adding the "-like" to an adjective refers to a specific referent. Another suffix used for expressing comparison is "-y". This suffix is commonly used to form adjectives from nouns denoting "substance". For example: "They turned to an *oily* grey..." (Wodehouse, 1935). Occasionally, the "*-ly*" suffix can be used to create comparative adverbs: "Well, George had *simply-Simonly* believed all this" (Aldington, 1929).

Sometimes, suffixes such as "*-ic*" and "*-ish*" may be employed: "…angelic mother…" (Thackeray, 1959), "…kittenish moods…" (Aldington, 1929). Comparison can also be conveyed through complex adjectives, where the first element is a substantive serving as the subject of comparison and the second element acts as a modifier. This technique is frequently used to describe colours, such as "*pea-green"* (Thackeray, 1959).

Finally, there is a method by which a subject and referent can be combined to form a complex adjective. This adjective is formed by combining two substantive roots, where the first is the subject and the second is the referent. The suffix "*ed*" is added to create the complex adjective. Interestingly, the second root often refers to a body part.

In the last column of Table 4, we have included data for comparisons that do not follow any of the previous structures, but still meet our definition. This includes instances where comparisons are conveyed through verbs like "suggest", "remind", "resume" (+ N), and so on. For example: "Do you like Broadway, Peggy?". *"Do/like Broadway*? *Does a kid like candy?* Why, don't you?" *Serpent Edith Butler* had stolen his play. Surely *Jeanne* must be touched by his heroism? But no. She was scolding furiously. Suppose *Andromeda* had turned and scolded Perseus after he had slain the sea monster! (Wodehouse, 1935).

Finally, comparisons in the form of literary allusions have also been made, such as in the case of Edith Butler stealing a play from The Serpent or Andromeda turning around and rebuking Perseus after he had killed the sea monster (Wodehouse, 1935).

IV. Conclusion

The relationship between the method of introduction and the structural composition of comparative constructions in the English language is both clear and significant. When comparative phrases are introduced by prepositions or phrases such as "of", "a sort of", and "be", they typically conform to a structure where the elements involved are represented by a singular noun (N) or an indefinite article (AN). This method of introduction emphasizes the notion of similarity or association that the comparison seeks to convey.

On the other hand, expressions that begin with phrases like "as if", "as though", or "the way" often follow a more complex two-part structure. These types of constructions suggest a more nuanced relationship between the elements being compared, highlighting similarities that may not be as direct as those indicated by the simpler forms.

Furthermore, certain formal comparative expressions - such as "as", "as/not so ... as", and "than"- exhibit a dual nature. These words can be employed to introduce comparisons that span a range of content types, moving from noun phrases (N) to noun-verb combinations (NV). Their versatility allows for a wide array of comparative implications, enriching the depth of the comparison being drawn.

This analysis points to the existence of a sophisticated system for articulating figurative comparisons in the English language, and its characteristics reveal several important patterns:

a) The subject and the agent involved in figurative comparisons frequently belong to the same grammatical subclass within the noun category. This suggests a shared quality or characteristic that lends itself to effective comparison.

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b) In the pivotal structure of comparison, the subject is often marked by a level of definiteness - indicating certainty or specificity - while the agent typically embodies a sense of indefiniteness, indicating a more general or vague quality. This distinction enriches the comparison, as it juxtaposes certainty against ambiguity.

c) The language demonstrates a consistent and systematic relationship between the method used to introduce a comparative construction and the structural content that follows. This harmony in language use not only aids in clarity but also contributes to the richness and expressiveness of figurative language in English.

Overall, this detailed exploration underscores the complexity and the refined nature of comparative constructions in English, illustrating how various elements work together to create effective and meaningful comparisons.

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Piety as Ethical Self-Formation: Rethinking Agency in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*

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***Abstract*—Contemporary arguments in feminist literary criticism have increasingly challenged the belief that agency must be expressed in terms of resistance, emancipation, or secular autonomy. In this respect, the novel *Minaret* by Leila Aboulela proposes a powerful reworking of Muslim female subjectivity based on the practise of religion as a discipline. This article examines the novel in terms of piety as ethical self-formation and argues that it redefines agency in ways that challenge secular, liberal conceptions of self-sovereignty. The paper uses a theory-based close reading to examine Najwa's transformation through prayer, veiling, silence, and submission as the development of cultivated capacity as described by Saba Mahmood. These embodied practices are not merely symbolic identifiers; they are means of moral self-cultivation. Situated within the context of post-secular feminist debates and diasporic literary studies, the article shows that Najwa's submission is not oppression but a deliberate alignment, thus breaking down the binary of oppression and emancipation. This paper broadens the conceptual range of feminist literary criticism and positions piety as a multifaceted form of agency in the works of contemporary Muslim women by foregrounding habituation, embodiment, and moral intentionality.**

***Index Terms*—post-secular feminism, diaspora, Leila Aboulela, *Minaret*, religious subjectivity**

I. Introduction

Minaret (2005) by Leila Aboulela is uniquely positioned among Anglophone Muslim women's fiction as a diasporic novel focused not on religious liberation but on a return to religion (Ben Amara, 2022). The book follows the spiritual transformation of Najwa, a Sudanese woman who relocates between elite secular privilege in Khartoum and migrant precarity in London and between cultural Islam and lived religious devotion. However, critical treatments of Najwa have tended to explore her religiosity through secular, liberal paradigms in which agency is synonymous with resistance, autonomy, or the ability to escape tradition (Awajan & Al-Shetawi, 2021).

Dominant feminist interpretations of the writing of Muslim women have traditionally prioritised structures of voice, visibility, and defiance, framing religious commitment as an act of oppression or a tactical act of resistance (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020; Satiti, 2021). Even when it has been sympathetic to the faith of Muslim women, scholarship has tended to measure agency against liberal autonomy, implicitly moralising self-determination as independent of religious norms (Saleem & Zaidi, 2022; Silva, 2022).

Recent post-secular feminist literature has called into question this paradigm's belief that emancipation should be secular (Grenz, 2023; Sahar, 2025). Based on Saba Mahmood's theory of piety as ethical self-formation, these studies have proposed that agency cannot be reduced to acts of resistance but must be comprehended as an ability that is developed in the process of discipline, habituation, and moral intentionality (Longman, 2021; Tareen, 2023).

Although Mahmood's framework has become increasingly prominent in anthropological and religious studies, it has rarely been applied to Anglophone Muslim women's fiction (Ali, 2024; Alrashidy, 2023). Critical studies of *Minaret* have frequently focused on themes such as identity formation, spatial negotiation, and postcolonial belonging (Amara, 2024; Assa, 2024) or have viewed Najwa's spiritual turn as a psychological consolation or an ideological retreat. Although the idea of Islam as empowering has been explored in the novel (Awajan & Al-Shetawi, 2021), the rhetoric has often been confined to emancipatory paradigms and has neglected to investigate piety as a form of ethical work. With scholarship on post-secular feminism growing (Grenz, 2023; Iqbal, 2025), a persistent gap in literary studies is the under-theorisation of religious practice as disciplined self-formation in diasporic fiction.

The present article fills this gap by posing the following questions:

- How is *Minaret* an expression of piety as ethical agency?
- How does Najwa's religiosity confound secular, liberal conceptions of autonomy and freedom?

Instead of understanding Najwa's veiling, prayers, and moral restraint as expressions of submission or opposition, the paper offers a reading in which these actions are means of forming an ethical subject. In *Minaret*, piety is framed not as a stable identity or a form of ideological adherence but as a process by which the self is habituated or self-disciplined through repetition, discipline, and deliberate aiming.

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Placing *Minaret* in the context of post-secular feminist literary criticism, this article presents a thesis that Najwa's transformation illustrates an alternative ethical paradigm in diaspora fiction, one that does not assimilate feministic individuals into liberal individualism or caricatured patriarchy. Thus, it promotes the literary use of Mahmood's reconceptualisation of agency and enlarges the conceptual lexicon that allows the subjectivity of Muslim women to be perceived in modern Anglophone literature.

II. Literature Review

A. Secular, Liberal, Feminist Readings of Muslim Women

Secular, liberal assumptions of agency, autonomy, and emancipation have often influenced feminist work on Muslim women writers. In this paradigm, agency is generally conceptualised as opposition to the control of patriarchy, public visibility, or escape from religious confinement (Saleem & Zaidi, 2022; Silva, 2022).

Silva (2022) showed that despite claims of corrective postcolonial feminist scholarship, studies have remained structured by the same teleologies of secular progress, albeit in a much more subtle way, where emancipation from religion is the standard course of empowerment. In a comparable context, Saleem and Zaidi (2022) demonstrated that accounts of Muslim women's experiences have often been evaluated according to neoliberal values of self-realisation and social assertiveness, thereby excluding forms of agency grounded in religious belief.

Recent post-secular feminist scholarship has challenged this interpretive hegemony (Ali, 2024; Chanda, 2024). Grenz (2023) argued in favour of a methodological double critique which questions patriarchal religious order and secular notions that make faith-based subjectivity incomprehensible. Based on Mahmood and Butler, Sahar (2025) criticised the Enlightenment idea of autonomy as sovereign detachment, arguing that, in its place, ethical subjectivity can be constituted in terms of attachment, obligation, and discipline.

In this extended argument, Mahmood's reconceptualisation of agency as cultivated capacity, rather than oppositional resistance, is central. The fact that the conception of piety as ethical self-formation remains significant today, as reflected in recent engagements with Mahmood's work (Eldridge, 2025; Iqbal, 2025), confirms the ongoing importance of this idea and situates Mahmood's theory within current debates on post-secularism, embodiment, and critique. Nonetheless, these notions have not always been incorporated in literary studies offering close readings of fiction written by Muslim women.

B. Critical Reception of Minaret

In recent years, critical scholarship on *Minaret* has expanded, with a particular focus on the topics of diaspora, identity negotiation, and Islamic belonging. Spatial politics (Amara, 2024), displaced belonging (Assa, 2024), the formation of a hybrid identity (Almir Mer, 2024; Rouabhia Salma, 2020), and Islam as a moral counter to Western materialism have also been studied in relation to this novel (Talafha et al., 2022). Najwa's experiences have been critically analysed to demonstrate her liminal life in London and how faith works as a stabilising force. Aboulela frequently depicts her characters' focus on self-definition and self-emancipation. These readings provide valuable insights into Najwa's journey from elite secularism in Sudan to migrant precarity in London.

Other critics have described Najwa's religiosity as empowerment in the context of diaspora. Awajan and Al-Shetawi (2021) understood Islam as providing moral clarity and existential grounding in *Minaret*, whereas Salah (2023) interpreted the novel as providing ethical counsel to Arab women navigating Western environments. Majid (2025) redefined the concept of freedom in relational terms, implying that the relation to God redefines the meaning of autonomy. These readings have gone beyond reductive victim discourses and have acknowledged the spiritual conversion narrative in the novel.

However, it has been a consistent trend for scholars to consider either a return to faith as a healing response to trauma or redemption after a fall within society as a social condition. Even in positive terms, religiosity has been referred to as a process of psychological healing or even cultural authenticity as opposed to well-disciplined ethical work. Themes of identity recovery, belonging, and empowerment have often taken precedence over sustained attention to embodied practices, prayer, veiling, modest comportment, and silence, which influence Najwa's subjectivity throughout her life (Bendjemil, 2024; Rodrigues, 2022).

Furthermore, even though a number of scholars have referred to notions of agency or empowerment, few of them have provided an extended theoretical consideration of Mahmood's model of ethical self-formation applied to literary analysis.

C. Gaps in Existing Scholarship

This review establishes three major gaps in the literature. First, there is a lack of sustained engagement with piety as ethical formation in literary studies of Muslim women's fiction. Although anthropological and religious studies have examined embodied piety movements extensively (Kolakkadan, 2024; Osella & Soares, 2020), literary criticism has prioritised symbolic representation or sociopolitical context over ethical habituation.

Second, secular, liberal models of agency have continually influenced the formation of interpretative patterns, even implicitly. The continued use of emancipatory narratives has excluded other ideas of freedom based on discipline, submission, and moral intentionality (Grenz, 2023; Sahar, 2025). Consequently, religious practices have either been

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absorbed in empowerment discourses or have been on the defensive against allegations of oppression.

Third, despite gaining momentum, post-secular debates in the humanities have yet to be assimilated into close literary analysis. The Mahmood-inspired ethical turn has not been fully harnessed to rethink diasporic Muslim women's fiction beyond identity politics or the trauma paradigm.

This paper fills these gaps by providing a theory-based close reading of *Minaret* that is based directly on Mahmood's definition of piety as ethical self-formation. Instead of evaluating Najwa's religiosity against liberal standards of independence, it explores the roles of prayer, veiling, silence, and submission as disciplines in which agency is developed. In doing so, the study contributes to post-secular feminist literary criticism and repositions Muslim women's fiction beyond the dichotomy of oppression and resistance.

III. Theoretical Framework: Piety as Ethical Self-Formation

A. Rethinking Agency Beyond Liberal Autonomy

This paper adopts Mahmood's reconceptualisation of agency as its primary analytical framework. In *Politics of Piety*, Mahmood critiqued the presumption prevalent in liberal feminist thought that agency must take the form of resistance to norms or liberation from structures of authority. She proposed an alternative understanding of agency, arguing that agency should not be understood solely in terms of subversion. Rather, agency can be reflected in the capacity to inhabit and cultivate norms through disciplined practice. Based on ethnographic research on women in the Egyptian mosque movement, Mahmood illustrated that the participants viewed their religious commitments not as passive compliance but as an active ethical struggle. They sought to shape their desires, wills, and dispositions through repeated practices such as prayer, modest comportment, and moral vigilance. From this perspective, agency is not a manifestation of an already autonomous self but an event whereby the latter is established. Ethical subjectivity is achieved through habituation, practice, and deliberate discipline. Instead of assuming that freedom involves an absence of tradition, Mahmood proposed that being bound to religious norms can form the basis through which specific forms of agency are realised.

In line with this view, Sahar (2025) differentiated between secular autonomy and what she referred to as consolidated subjectivity, where freedom is expressed not in terms of detachment but in terms of alignment. Eldridge (2025) explained that Mahmood's intervention is methodological; it involves suspending normative judgements to investigate the formation of subjects in religious traditions. Iqbal (2025) emphasised the persistent relevance of Mahmood's model in modern discussions of post-secular feminism and ethical life.

B. Ethical Habituation and Embodied Practice

Mahmood's account of agency is closely linked to an understanding of ethics as formation; ethical dispositions are not seen as inherited but as constructed through recurring bodily and temporal practices. Drawing on the Foucauldian concept of subjectivation, Mahmood considered religious practices as self-disciplined practices through which individuals shape their behaviour and align their desires with particular virtues. Such practices are important because they are used repeatedly. Through repetition, actions become habitual, and through discipline, new intentions are formed.

This focus on embodiment is supported by recent scholarship on lived Islam. Kolakkadan (2024) showed how the issue of piety in young Muslim women is worked out in terms of corporeal behaviour and reflexive involvement in religious discourse. Osella and Soares (2020) warned against thinking of ethical self-cultivation as ideological rigidity and instead highlighted its dynamic and continuous nature. Agency in such systems is progressive, processual, and usually internalised.

In the literary field, Chaoui (2023) demonstrated how veiling in modern fiction can be perceived as an active moral act rather than as a form of subjugation. El Shakry (2024) categorised sensuous piety as a form of ethical cognition that destabilises the practices of secular readings. These interventions highlighted the fact that religious practice should be seen as formative but not expressive.

This conceptualisation of piety as habituated practice displaces the interpretive focus from dramatic rebellion to a long-term process of discipline. It prefigures time and repetition rather than disruption and spectacle.

C. Conceptual Orientation of This Study

When applying Mahmood's framework to *Minaret*, this article views religious practices as formative practices rather than as symbolic identifiers or ideological expressions. The aim is not to evaluate the normative desirability of Najwa's actions or to assimilate her religiosity into liberal codes of empowerment. Instead, the analysis explores the roles of prayer, veiling, silence, and submission as methods of developing an ethical subject. Retaining Mahmood's framework as the primary theoretical lens ensures conceptual consistency. The central analytical task is to map the mechanisms of ethical becoming as they are articulated within the narrative. This paper places *Minaret* in the context of a wider re-evaluation of agency in contemporary Muslim women's writing through foregrounding habituation, embodiment, and moral intentionality.

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IV. Methodology

This study employs a theory-informed close reading as its primary methodological framework. Rather than treating *Minaret* as a form of sociological data about Muslim women's lives, it approaches the novel as a literary text whose narrative structure, characterisation, temporality, and descriptive detail encode processes of ethical formation. In this respect, close reading entails sustained attention to narrative voice, focalisation, embodied description, and patterns of repetition. Since Mahmood's framework conceptualises agency as a practice formed through discipline and habituation, the analysis prioritises recurring religious practices, such as prayer, veiling, Qur'anic recitation, silence, and moral restraint, over scenes of dramatic transformation. The ethical change in *Minaret* is a process that develops over time; hence, the approach to the novel conforms to the temporal logic of the novel itself, attending to subtle changes in Najwa's inner life and behaviour.

Studies of lived Islam have demonstrated that ethical subject formation is achieved through repetitive bodily and temporal disciplines (Kolakkadan, 2024; Osella & Soares, 2020). In literary criticism, this focus on embodiment makes it possible to read Muslim women's fiction in a way that foregrounds habituated practice rather than oppositional gestures (Chaoui, 2023). Based on these insights, this paper interprets religious acts not as fixed symbols but as narrative practices through which subjectivity is restructured.

Mahmood's conceptualisation of agency as a cultivated capacity provides the interpretive framework through which textual moments are analysed. This application is literary rather than anthropological. The analysis does not aim to generalise the experiences of Muslim women or evaluate theological correctness. Instead, it explores how *Minaret* narrativises ethical discipline, examining the ways in which repetition organises time, embodied action reshapes desire, and interior monologue marks moral intentionality.

This study's deliberate single-text focus on *Minaret* allows for Najwa's ethical becoming to be examined deeply rather than broadly, so that the ethical change is carefully traced throughout the narrative arc. Furthermore, the paper's non-evaluative interpretive approach to faith follows Mahmood's methodological injunction to suspend normative judgement (Eldridge, 2025; Iqbal, 2025). The analysis neither glorifies nor criticises Najwa's religiosity. Rather, it attempts to comprehend the functioning of religious submission in the text as a principle of structuring the subject. The task is analytical: to trace the narrative mechanisms through which piety becomes ethical agency. Through this literary theoretical approach, *Minaret* emerges not only as a diasporic identity novel but also as an extended reflection on disciplined self-cultivation.

The subsequent sections of this paper discuss Najwa's trajectory through moments of precarity, prayer, veiling, silence, and submission, illustrating a gradual and embodied process of ethical becoming.

V. Discussion

At the beginning of *Minaret*, Najwa lives in a state of elite secular privilege in Khartoum. Her family's elevated status and high standing in politics create her initial identity and image of herself in terms of cosmopolitan comfort, material comfort, and social exposure. At this level, religion functions primarily as a cultural marker rather than as an ordered discipline. Najwa's main concerns are to do with romance, fashion, and status rather than ethical self-doubt.

This identity is severely shaken by the political crisis that leads to her father being executed and her family moving to London. However, the novel is opposed to the framing of exile as a basic trigger for religious conversion. The lack of privilege and economic stability that Najwa experiences over the years (as she works as a domestic servant in London) provides a condition of precarity, yet there is no simplistic presentation of trauma as a driver of faith in the text. Rather, precarity is used as a setting in which ethical reorientation can be achieved.

Researchers have often explained the reversion to Islam as a psychological compensation for the loss of the economic condition of Najwa or a desire to regain cultural stability in diaspora (Awajan & Al-Shetawi, 2021; Talafha et al., 2022). Although these readings grasp the displacement issue of the novel, they risk turning religiosity into a therapeutic reaction. A closer reading shows that the narrative reconstructs Najwa's interiority as a process of conscious reflection on her guilt and moral reflection. Her previous involvement with Anwar is not merely recalled as a romantic transgression but is revisited through a newly acquired moral perspective that refigures desire as moral deviance.

Najwa's turning to religion is not an immediate result of her exile but a gradual process resulting from steady exposure to the community of the mosque in London. The mosque is a space organised by routine, discipline, and shared worship instead of spectacle. As has been noted by critics, the Islamic spaces Aboulela depicts in her fiction are never sites of coercion; they are places of ethical purity (Salah, 2023). In *Minaret*, this precision is achieved through repetition rather than through enforcement by authority figures.

Najwa's transformation can be understood in terms of Mahmood's conception of agency as related to cultivated capacity. In this case, agency is manifested not in acts of revolt against circumstance but in the slow realignment of desire. Najwa starts feeling shame as a result of moral consciousness rather than social humiliation; vulnerability creates opportunities to develop attentiveness. This internal recalibration can be defined as a process of deliberate interaction with piety in terms of which Kolakkadan (2024) explained the subject of ethics using the example of reflexive adjustment to the ways of religion.

Notably, Najwa's domestic work in London does not serve purely to degrade her. Although it has the effect of

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materially reducing her social status, it restructures her relation to visibility. In Sudan, her identity was acquired through class-based displays; in London, she has a socially invisible status. This invisibility is made ethically productive. No longer facing the performativity requirements of elite society, Najwa starts developing an inward focus that is organised by being accountable to God instead of by being recognised by others. This reorientation challenges secular models that identify agency and public claim as the same (Saleem & Zaidi, 2022; Silva, 2022). Her emerging subjectivity is more silent, inward, and disciplined than before.

From this perspective, precarity in *Minaret* must be interpreted not as a deterministic cause but as a narrative condition. It challenges established identities and reveals the instability of identities based on status, creating space for ethical reconstitution. Najwa's transformation process is not quick and linear; it is realised through indecisiveness, ambivalence, and constant returning to religious areas. This temporality is crucial. In the novel, ethical becoming is gradual rather than abrupt, in line with Mahmood's notion of subject formation as a process and not as a discontinuous event.

Prayer organises Najwa's time during her ethical reorientation. Unlike her previous life in Sudan, which was ruled by social events and romantic anticipations, her new life is punctuated by the five daily prayers. These rituals rearrange her days, inculcating discipline in the passage of time. Prayer is represented not as ecstatic revelation but as repetition that is sustained and constitutes disposition. Passages portraying congregational prayer linger on body positioning and the rhythmic steps of standing, bowing, and prostrating. Such gestures are first enacted physically and then internalised. Here, Mahmood's description of embodied discipline can be useful; bodily practices do not simply communicate the belief that precedes them; they develop it. Actions become virtues through repetition.

This focus on deliberateness is an indication of the end of external submission to inner discipline. According to Osella and Soares (2020), who, in their article about lived Islam, referred to the persistent negotiation between ambition and failure in the formation of ethics; this is not without exception. Najwa's prayers are characterised by distraction, doubt, and self-criticism; the text foregrounds effort instead of perfection.

It is important to note that prayer does not alienate Najwa from the secular world but transforms her connection with it. Leaving her workplace to go to the mosque noticeably disrupts the linear flow of her workday. This disruption rebalances values as she believes productivity and status come from being accountable to God. This rearrangement challenges neoliberal measures of success that assess agency based on economic self-sufficiency or communal accomplishment (Saleem & Zaidi, 2022). Prayer is a temporal dislocation whereby life is organised based on transcendentalism rather than by market economics.

Practising prayer repeatedly also allows Najwa to stabilise her personal identity in the state of diaspora. Ritual regularity provides continuity in a city in which her social role and status have been reduced. This continuity does not reflect nostalgia for her former life in Sudan; it reveals prospective discipline. Najwa is proactive in recreating her desires through prayer, and she is no longer attached to the things that used to define her. Praying becomes an exercise of attentiveness, shifting her desire away from romantic satisfaction towards religious equipoise.

Therefore, prayer in *Minaret* serves as moral work. It is not a symbolic indicator of status or a narrative shortcut to redemption. It is a recurring performance that restructures time, longing, and self-perception. Najwa's subjectivity is brought back into balance through embodied repetition. Agency is achieved not through dramatic assertion but through perseverance in discipline.

Another critical point in the ethical forming of Najwa is her choice to wear the hijab. However, the text does not allow veiling to be an explicit ideological statement. Rather, the decision is made slowly, with reservations and self-doubt. The use of the veil is portrayed not as a form of political opposition or an attempt to fit into the community but as an extension of a gradual undertaking of humane behaviour.

Within Western semiotics, the veil is often understood as a symbol of oppression or resistance; such symbolic reduction hides its disciplinary aspect. According to Chaoui (2023), approaches to veiling in modern Muslim fiction tend to presuppose embodied agency rather than submissiveness. Veiling in *Minaret* rebalances Najwa's relation to visibility, placing emphasis on moral responsibility rather than aesthetic display. Therefore, wearing the veil does more than engender an external transformation. The hijab must be worn carefully in terms of posture, movement, and interaction. It influences her speech, her body language, the way she is perceived, and the way she perceives herself. This idealised control coincides with Mahmood's explanation of modesty as a developed virtue instead of a forced limitation. A modest demeanour is absorbed into Najwa's inner being through practice.

Notably, wearing a veil in London poses social risks. Najwa is vulnerable in a secular European environment characterised by suspicion of visible Islam. However, the narrative does not frame her choice as martyrdom. Rather, it focuses on deliberateness. The decision Najwa makes can be described as an alignment of will and not as a submission to an external force. Although freedom can be found in the absence of attachment to norms, as Sahar (2025) proposed in his conceptualisation of post-secular subjectivity, it can also be achieved in the conscious presence of norms.

Veiling reflects a drastic departure from the Najwa who previously depended on beauty and social charisma as validation agents. In Sudan, she relied on her looks for romantic intrigue and social validation. The hijab breaks this economy of visibility. It reduces the importance of outward appearance and shifts the focus to the value of inner virtue. This reconstruction complicates secular feminist models which contend that empowerment is expressed visibility (Silva, 2022). The agency that unfolds through Najwa is one of disciplined self-restraint rather than an amplification of self-

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display.

Therefore, veiling in *Minaret* is a practice of ethics and not an ideological motto. It is a representation of the way in which embodied repetition alters identity over time. Najwa realises her ethical becoming through praying and veiling as daily practices. Her subjectivity is not erased or theatrically liberated; it is rebuilt in disciplined alignment.

Silence in *Minaret* is represented not as imposed but as practised. Najwa's prior life in Khartoum featured casual, flirtatious, and socially performative speech. Communication was performed as a tool of beauty and finely bred self-confidence. A gradual recalibration of speech occurs in London; Najwa becomes less talkative, a more attentive listener, and more aware of the ethical weight of words. This change is presented not as oppression but as training. The novel repeatedly portrays how Najwa carefully considers her intentions before speaking, contemplating whether her utterances conform to humility and modesty. These are the instances that Mahmood defined as ethical self-regulation: the formation of desire and articulation through conscious practice rather than automatic declaration. In this case, silence is not externally enforced but included as part of a greater goal of moral perfection.

Researchers who study lived Islam have highlighted the fact that ethical subject formation frequently takes place through practices of restraint, where speech, gaze, and body are regulated (Osella & Soares, 2020). In *Minaret*, silence forms one of these practices. The text does not depict Najwa as a weak character when she does not show any resistance to small humiliations or gossip. Rather, these scenes prefigure interior reflection. She pits reaction against virtue and anger against patience. The decision not to respond is agency.

Such a representation challenges secular models that equate agency with vocal assertion. According to Silva (2022), feminist discourses have tended to position visibility and speech as the main triggers of empowerment. In these models, silence seems to be equivalent to marginalisation. However, *Minaret* upsets this balance. Najwa's silence is not the result of fear; in fact, it is often surrounded by inner power and self-possession. Her lack of external protest does not suggest a lack of will.

Importantly, the novel differentiates between silencing and silence. Silencing happens earlier on Najwa's life, when a series of political occurrences and gender demands narrows her choices without her approval. Silence is developed later as an intentional ethical practice. This distinction is crucial. Conflating them would reduce the moral agency described in the novel.

The reorientation of Najwa's relation to recognition is also achieved through silence. Previously, social affirmation organised her self-esteem. Subsequently, she becomes less concerned with external approval. By being silent, she ceases to engage in the competitive act of self-presentation and focuses on her responsibility to God rather than on social judgement. In this manner, silence adds to the process of the gradual dismantling of ego that accompanies her ethical becoming.

The most controversial aspect of Najwa's transformation is her submission to God and, in some interpersonal situations, to religiously organised power. In the liberal feminist paradigm, subordination is commonly associated with submission. Self-legislation is seen as autonomy; agency is seen as submission. *Minaret* questions this duality. Najwa's submission is always presented as concordant instead of destructive. When she talks of giving her will to God, the narrative focuses on reprieve and unity rather than depreciation. Submission becomes a reconfiguration of priorities; the will of God overrides the will of the individual. This rearranging is selected, meditated, and incorporated. It is not portrayed as external coercion.

Sahar's (2025) explanation of post-secular subjectivity is useful here. He differentiated between secular autonomy that is based on detachment and forms of freedom that are expressed in terms of attachment and obligation. In this type of structure, agency is not rejected within submission but restructures around it. The subject does not exist in isolation; it is composed by an alignment of relation. This consolidated model is reflected in Najwa's religiosity. Her will is diverted rather than destroyed.

The text supports this difference using contrast. Najwa's previous romantic feelings towards Anwar seem, in hindsight, a kind of self-denial, with her desires having been shaped by charisma and impulse rather than introspection. In comparison, her subsequent submission to religious discipline is characterised by greater self-awareness. She questions her reasons, challenges temptation, and willingly chooses moderation. Deliberation is followed by submission rather than passivity.

Recent scholarship on the agency of Muslim women has highlighted the fact that obedience and oppression should be separated. As Kolakkadan (2024) demonstrated, pious women can critically and reflexively consider religious norms while not disputing them. In the same way, Mesgartehrani et al. (2023) described forms of religious empowerment that presuppose inner autonomy and a personal sense of righteousness rather than open opposition. The path that Najwa follows appeals to these models. Her submissiveness is not theatrical defiance or internalised oppression; it is disciplined dedication.

This conflict is especially apparent in her encounters with members of the mosque community. As much as she takes religious advice, she does not give up moral judgement. The text repeatedly shows her considering her choices, doubting what she is doing, and even questioning her own integrity. This reveals conscious conformity rather than blind submission.

More importantly, submission is not romanticised in the novel. Najwa feels uncertain, lonely, and socially strained. Her adherence alienates her from some secular places and restricts her love life. Such limitations, however, symbolise

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voluntary sacrifices rather than forceful denials. The voluntariness is emphasised by the sacrificial nature of Najwa's submission.

Minaret adds to the vocabulary of agency by depicting submission as moral correspondence rather than oppression. Agency does not exist in acts of disruption or disobedience; it exists in disciplined submission. Obedience organises Najwa's moral life, but this organisation is inspired by intention. According to Mahmood, agency lies in the ability to occupy norms in search of virtue.

Najwa's ethical change takes place in a secular European environment, which increases its importance. In *Minaret*, London does not only represent an exile background; it is a location that is organised by liberal individualism, consumerism, and unspoken suspicion of visible religiosity. Against this backdrop, the intensification of piety in Najwa is a conscious return to modernity rather than a form of nostalgia for the motherland. Her religiosity is a sign not of a retreat to the modern world but of a different way to occupy it.

Hybridity, negotiation, and in-betweenness have often been identified as characteristics of migrant subjectivity in diasporic scholarship (Amara, 2024; Assa, 2024). Although these structures help to shed light on the spatial and cultural dynamics of the novel, Najwa's course challenges strictly hybrid models. Her moral maturation is not presented as a compromise between secular and religious self-identities; it is less and less assimilated by liberal standards of morality than by divine ones. It is discipline in her spiritual life rather than cultural fusion that helps Najwa gain belonging.

Post-secular perspectives invite this positioning by refuting the belief that modernity implies the decline or privatisation of religion. Post-secular constructs view faith not as a remnant of premodern consciousness but as a living and creative power in the present (Grenz, 2023). *Minaret* is an example of this dynamism. Najwa becomes more pious not in Sudan but in London, which hints at the fact that secular contexts can stimulate, not disintegrate, religious dedication.

Her piety does not fit within multicultural liberal tolerance. It is not represented as an ethnic marker or cultural performance. Rather, it restructures her everyday routine, time cycles, and ethical values. Prayer breaks her working day; veiling changes her appearance in society; silence refigures her social life. Through such practices, Najwa lives in London without becoming a completely submissive subject to its value system. Her moral system is pegged at a different level.

Her positioning can be referred to as counter-hegemonic belonging. Najwa is not opposed to the city and is not politically confrontational. Instead, she exists in it by looking to another moral horizon. This minor restructuring coincides with Majid (2025) perspective that freedom in some Islamic stories is expressed as having associations with God instead of being freed of bondage. Najwa's sense of dignity is based not on civic sense but on divine accountability.

In that regard, *Minaret* is involved in the remaking of feminist imaginaries. It has become common in secular feminist discourse to make the liberation of Muslim women conditional upon the relaxing of religious affiliation. However, Najwa's path suggests that moral prosperity can be reached by means of increased devotion. This does not mean that piety is a universally guaranteed path to empowerment; it means that agency may be produced by disciplined subjection without the need to adjust to liberal autonomy.

Recent reports on the agency of Muslim women have warned against confusing emancipation and secularisation (Kolakkadan, 2024; Mesgartehrani et al., 2023). Incorporating this insight into the narrative form, *Minaret* helps to build feminist vocabularies. Najwa's life does not lead to professional success, love without relations, and political action. Rather, it develops her inner consistency and ethical conformity. The novel thus redefines the parameters of fulfilment.

Diaspora in *Minaret* is no longer a displacement but a place of moral reconstruction. Having been pushed out of Sudan's class structures and political hierarchies, Najwa finds herself in a space in which she has to build up selfhood with few material resources. Religion offers order rather than an escape. Her discipline allows her to create a sense of belongingness not attached to status or nationality.

This reformulation does not only affect Aboulela's fiction. It challenges literary critics on where to leave the narrative endpoints they are inclined to privilege. When the idea of liberation is evaluated only through the lens of secular autonomy, texts such as *Minaret* seem conservative or retrogressive. However, when agency is viewed as developed ability, the novel emerges as a meditative continuum on ethical self-fashioning in the contemporary diaspora.

By placing Najwa's piety in a secular European setting, *Minaret* disproves the belief that modern Muslim women have to sacrifice faith and freedom. The novel envisions a mode of subjectivity whereby submissiveness to divine authority goes hand in hand with self-formation. This vision does not undermine feminist criticism; it extends it. It implies that the future of feminism entails embracing disciplined alignment and not only sovereign-based moral paradigms.

This paper has argued that *Minaret* reconstructs agency within the context of ethical self-formation as opposed to either resistance or emancipation. Following Najwa's transformation through precarity, prayer, veiling, silence, and submission, the novel predicts disciplined practice as the location of subject production. Agency occurs in continuity rather than discontinuity and in conformity rather than sovereignty.

This kind of reading interferes with earlier arguments in feminist literary criticism. Stories of Muslim women have often been judged based on secular, liberal standards that use independence, social statement, and lack of religious control to determine empowerment (Saleem & Zaidi, 2022; Silva, 2022). In these systems, piety manifests itself in

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forms of restraint or tactical opposition. *Minaret* disrupts this duality. Najwa's religiosity does not fit within liberal emancipation and does not qualify as covert rebellion. Rather, it typifies a pattern of moral development based on will, habit, and lived practice.

The conceptual words that can be used to capture this dynamic are found in Mahmood's reconceptualisation of the notion of agency as cultivated capacity. Instead of associating agency solely with opposition, Mahmood finds it in the activities whereby subjects constitute themselves in relation to normative traditions. Recent scholarly engagements with her perspectives underline their importance in current post-secular feminist research (Iqbal, 2025; Sahar, 2025). The application of this framework to *Minaret* shows how literature can be used to narrativise ethical habituation in a subtle way that is usually not realised in sociological discourse.

The analysis also contributes to enlarging the lexicon of feminist literary criticism. If the concept of agency is perceived only through the grammar of liberation, texts on disciplined religiosity could be misunderstood. Feminist scholarship, according to Grenz (2023), should take into consideration types of subjectivity that do not fit secular ideas of autonomy. *Minaret* provides an example of such a type. Najwa's satisfaction is not romantic or professional; rather, it is moral. Her plot progression favours enlightenment instead of triumph.

Moreover, the present reading establishes *Minaret* in the context of recent research that has recorded reflexive and deliberative piety in Muslim women (Kolakkadan, 2024; Mesgartehrani et al., 2023). These studies have proved that following religious norms does not exclude a critical approach or self-awareness. In line with this, Najwa's submission is characterised by questions, reservations, and internalisation. The moral subject that emerges is not a passive or radically autonomous subject but is formed intentionally.

Agency can be reconceived in this manner without the need to abandon feminist critique. Doing so involves expanding the scope of analysis. Acknowledging disciplined submission as a possible place of agency does not idealise patriarchy or reject structural inequalities. Rather, it opposes diminishing Muslim women's religiosity to false consciousness or internalised domination. *Minaret* encourages critics to examine the interior work through which ethical identities are forged by foregrounding intention and habituation.

This change has an impact beyond Aboulela's fiction. The writing of contemporary Muslim women usually depends on faith as an organising power rather than an ornament of culture. Attempting to read such texts in terms of secular teleology can lead to a simplification of the texts. In comparison, engaging with them based on models of ethical formation allows for more delicate interpretations of silence, modesty, and submission. Agency may thus be found in acts of congruence and containment without degenerating into the exaltation of piety or the mistrust of liberalism.

It is in this sense that *Minaret* engages in a post-secular restructuring of literary studies by accepting religion as formative rather than deformed. The changes in Najwa prove that ethical becoming can be developed through disciplined devotion in contemporary urban life. Her narrative does not dismiss feminist issues of power and gender; it redefines them according to a different moral horizon.

Minaret's rethinking of agency endows feminist literary criticism with broader conceptual territory. It invites academicians to acknowledge that Muslim women's subjectivity cannot be captured only in terms of binaries of oppression and resistance. Another register of agency, which requires critical, but not theoretical, attention, is ethical self-formation, which is slow, embodied, and intentional.

VI. Conclusion

This paper suggests that *Minaret* reconceptualises agency as ethical self-formation rather than as resistance or secular emancipation. Najwa's transformation shows that piety, manifested through prayer, veiling, silence, and submission, is not a passive form of subjugation but a disciplined process of moral alignment. Using Mahmood's theory of cultivated agency, the paper demonstrates that freedom in the novel is expressed through deliberate submission to divine authority rather than through independent self-determination. By foregrounding embodiment, repetition, and interior discipline, *Minaret* challenges secular, liberal feminist contrasts of oppression and resistance and broadens feminist literary criticism to embrace religious self-formation as a valid mode of agency.

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Language Transformation and Subjectivity: A Lacanian Psychological Literary Criticism of Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*

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***Abstract*—This study examines subjectivity construction, stabilization, and disintegration in Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*, highlighting language as the main narrative mechanism for producing subjectivity. Using narratological, stylistic, and Lacanian psychoanalytic frameworks, the analysis views subjectivity not as a stable psychological essence but as a fragile, language-dependent formation via narrative discourse. Through qualitative close reading, the study analyzes Charlie Gordon's first-person progress reports, focusing on linguistic markers of subjectivity, including spelling patterns, syntactic complexity, vocabulary range, narrative coherence, and self-referential expressions. The findings show early non-standard linguistic forms place Charlie at symbolic discourse margins, while subsequent linguistic stabilization allows reflective self-positioning and symbolic integration. However, this stability is temporary, as linguistic deterioration leads to narrative fragmentation and self-referential authority disintegration. A Lacanian reading of the Imaginary and Symbolic orders shows narrative coherence moments correspond to imaginary identification, while symbolic regulation introduces abstraction and alienation, and its breakdown results in narrative subjectivity disintegration. The study argues *Flowers for Algernon* constructs subjectivity as a precarious narrative achievement sustained through language, not an inherent psychological constant, offering a language-centered perspective to literary discussions of identity, narrative voice, and subject formation.**

Index Terms*—narrative subjectivity, linguistic transformation, Lacanian psychoanalysis, first-person narrative, *Flowers for Algernon

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I. INTRODUCTION

Literary narratives do more than tell stories; they shape how subjectivity becomes intelligible within language (Arafah et al., 2026). In many contemporary theories of narrative identity, the self is not treated as a stable psychological core that exists prior to discourse. Instead, it takes form through the temporal and structural organisation of narrative (Meretoja, 2014; Ricoeur, 1991). Fiction, therefore, does not simply open a window into a character's inner life. What readers encounter as "consciousness" is carefully constructed through linguistic choices, narrative perspective, and patterns of focalization. As Fludernik (1996) suggests, fictional consciousness is produced through discourse rather than retrieved from an interior mental space. Herman (2002) further demonstrates that voice, deixis, and focalisation organise how readers position a narrative subject. From this angle, characters emerge gradually within the texture of language. Their identities are not preformed psychological entities but effects of narrative design. Language functions as a symbolic system that encodes cultural values and social positioning (Takwa et al., 2026a), influencing how characters are perceived and understood within the narrative framework.

Stylistic and linguistic approaches to narrative emphasize language. Banfield (1982) argues that "inner consciousness" in fiction is not retrieved from psychological depth but constructed through grammar—through tense, sentence structure, and thought representation. Lodge (2002) notes that novels render consciousness through narrative voice and syntactic organisation rather than direct psychological access. Stockwell (2002) shows how changes in linguistic perspective guide interpretation of fictional minds. These accounts suggest that subjectivity in narrative fiction is produced within language itself, shaped by discourse organization rather than an assumed interior essence.

Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* demonstrates how language shapes subjectivity. As the novel comprises Charlie Gordon's progress reports, readers witness his transformation through his writing. This appears first in spelling mistakes, repetitive phrasing, and short, uneven sentences in his early entries. Charlie struggles with vocabulary and interpretation. His limited linguistic range restricts how he understands and articulates experience, echoing sociological analyses of how social norms and linguistic standards influence identity formation (Mare et al., 2025). After the operation, the writing changes. Sentences grow longer and more structured. Abstract terms appear. Charlie reflects on his past and analyzes his relationships. Language seems to grant him a stronger position within discourse. Yet this control weakens. Spelling errors return, syntax becomes unstable, and reports lose coherence. The arc from linguistic expansion to decline suggests that subjectivity is neither fixed nor secure. It depends on sustaining language. When that ability falters, the narrative self fractures. The erosion of linguistic competence may disrupt continuity of identity and participation in symbolic systems (Jamiluddin et al., 2026).

Flowers for Algernon has been widely discussed, but readings focus on Charlie Gordon's intelligence changes. Critics frame his transformation in terms of cognitive enhancement, mental health, disability, or ethics. These approaches view language changes as signs of psychological development rather than narrative structure components. Culler (1997) warns against this psychological reductionism, where interpretation moves from textual form to external explanatory models. In contrast, narratological and stylistic approaches focus on discourse. Here, subjectivity in fiction doesn't just mirror mental conditions; it is created within narrative structure and linguistic design (Takwa et al., 2026b). Psychological approaches to literature do not treat fictional characters as clinical case studies. Instead, they recognize that a character's "inner life" is shaped by narrative form and linguistic mediation. Barry (2017) makes this point: literary characters cannot be diagnosed as empirical subjects; they must be interpreted through close reading. A similar emphasis appears in Indonesian scholarship. Arafah (2018) argues that identity in literary texts emerges from narrative strategy and linguistic patterning rather than generalised psychological categories. Bennett and Royle (2016) caution against assuming fictional consciousness is hidden behind the text. It is produced within the text. Felski (2015) extends this by suggesting literature does not simply reflect psychology but reshapes how inner life becomes meaningful within culture. These positions redirect attention to form, encouraging us to examine how subjectivity is constructed in discourse rather than searching for psychological essence behind it. This orientation frames the present study's focus on language as the central site of subject formation.

Discourse-orientated approaches begin from a premise: subjectivity in fiction does not pre-exist the text. It takes shape within language. Characters emerge through narrative voice, patterns of syntax, and discourse organization. Rather than searching for an inner psychological core, critics examine how identity is articulated through textual features such as focalisation, lexical choice, and grammatical structure (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019). Lacanian psychoanalysis emphasizes this focus on language. For Lacan, the subject forms within the Symbolic Order—the network of signifiers that structures meaning. His claim that "the unconscious is structured like language" (Lacan, 2006) reframes subjectivity as a linguistic process rather than a hidden essence. From this view, changes in language can signal shifts in a character's position within symbolic structures (Arafah et al., 2026). Linguistic transformation becomes more than stylistic variation; it marks movement within the system that produces the subject (Taqdir et al., 2026).

Building on this theoretical framework, the analysis examines the role of language in *Flowers for Algernon*. Linguistic change is not treated as mere reflection of cognitive development, but as the process through which Charlie's subjectivity takes shape, shifts, and fractures. Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalytic criticism—especially the concepts of the Imaginary and the Symbolic—the discussion traces how Charlie's evolving language marks changes in his position within symbolic structures. This approach positions language as the primary site where identity forms in the novel. By emphasising discourse rather than psychological essence, the study contributes to debates that position narrative language

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as constitutive rather than descriptive of fictional selves. Similar arguments about discourse's formative power appear beyond literary studies—in research on educational texts that shape gendered and social identities (Taqdir et al., 2025), and in eco-literary scholarship that regards literature as influencing ethical awareness (Manugeren et al., 2023). Such perspectives reinforce that language does not simply represent subjectivity; it participates in producing it (Yudith et al., 2023).

II. Literature Review

Literary studies assert narrative fiction's subjectivity is constructed through language and discourse, not psychological interiority. Narratologists show fictional consciousness is shaped by voice, focalization, and linguistic choices. Fludernik (1996) defines fictional consciousness as strategies enabling readers to understand character perspective. Herman (2002) shows narrative subjectivity is constructed through focalisation and deixis. Characters' identities are constituted through language rather than preceding discourse. Banfield (1982) argues subjectivity in fiction is embedded in narrative sentences. Tense, modality, and speech and thought representation shape how mind becomes legible in text. Stylistic critics examine how syntactic patterns and lexical choices guide readers' perception of cognitive stance (Leech & Short, 2007; Stockwell, 2002). Linguistic form organizes perspective and mediates between narrating voice and experiencing self. Studies of ritual and cultural discourse show how patterned language produces shared imagery in socio-cultural contexts (Arafah et al., 2026; Takwa et al., 2024). Such findings reinforce that language structures meaning, suggesting shifts in character speech indicate changes in narrative positioning.

This language-centred orientation is reflected in Indonesian literary scholarship, where character identity and ideological positioning are examined through discourse-based analysis. Arafah (2018) posits that we should analyse character identity in literary texts using narrative discourse and linguistic patterns, not psychological generalisations. Studies demonstrate this orientation by analysing character education values, emotional regulation, gender domination, racial discrimination, parenting styles, and animal representation as discursive constructions in narrative language (Arafah et al., 2024; Arafah et al., 2023e; Asri et al., 2023; Mutmainnah et al., 2022). These works reinforce that literary characters are textual effects shaped by narrative strategies, symbolic structures, and linguistic choices (Sunyoto et al., 2022; Yudith et al., 2024).

Language and subjectivity discussions extend into applied linguistics, showing that access to linguistic systems shapes self-positioning and cognition (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a). Digital literacy regulates how individuals evaluate information, negotiate credibility, and position themselves in mediated discourse (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b). Studies on self-regulated writing, AI-assisted composition, grammar instruction, and online material design show linguistic competence structures thought organisation and articulation (Arnawa & Arafah, 2023; Kaharuddin et al., 2024; Kuswanty et al., 2023; Arafah et al., 2023c; Arafah et al., 2023d). Though rooted in educational contexts, these findings converge on a premise: language not only transmits ideas but conditions how meaning is constructed and how subjects position themselves within discourse. Cultural linguistics shows linguistic forms are rooted in shared mental schemas and cultural conceptualisations, influencing how individuals interpret and engage with language in social contexts.

In literary theory, psychoanalysis is crucial in theorising subjectivity. Early Freudian criticism saw literary texts as symbolic of unconscious conflict, but Lacan placed the subject within language. His idea that “the unconscious is structured like a language” (Lacan, 2006) re identity as an effect of signification, not a stable psychological interior. Evans (1996) clarifies the Lacanian subject is divided, formed through signifiers and social laws in the Symbolic Order. In literature, such regulation often appears in structured systems, like class hierarchy and social convention, as shown in sociological analyses of Edwardian fiction (Rano et al., 2026). These perspectives affirm subjectivity emerges within symbolic and social structures, not from autonomous interiority.

Symbolic structures operate through class hierarchy and culturally embedded ethical systems (Effendy et al., 2025). Studies of indigenous governance show codified norms regulate leadership conduct and institutional legitimacy (Arafah et al., 2025), highlighting their importance in maintaining community cohesion and ensuring leader accountability. Semiotic analyses of digital texts show meaning arises through interaction between denotative and connotative levels structured by symbolic exchange between text and reader (Hasyim & Arafah, 2023). Discourse-oriented studies of digital literacy reinforce this by demonstrating how linguistic competence shapes interpretation and positioning within mediated narratives (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b). These findings strengthen the claim that subjectivity is structured through participation in symbolic linguistic systems.

Research on technology-mediated engagement suggests digital platforms reorganise linguistic navigation, influencing meaning-making (Idhan et al., 2026) and narrative interpretation in literary studies. Language shapes participation in symbolic life by determining interpretive frameworks. Johnson (2013) shows narrative voice shifts articulate subjectivity, while Korkmaz Karaman (2022) demonstrates linguistic experiments embody subject formation in modernist fiction. These studies establish subjectivity in literature as a discursive effect via narrative organisation. Lacanian criticism views linguistic changes as shifts in subject position, not intellectual progress. "*Flowers for Algernon*" has been examined through ethics, psychology, disability studies, and cognitive development, focusing on Charlie Gordon's intelligence changes to explore mental health and social exclusion. Çelikel (2020) examines the novel through madness and institutional power, showing intelligence increases Charlie's psychological suffering. These studies offer ethical insights but treat linguistic change as a symptom of cognitive transformation. Poltoratska (2025) highlights Charlie's linguistic

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evolution as a strategy to foster empathy and expose intellectual disability stigma. This approach acknowledges language's importance but views change through social perception, without examining language as a condition of subjectivity. The Lacanian approach remains limited, as psychoanalytic readings prioritize psychological states over linguistic transformations.

Studies on structured linguistic practice show patterned language improves writing clarity (Suparti et al., 2025). However, these discussions rarely extend to literary narrative, where language change signifies more than style. In *Flowers for Algernon*, Charlie Gordon's evolving language traces shifting subject positions within symbolic structures. Narratological theories and Lacanian psychoanalysis position language as central to subjectivity but are seldom combined in readings of Charlie's reports. Most interpretations focus on psychological development or intelligence, reducing the narrative to a case study and overlooking discourse articulation of subjectivity. This analysis combines narratology, stylistic linguistics, and Lacanian psychoanalysis to examine *Flowers for Algernon*, emphasizing changes in Charlie Gordon's first-person reports. Variations in spelling, syntax, vocabulary, coherence, and self-reference signal shifts within the Imaginary and Symbolic Orders, Lacanian concepts of human experience and identity. Rather than treating linguistic developments as plot incidental, the discussion approaches them as constitutive of narrative self. Through this lens, subjectivity emerges not as a stable essence but as a textual formation unraveling within discourse.

III. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative literary research design based on close textual analysis. Qualitative methods are commonly used in literary studies to interpret meaning and subjectivity as textual constructions, rather than as empirically measurable phenomena (Barry, 2017). Therefore, this study does not aim to diagnose psychological states or measure cognitive development but to interpret how subjectivity is narratively constructed through language.

The primary data source is Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* (2004 edition), which focuses on the first-person progress reports written by the protagonist, Charlie Gordon. In this study, *Flowers for Algernon* is regarded as primary literary data, and the progress reports are examined as textual artifacts that construct narrative voice, linguistic form, and subjectivity within the fictional discourse (Keyes, 2004). These progress reports serve as the narrative medium of the novel and provide sequential records of linguistic transformation. Data were collected through intensive reading of the text, with relevant quotations selected based on observable changes in spelling, syntax, vocabulary range, narrative coherence, and self-referential expression.

Data analysis was conducted through close reading informed by narratological and Lacanian psychoanalytic literary frameworks. Subjectivity was examined as a discursive construction produced in language, drawing on the Lacanian concept of the Symbolic Order as the domain in which identity is formed through signification (Lacan, 2006). The discourse-orientated perspective aligns with literary studies that emphasise discourse and narrative structure as the primary sites of meaning formation rather than psychological explanations (Arafah, 2018; Culler, 1997).

IV. Results and Discussion

A. Linguistic Markers of Subjectivity in Charlie Gordon's Progress Reports

In *Flowers for Algernon*, Charlie Gordon's subjectivity is not conveyed through explicit psychological commentary but unfolds through the evolving language of his first-person progress reports. Because the narrative consists entirely of these written entries, linguistic shifts become the primary means through which changes in his position as a subject can be traced. What appears to be cognitive development is, at the level of the text, a transformation in how experience is structured, interpreted, and linguistically organised over time.

Empirical research in language development lends support to this connection between linguistic competence and expressive capacity. Studies show that structured reading practice and vocabulary enrichment significantly enhance speaking performance, indicating that access to linguistic resources directly affects self-articulation (Kaharuddin et al., 2023; Usman et al., 2024). From a theoretical standpoint, conceptual metaphor theory further clarifies this process by arguing that abstract experience is organised through patterned linguistic mappings rather than simply ornamented by language (Baa et al., 2023), in this sense, language does not decorate thought—it structures it.

Accordingly, this analysis focuses on recurring textual features in Charlie's writing—spelling stability, syntactic complexity, vocabulary range, narrative coherence, and self-referential expressions—to examine how subjectivity is gradually constructed, provisionally stabilised, and eventually destabilised. These features function not as surface stylistic markers of intelligence but as linguistic mechanisms that organise cognitive and affective states within the narrative. The discussion begins with spelling, the most immediately visible indicator of Charlie's shifting access to socially regulated language. Changes in orthographic control operate as indexical signs of movement between marginal and authorised identity positions, echoing sociolinguistic findings that linguistic variation serves as a resource for negotiating evolving identities in mediated contexts (Hasjim et al., 2026; Iksora et al., 2022).

1. Spelling Patterns

In *Flowers for Algernon*, spelling functions as the most immediate indicator of Charlie Gordon's shifting relation to socially regulated language. Orthographic control signals access to the symbolic system, whereas deviation suggests marginal positioning within it. Across the narrative, changes in spelling trace Charlie's fluctuating proximity to linguistic

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authority.

Data 1

"Dr Strauss says I shoud rite down what I think and remember and evrey thing that happins to me from now on"(Keyes, 2004, p. 1).

The phonetic spellings (e.g., *shoud, evrey, happins*) indicate that Charlie writes according to sound rather than convention. His language has not yet entered standardised symbolic regulation. Although he speaks in the first person, the narrative voice lacks institutional authority; subjectivity appears present but structurally limited by restricted access to socially codified language, which may hinder his ability to fully express complex ideas and emotions that require more formal linguistic structures.

Data 2

"I figured out a new way to set up the mixing machines in the bakery to speed up production" (Keyes, 2004, p. 59).

Here, orthographic accuracy is fully stabilised. The absence of spelling deviation reflects Charlie's integration into symbolic norms. Linguistic precision enables technical explanation and self-positioning as competent and rational. Spelling control thus marks a temporary authorisation within symbolic discourse.

Data 3

"I forget things and even when I rite them in my notbook sometimes I cant reed my own riting and its very hard" (Keyes, 2004, p. 30).

The reappearance of orthographic instability signals regression. Errors disrupt textual stability and expose the fragility of Charlie's symbolic position, indicating that the inconsistencies in spelling and grammar may lead to misunderstandings of his identity and experiences. Subjectivity remains grammatically present, yet its discursive foundation weakens. While spelling governs access at the surface level, syntactic organisation determines how experience is structured within the narrative.

2. Syntactic Complexity

If spelling marks entry into regulated language, syntax determines how thought is hierarchically organised. Shifts in sentence structure reveal the degree to which Charlie can interpret rather than merely report experience.

Data 4

"I had a test today and I think I faled it and I think mabye now they wont use me" (Keyes, 2004, p. 1).

This sentence relies on parataxis—clauses linked by repetition and simple conjunctions. The absence of subordination restricts analytical distance. Charlie records events sequentially but does not yet organise them causally or reflectively. Subjectivity here remains immediate rather than interpretive.

Data 5

"I told Strauss that I was too involved in thinking, reading, and digging into myself, trying to understand who and what I am" (Keyes, 2004, p. 113).

Embedded clauses and abstract phrasing demonstrate syntactic layering. Experience is subordinated, evaluated, and conceptually framed. Grammatical hierarchy enables introspection, signalling a more stable narrative subject capable of self-analysis.

Data 6

"I dont feel like riting any more progress reports" (Keyes, 2004, p. 20).

The contraction of syntax mirrors cognitive and affective contractions. Although self-awareness persists, the grammatical structure no longer sustains extended reflection, leading to a more fragmented expression of ideas and emotions. As syntactic complexity diminishes, narrative authority weakens, leading to a more fragmented and less coherent expression of ideas. Where syntax organises thought hierarchically, vocabulary determines the conceptual range available for articulation.

3. Vocabulary Range

Lexical selection, which refers to the process of choosing words to express ideas, shapes what can be conceptualised. Charlie's vocabulary expands during symbolic integration and contracts during decline, directly affecting the depth of his evaluative capacity.

Data 7

"because all my life I wantid to be smart and not dumb" (Keyes, 2004, p. 4).

Early vocabulary relies on binary oppositions—*smart* versus *dumb*. These socially imposed labels compress identity into simplified categories, limiting nuance and interpretive autonomy.

Data 8

"Now I understand one of the important reasons for going to college and getting an education is to learn that the things you've believed in all your life aren't true, and that nothing is what it appears to be" (Keyes, 2004, p. 71).

Here, abstraction and conceptual layering become possible. Charlie articulates epistemological uncertainty and metacognitive reflection. Lexical expansion enables differentiated evaluation and a more stable discursive identity.

Data 9

"writing is harder. I have to look up even simple words in the dictionary now and it makes me angry with myself" (Keyes, 2004, p. 303).

As vocabulary contracts, expression becomes affect-driven. The reduction in lexical resources limits complex

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articulation, narrowing subjectivity to frustration and immediacy. Vocabulary loss thus affects not only expression but also the capacity to sustain narrative coherence over time, leading to fragmented thoughts and difficulty in conveying complex ideas effectively.

4. Narrative Coherence

Beyond individual sentences, subjectivity depends on the ability to organise experience temporally and causally. Narrative coherence reflects whether the narrator can integrate events into a meaningful structure.

Data 10

"I had a test today and Dr Strauss and Miss Kinnian was there and I tried hard and I want to be smart" (Keyes, 2004, p. 1).

Events accumulate without causal linkage or evaluative framing. Experience is recorded but not narratively shaped. The self remains minimally constructed within discourse.

Data 11

"Now I understand one of the important reasons for going to college and getting an education is to learn that the things you've believed in all your life aren't true, and that nothing is what it appears to be" (Keyes, 2004, p. 71).

Past belief and present realisation are integrated within a unified framework. Temporal layering and evaluative positioning stabilise narrative identity.

Data 12

"I don't know where the time goes" (Keyes, 2004, p. 302).

Temporal disorientation signals fragmentation. Without continuity, narrative selfhood weakens. The inability to sustain coherence undermines the discursive construction of subjectivity.

5. Self-Referential Expressions

Finally, shifts in self-reference reveal how Charlie positions himself within discourse.

Data 13

"I want to be smart" (Keyes, 2004, p. 1).

The pronoun 'I' functions grammatically but lacks interpretive depth. Identity is externally defined rather than internally constructed.

Data 14

"Thinking about it makes me remember the time I fell asleep standing up and Frank kicked my legs out from under me. "It's me, and yet it's like someone else lying there—another Charlie" (Keyes, 2004, pp. 59-60).

Here, reflexive distancing becomes possible. Language allows Charlie to differentiate past and present selves, forming a layered narrative identity.

Data 15

"I don't know where the time goes" (Keyes, 2004, p. 302).

The pronoun remains, but temporal anchoring dissolves. Although self-reference's organizing function deteriorates, its form endures.

In the later stage, first-person references remain grammatically present, yet they no longer anchor a stable narrative identity. The pronoun "I" continues to appear, but it carries less interpretive control. What remains is a voice that speaks without fully sustaining coherence.

Taken together, these patterns show how Charlie's position in language shifts across the novel. His sense of self does not precede the narrative; it takes shape within it. Spelling, syntax, vocabulary, and narrative organisation interact rather than function in isolation. They form a network of discursive mechanisms through which the narrative self emerges, gains temporary stability, and gradually unravels. Linguistic change, therefore, cannot be reduced to a surface marker of intelligence. It registers movement within the structures that produce subjectivity in the first place.

B. From the Imaginary to the Symbolic: Lacanian Subjectivity in Charlie Gordon's Narrative Voice

Lacan does not treat the subject as a unified inner self. Instead, subjectivity takes form within language and the symbolic structures that organise it. Read from this angle, Charlie Gordon's narrative voice becomes more than a vehicle for reporting events. It is the space in which his position in language shifts and becomes visible.

As the progress reports evolve, changes in coherence, abstraction, and linguistic control reflect movement between the Imaginary and the Symbolic Orders. At certain moments, language appears to stabilise Charlie's sense of self; at others, it exposes division and fragmentation. What matters, then, is not only what Charlie narrates, but how his narration reorganises his relation to identification, authority, and loss within discourse.

1. Imaginary Identification and Narrative Coherence

Within Lacanian theory, the Imaginary Order is structured around identification with images of wholeness, coherence, and self-sufficiency. In *Flowers for Algernon*, certain moments in Charlie Gordon's narration temporarily generate this kind of unity. The narrative appears coherent, achievements align with recognition, and the self seems stabilised through reflected success rather than through symbolic differentiation.

Data 16

"I figured out a new way to set up the mixing machines in the bakery to speed up production. Mr. Donner says he will save costs and increase profits. He gave me a fifty-dollar bonus and a ten-dollar-a-week raise" (Keyes, 2004, p. 59).

The sequence unfolds smoothly: action leads to recognition, and recognition leads to reward. Events are arranged in a

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linear and affirmative pattern that reinforces a coherent self-image. The narrative logic confirms Charlie as capable and valued. This coherence, however, rests on identification with external validation, such as praise from peers or acknowledgment from authority figures. The unity achieved here derives from recognition and success, not from structural positioning within language. It is an image of wholeness sustained by affirmation.

Data 17

"It's me, and yet it's like someone else lying there—another Charlie" (Keyes, 2004, pp. 59-60).

In this moment, Charlie turns his narrative gaze upon himself. The distinction between past and present selves introduces reflexivity, yet the structure of comparison still depends on visual and affective recognition. He observes himself as an object "another Charlie" rather than articulating a divided subject structured by signifiers. The coherence remains imaginary: it depends on recognition and contrast, not on symbolic mediation. Because it is anchored in identification, this unity remains precarious and vulnerable to collapse, particularly when external factors challenge the individual's sense of self or when there is a lack of consistent recognition from others.

2. Entry into the Symbolic Order and Linguistic Regulation

Where the Imaginary offers unity through image, the Symbolic organises subjectivity through language, abstraction, and differentiation. Entry into this order does not merely require fluency; it involves submission to linguistic structures that exceed the self, which can lead to a transformation in one's identity and perception of reality. Charlie's narrative voice increasingly reflects this shift as abstraction, evaluative distance, and conceptual framing begin to govern his discourse, illustrating how he navigates the complexities of identity and meaning within the Symbolic order.

Data 18

"Now I understand one of the important reasons for going to college and getting an education is to learn that the things you've believed in all your life aren't true, and that nothing is what it appears to be" (Keyes, 2004, p. 71).

Here, experience is no longer narrated as immediate perception. Instead, Charlie formulates a general principle that surpasses personal circumstance, suggesting that universal truths can be derived from shared experiences rather than solely from individual perspectives. Belief is reinterpreted through epistemological doubt, and meaning is organised conceptually rather than experientially. The movement from "I experienced" to "I understand" signals a structural shift: knowledge is mediated through abstract language. In this moment, subjectivity is positioned within a system of signification that regulates truth beyond individual feeling, suggesting that our understanding of truth is shaped by collective frameworks rather than solely personal experiences.

This transition is accompanied by heightened awareness of language itself. Writing becomes a tool of independence and interpretation. Linguistic mastery no longer serves self-image but functions as authorisation within a shared symbolic framework.

Data 19

"Now I know what it means when they say 'to pull a Charlie Gordon"(Keyes, 2004, p. 41).

Here, Charlie recognises himself as a signifier within social discourse. His name becomes part of a linguistic network that categorises and circulates meaning. Identity is no longer grounded in reflection but in relational positioning within language, which means that an individual's sense of self is shaped by their interactions and relationships with others in various social contexts. The self emerges through differentiation—through how it is named and invoked by others, which highlights the importance of social interactions and cultural contexts in shaping one's identity.

Data 20

"Intelligence is one of the greatest human gifts. But all too often a search for knowledge drives out the search for love" (Keyes, 2004, p. 249).

This statement moves fully into abstraction. The claim is impersonal, universalised, and detached from immediate experience. Intelligence becomes a conceptual category rather than a personal achievement. The language of general principle replaces narrative immediacy, making it harder for individuals to connect emotionally with the concepts being discussed. Yet this symbolic articulation introduces division. Conceptual clarity exposes contradiction—knowledge and love are placed in tension. What appears as mastery simultaneously reveals loss. Linguistic precision sharpens awareness but distances the subject from affective certainty, leading to a struggle between intellectual understanding and emotional connection. The more fully Charlie occupies the Symbolic, the more he encounters alienation, as he becomes increasingly detached from his emotional experiences and personal connections. Symbolic integration thus stabilises subjectivity only temporarily. It enables abstraction and analytical depth, but at the cost of unity. The subject becomes structured, differentiated, and divided—capable of conceptual thought, yet increasingly estranged from affective coherence, leading to a fragmented sense of self that struggles to integrate emotional experiences with rational understanding.

3. Symbolic Disintegration and Narrative Fragmentation

Moments of decline in *Flowers for Algernon* are registered not through explicit confession, but through disruptions in language. As Charlie's condition worsens, his writing begins to show strain.

Data 21

"But writing is harder. I have to look up even simple words in the dictionary now and it makes me very angry with myself" (Keyes, 2004, p. 303).

Here, difficulty with writing is no longer a temporary obstacle but a structural limitation. Charlie remains aware of the loss; he can still name it. Yet the act of looking up words suggests that language no longer arrives with immediacy or

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control. Meaning must be chased, retrieved, and pieced together. The frustration he expresses is not only emotional but also discursive.

As this pattern continues, reading and rereading fail to secure comprehension. Repetition does not restore stability. Language persists at the level of mechanical form, but its capacity to sustain continuity across time weakens. What emerges is a fragmentation of narrative control: sentences remain, yet their organising force diminishes. In Lacanian terms, this moment can be understood as a loosening of symbolic coherence, where the structures that once stabilised Charlie's position in language begin to falter.

C. The Narrative Construction and Disintegration of Charlie Gordon's Subjectivity

Subjectivity in *Flowers for Algernon* ultimately proves to be a fragile narrative construction maintained through linguistic mediation. As Charlie Gordon's access to symbolic language weakens, the narrative voice that once organised his experiences and sense of self begins to crack. The following analysis examines how this breakdown unfolds within Charlie's first-person discourse, focusing on the erosion of narrative continuity, the collapse of self-recognition, and the outward displacement of meaning. Through these processes, subjectivity emerges not as a stable psychological core but as a language-dependent construction that dissolves when symbolic regulation can no longer be maintained.

1. Symbolic Strain and the Onset of Narrative Instability

\The decline does not occur abruptly. In the early stages, Charlie can still write and read, but something in the process feels strained. Coherence becomes harder to sustain.

Data 23

"But then it hit me like a fist against the side of my head that I didn't remember what I had to do… when I turned to read it, part of it had been erased and the rest didn't make sense" (Keyes, 2004, p. 287).

This moment captures more than forgetfulness. Charlie confronts a gap between writing and comprehension. The text is physically present, yet it no longer guarantees meaning. The phrase "didn't make sense" signals a rupture in continuity: sentences no longer connect across time in a reliable way. He rereads, but repetition does not restore clarity. The effort to recover meaning exposes its instability. Language remains visible on the page, but its organising force weakens. What once structured experience now produces anxiety. In Lacanian terms, this change can be understood as a loosening of the symbolic framework that previously sustained his position in discourse. Narrative authority does not disappear at once; it erodes, sentence by sentence.

As this erosion deepens, instability shifts from cognitive difficulty to affective distress. The fear is no longer only of forgetting, but of losing access to language itself.

2. Full Symbolic Disintegration and Narrative Fragmentation

As the decline progresses, language no longer provides stability. The breakdown is not only cognitive but structural: sentences lose cohesion, repetition replaces development, and the narrative voice shifts toward urgency rather than reflection.

Data 24

"Please… please… dont let me forget how to reed and rite…" (Keyes, 2004, p. 307).

The repetition of "please" interrupts syntactic flow and replaces explanation with appeal. Earlier in the narrative, Charlie analysed his condition through abstraction and reflection. Here, analysis disappears. What remains is a plea. The fear is no longer framed as an intellectual problem but as an immediate threat to existence. The fragmentation of spelling mirrors the instability of the voice itself, indicating that the disintegration of language reflects a deeper crisis in identity and communication. Language is still present, but it no longer organises experience; it exposes vulnerability, revealing how individuals struggle to articulate their feelings and thoughts in a world where traditional meanings have become unstable. In Lacanian terms, this moment suggests that the linguistic framework that once structured Charlie's position in discourse can no longer hold. The speaking "I" persists, yet it no longer anchors a coherent narrative identity. The voice becomes affective rather than interpretive.

3. The Narrative Disintegration of Subjectivity

In the final stage, the erosion becomes visible at the level of self-recognition. The first-person pronoun remains grammatically intact, but it no longer guarantees continuity between experience and identity.

Data 25

"Alice tells me I lie in bed for days and don't seem to know who or where I am" (Keyes, 2004, p. 295).

The sentence is striking because self-knowledge is mediated through another person. Charlie does not describe his condition directly; he reports what Alice tells him. This displacement signals a weakening of narrative authority. The "I" is grammatically present, but awareness of that "I" depends on external testimony. The result is not the disappearance of language but the thinning of its organising power. Self-reference becomes formal rather than reflective.

Data 26

"please if you get a chance put some flowers on Algernons grave in the bak yard" (Keyes, 2004, p. 311).

The final appeal completes this outward movement. Memory and responsibility are entrusted to the reader. Instead of narrating himself, Charlie asks others to preserve meaning for him. The request is simple, almost childlike, yet structurally significant: narrative continuity no longer rests within the speaking subject. At this point, subjectivity does not vanish; it dissolves into relation. What remains is a voice that reaches outward, no longer capable of sustaining its own symbolic position. The novel thus closes not with silence, but with a fragile gesture that reveals how deeply identity in this text

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depends on language.

V. Conclusion

Flowers for Algernon ultimately portrays subjectivity not as a stable psychological interior, but as a fragile narrative construction sustained through language. Charlie Gordon's progress reports demonstrate that identity in the novel emerges through specific linguistic mechanisms—spelling patterns, syntactic organisation, vocabulary range, narrative coherence, and self-referential expressions. These elements do not merely reflect intelligence; they structure how experience is ordered, interpreted, and narrated. The analysis shows that moments of linguistic stability allow Charlie to occupy a more coherent narrative position, enabling abstraction, reflection, and social positioning. However, this coherence remains provisional. As linguistic control diminishes, narrative continuity starts to disintegrate, and the first-person voice progressively loses its ability to maintain a cohesive sense of self. The "I" remains grammatically present, yet its authority as a site of interpretation diminishes. From a Lacanian viewpoint, this evolution demonstrates that subjectivity is facilitated by symbolic structures rather than rooted in psychological essence. Imaginary coherence offers transient unity, whereas symbolic integration fosters both conceptual clarity and alienation. When symbolic organisation deteriorates, subjectivity does not disappear entirely but becomes unstable and increasingly dependent on others for narrative validation. This study therefore contributes a language-centred reading of *Flowers for Algernon*, demonstrating that the novel constructs and destabilises subjectivity through narrative form itself. By foregrounding linguistic transformation as a traceable mechanism of subject formation, the analysis expands existing interpretations that prioritise psychological or ethical themes and instead highlights how first-person fiction stages identity as a discursive effect produced—and undone—through language.

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A Model of Critical Historiography in T. Kakishuly's Scholarly Legacy: Alash, Sakentanu, and the Reconstruction of the National Literary Canon

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***Abstract*—The significance of the present study lies in the need for a theoretical interpretation of T. Kakishuly's scholarly legacy as a model of critical historiography associated with the restoration of literary memory and the reconstruction of the national literary canon. The aim of the study is to identify the model of critical historiography in T. Kakishuly's work and to determine how literary memory and the national literary canon are reconstructed through Alash, the literary and intellectual legacy of the Alash movement; *sakentanu*, or Saken Seifullin studies; and the history of Kazakh literary criticism. The methodology of the study is based on historical-literary, historiographic, literary-discursive, and canonological analysis operationalized through a coding matrix of historiographic fragments. The scholarly novelty of the study lies in interpreting T. Kakishuly's works as an integral model of transition from ideologically distorted interpretation to canonical reconstruction. The study identifies strategies of critical re-evaluation, terminological clarification, the restoration of *aqtandaq* ("suppressed / blank pages of literary history"), and the inclusion of authors in national literary memory. The main findings confirm the significance of T. Kakishuly's critical historiography for the theory of literary historiography, memory studies, and research on the national canon, while also showing that the proposed model requires further comparative testing in other Kazakh and post-Soviet literary-critical corpora.**

***Index Terms*—critical historiography, Alash, sakentanu, literary memory, national literary canon**

I. Introduction

T. Kakishuly's scholarly legacy is important for understanding Kazakh literary history as a dynamic field of memory, interpretation, and scholarly re-evaluation. The Soviet period left not only texts and research traditions but also ideological schemes that shaped the status of authors, movements, and concepts. Therefore, the restoration of literary memory requires attention not simply to the return of names, but to evaluative language, archival argumentation, polemics, and the canon-forming function of criticism. In this sense, Kakishuly's works provide material for analyzing critical historiography as a mechanism of national literary reconstruction.

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International and regional scholarship situates this problem within debates on memory, canon, and post-Soviet cultural redescription. Studies of Alash emphasize its political, cultural, and historiographic reception (Kesici, 2017; Saktaganova et al., 2020; Dukeyev, 2025), while research on educational narratives and Kazakh symbolic culture shows how national memory is continually reworked (Burkhanov & Sharipova, 2024; Kyyakhmetova et al., 2025; Jacquesson, 2022; Rigney, 2018). These studies confirm that the reconstruction of literary history involves both the recovery of suppressed material and the reinterpretation of inherited explanatory schemes.

Research on Soviet national literatures and canon formation provides the theoretical background for this study. **Frank (2022)**, Chmielewska (2019), and McGuire (2018) show how literary history was organized through ideological appropriation and socialist-realist schemes, whereas Barré et al. (2023), Rydholm (2025), Milevski and Wetenkamp (2022), and Jünke (2023) connect canonicity with selection, rediscovery, archive, and memory transmission.

A gap remains, however, in explaining how an individual scholar transforms ideological classifications into a literary-historical model. Studies of Alash, canon, and memory often address political history, institutional selection, or the return of suppressed names, but they less often examine the exact terminological and polemical operations through which critical historiography itself becomes canon-forming. This article therefore treats T. Kakishuly's works not as a biographical set of writings, but as an integrated model of scholarly redescription.

The novelty of the article lies in interpreting T. Kakishuly's legacy as a systematic transition from Soviet evaluative classification to literary memory restoration and national canon reconstruction. Alash, sakentanu, and the history of Kazakh literary criticism are treated as interconnected components of one model rather than as separate thematic directions. Special attention is given to the terms ultshyl, baishyl, burzhuaziyashyl, and alashshyl, because they reveal how scholarly optics shift from ideological accusation to historically grounded literary explanation.

The aim is to identify T. Kakishuly's model of critical historiography and to determine how literary memory and the national literary canon are reconstructed through Alash, sakentanu, and Kazakh literary criticism. To achieve this aim, the study defines the relevant theoretical frameworks, compares international and Kazakhstani approaches, explains the methodological transition from individual works to an analytical model, and shows how terminological re-evaluation, archival evidence, and literary-discursive polemics produce a canon-forming result.

II. Literature Review

The review follows four connected lines: critical historiography as the revision of ideological literary-historical schemes; Alash and sakentanu as objects of memory, identity, and rehabilitation; archive, memory, and canon as mechanisms of selection, exclusion, and return; and the methodological gap concerning terminological and discursive re-evaluation within a scholar's own texts. This sequence makes it possible to move from general theory to the specific Kazakh literary-critical corpus.

Critical historiography is understood here as an analytical procedure for identifying and correcting distorted interpretations of the past. Literary memory denotes the scholarly and cultural actualization of names, texts, and archival materials, while the national literary canon is a changing system of selection and legitimation shaped by criticism, institutions, archives, and reception (Bond et al., 2017; Erll, 2011; Rigney, 2018).

A. Critical Historiography and the Redescription of the Soviet Literary Heritage

Studies of Soviet and post-Soviet literatures show that literary history includes selection, appropriation, exclusion, ideological labeling, and later re-evaluation. **Frank (2022)** describes the critical appropriation of heritage in Soviet national literatures; Chmielewska (2019) treats socialist realism as a literary-historical model; and McGuire (2018) shows how Abai Zholy functions both as socialist realism and as literary history.

This perspective clarifies T. Kakishuly's work: he does not merely restore names or biographies, but demonstrates why earlier descriptive language became insufficient for national literary history. **Annus (2016), Parui (2024), and Fluck (2019) are particularly relevant here because they connect memory, postcolonial culture, critique, and the forms through which new interpretive frameworks become possible.** Thus, T. Kakishuly's critical historiography may be understood as a movement from exposing ideology to building an evidence-based model of literary knowledge.

For Kazakhstan, the issue is also linked to education and national identity. Burkhanov and Sharipova (2024), Boman and Mussakhanova (2024), and Bekzhanova and Durrani (2025) show that educational narratives combine national renewal with residual Soviet schemes, which is essential because the canon is consolidated not only in scholarship but also in teaching.

Table 1 summarizes the frameworks that explain T. Kakishuly's critical historiography and their function in the present study.

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TABLE 1
THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR STUDYING CRITICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE NATIONAL LITERARY CANON

Research framework	**Key focus**	**Relevant sources**	**Function for the present article**
History of Soviet national literatures	Ideological appropriation of heritage, redescription of the past, socialist realism as a literary-historical scheme	**Frank, 2022**; Chmielewska, 2019; McGuire, 2018	Explains the initial evaluative system revised by critical historiography
Memory studies	Memory as a process of remediation, transfer, return, and contested actualization of the past	Erll, 2011; Rigney, 2018; Milevski & Wetenkamp, 2022; Jünke, 2023	Makes it possible to treat *aqtandaq* and archival evidence as elements of literary memory
Canonological analysis	Selection, institutionalization, reception, and rediscovery of authors and texts	Barré et al., 2023; Rydholm, 2025; Karpukhina, 2023	Provides a language for describing the transition from re-evaluation to canonical reconstruction
Studies of Alash and Kazakhstani identity	The legacy of Alash, national narratives, post-Soviet reception, and educational memory	Kesici, 2017; Saktaganova et al., 2020; Dukeyev, 2025; Burkhanov & Sharipova, 2024	Reveals the historical and cultural context for the return of Alash to national memory
Literary-discursive analysis of criticism	Nomination, argumentation, terminological substitutions, and evaluative formulas	Mansouri et al., 2017; Al-lawama, 2024	Allows the analysis to address not only conclusions but also the language of scholarly re-evaluation

Table 1 shows that no single framework fully explains T. Kakishuly's model. Soviet literary history clarifies the initial ideological matrix, memory studies explains the return of suppressed material, and canonology describes how this material becomes part of the national literary structure. The review therefore connects these levels without reducing critical historiography either to biography or to the general history of Alash.

B. Alash and Sakentanu in Studies of National Literary Memory

Studies of Alash show that the movement was more than an early twentieth-century political episode. Kesici (2017) connects it with the transformation of Kazakh ethnicity into national community, Saktaganova et al. (2020) reconstruct its historiography, and Dukeyev (2025) traces its contested contemporary narratives. For this article, these works are important because they show that Alash is not merely rehabilitated from outside, but becomes a field in which literary subjectivity and the scholarly language of description are restored.

The literary memory of Alash also intersects with cultural symbolization. Kyyakhmetova et al. (2025), Jacquesson (2022), Rancier (2024), and Tokshylykova et al. (2024) show that folklore, epic heritage, the dombra, the steppe, and the horse operate as symbolic carriers of historical memory and national identity.

Sakentanu has a distinct place because Saken Seifullin's reception cannot be reduced to a Soviet/national opposition. Kassimova et al. (2023), **Omarov (2020)**, Nurgali et al. (2021), and Rakymzhan et al. (2022) demonstrate his broader cultural, intertextual, and literary-historical significance. Against this background, sakentanu in T. Kakishuly's legacy can be read as a method for analyzing a complex figure located between biography, ideology, archive, text, and canon.

Selected Kazakhstani and Turkological studies further show how ethnocultural memory is represented linguistically. Bakytzhanova et al. (2023) identify stable evaluative models in Turkic phraseology, while Akhmetova et al. (2025) show that ethnocultural names remain active in Kazakh youth's linguistic consciousness; both sources link memory with language rather than archive alone.

Figure 1 presents the functional relationship among Alash, sakentanu, and the history of Kazakh criticism in T. Kakishuly's model.

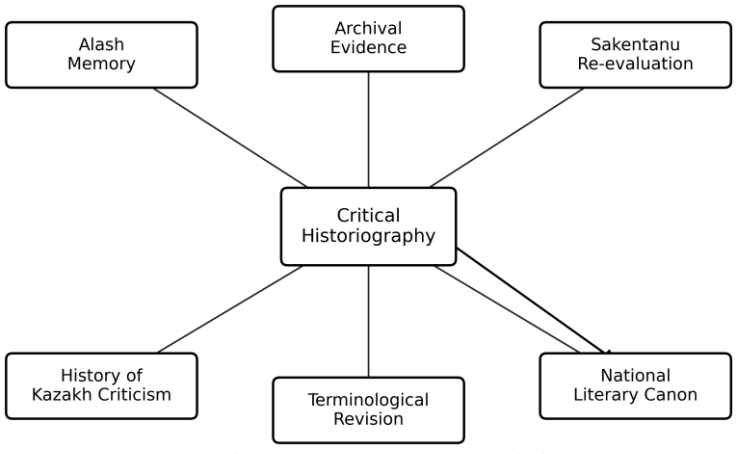


Figure 1. Conceptual Map of Critical Historiography in T. Kakishuly's Scholarly Legacy

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Figure 1 shows that archival evidence, Alash memory, sakentanu, the history of Kazakh criticism, and terminological correction converge around re-evaluation. In this model, the canon is not a ready-made list but the result of linking memory, evidence, and scholarly language.

C. Archive, Literary Memory, and Mechanisms of Canonical Reconstruction

Memory theory explains why forgotten names and archival documents do not become canonical automatically. Erll (2011), Rigney (2018), Milevski and Wetenkamp (2022), and Jünke (2023) treat memory as travelling, remediated, and translated. This allows aqtandaq to be seen not as empty gaps in literary history, but as zones of return, reinterpretation, and scholarly redescription that require both evidence and critical language.

Canonological scholarship adds that memory needs institutional and critical consolidation. Barré et al. (2023), Rydholm (2025), Karpukhina (2023), and Youngman et al. (2024) show that the canon and archive are active structures of recognition, rediscovery, and selection rather than passive repositories of the past. For T. Kakishuly, this means that archival evidence becomes significant only when it is turned into a literary-historical argument.

Recent studies of Kazakh literature also stress the need to connect national material with international theory. Matayeva et al. (2025), Kossyn (2024), Ismakova et al. (2019), and Zakirova et al. (2023) demonstrate how modern Kazakh literary studies combine national specificity with structural, hermeneutic, postcolonial, and linguacultural approaches. These works confirm that the local literary corpus can be interpreted through concepts readable in wider humanities scholarship.

Figure 2 outlines the transition from ideological labeling to canonical reconstruction, showing that suppressed material becomes scholarly significant only through evidence-based re-evaluation, terminological clarification, and systematization.

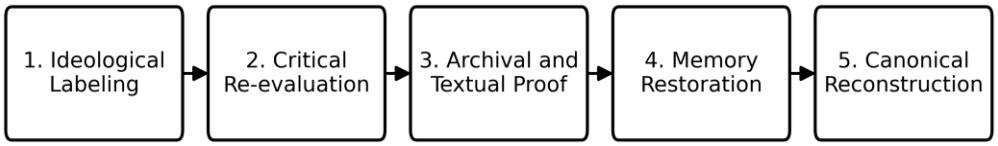


Figure 2. Procedural Model of the Transition From Ideological Labeling to Canonical Reconstruction

Figure 2 identifies five stages: ideological labeling, critical re-evaluation, archival and textual proof, memory restoration, and canonical reconstruction. The archive gains force only when it is transformed into reasoned literary-historical argument.

D. Terminological Re-Evaluation, Discursive Argumentation, and the Place of the Present Study

Terminological re-evaluation is central to critical historiography because Soviet labels predetermined the status of authors and the limits of interpretation. Mansouri et al. (2017) and Al-lawama (2024) show that nomination, argumentation, and critical theory revise power-related assumptions; this supports reading ultshyl, baishyl, burzhuaziyashyl, and alashshyl as instruments of interpretive struggle.

Kazakh literary and cultural studies confirm that the canon is shaped by symbolic, educational, and critical practices. Yerdembekov et al. (2025), Gülüm (2023), and Sadvokassova et al. (2025) show that Alash, folkloric memory, and Kazakhstani identity function as broader contexts for the symbolic reconstruction of the national past.

The research gap is therefore specific: Alash, canon, and memory are well studied, but the mechanism by which a single literary scholar builds critical historiography inside his own texts remains insufficiently described. T. Kakishuly's corpus is suitable for filling this gap because it combines archive, polemic, terminology, aqtandaq, and canonical inclusion. The article thus specifies the general post-Soviet memory discussion through a personal scholarly model important for Kazakh literary studies.

Table 2 systematizes the limitations of existing studies and the contribution of the present article.

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TABLE 2
MATRIX OF RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PRESENT ARTICLE

Research line	Already developed	Limitation of existing studies	Contribution of the present article
Alash studies	History of the movement, political program, national intelligentsia, and contemporary narratives of memory	The literary-critical mechanism of re-evaluation is revealed only fragmentarily	Alash is considered as a functional component of T. Kakishuly's critical historiography
Sakentanu	Biography, works, and cultural-historical status of Saken Seifullin	The connection between personal reconstruction and canon formation is insufficiently described	Sakentanu is interpreted as a model for the comprehensive re-evaluation of a literary figure
Memory studies	Archive, cultural memory, remediation, and the return of suppressed voices	General theories are rarely brought to the level of a concrete Kazakh literary-critical corpus	The concept of *aqtandaq* is connected with archival evidence and critical language
Canon studies	Selection, reception, institutionalization, and quantitative operationalization of canonicity	The role of terminological substitutions and polemics in canon formation is not always considered	The canon is reconstructed through a shift in scholarly optics and the language of evaluation
Discursive analysis of criticism	Nomination, argumentation, ideological frames, and critical strategies	Terminological correction in Kazakh literary historiography remains insufficiently examined	The terms *ultshyl*, *baishyl*, *burzhuaziyashyl*, and *alashshyl* are analyzed as instruments of redescription

Table 2 shows that the gap lies in the absence of an integrated model connecting Alash, sakentanu, criticism, archival memory, and terminological re-evaluation. The article addresses this gap by locating canon reconstruction within literary-critical argumentation.

The review leads to three conclusions. First, critical historiography reconstructs knowledge rather than merely correcting errors. Second, Alash and sakentanu form complementary trajectories for restoring literary subjectivity: one is connected with a national-intellectual movement, the other with the re-evaluation of a complex writer. Third, the canon is shaped through the language of evaluation, criteria of evidence, and scholarly argumentation.

Thus, international studies provide the apparatus of memory, canon, and postcolonial re-evaluation; Kazakhstani and Turkological works specify Alash, literary memory, and identity; and discourse-oriented research explains terminological substitutions as scholarly mechanisms. These conclusions justify the historical-literary, historiographic, literary-discursive, and canonological methodology used below, as well as the coding matrix that traces the movement from ideological distortion to canonical reconstruction.

This synthesis also avoids two extremes: treating memory restoration only as moral rehabilitation and treating the canon only as a final list of authors. T. Kakishuly's model shows how archival fact, polemic, terminological clarification, and the history of criticism gradually become a mechanism of national literary reconstruction. Further analysis must therefore consider not only the topics of his works but also the internal logic of their evidentiary force, because it is this logic that turns literary-critical commentary into a canon-forming procedure.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Materials of the Study

The material consists of Tursynbek Kakishuly's scholarly, literary-critical, historical-literary, documentary-biographical, and polemical works in which synshyl tarihnama ("critical historiography") is formed. The corpus covers three directions: Alash, sakentanu ("Saken Seifullin studies"), and ulttyq adebi kanondy qaita quru ("reconstruction of the national literary canon"). It includes Sanadagy jaralar, Ker zamannyn keregar oilary, Magzhan-Saken, Saiys, and major works in sakentanu such as Qyzyl sunkar, Saken Seifullin, Sakennin soty, Tar jol, taigaq keshudin tagdyry, Dauir dauylpazy, and Dala dauylpazy. These texts were selected because they revise Soviet interpretations, use archival and polemical evidence, clarify ideological terms, restore aqtandaq, and define the place of Alash and Saken Seifullin in Kazakh literary history. The chronology of sakentanu also makes it possible to trace continuity from early biographical work to later conceptual reconstruction, while the Alash-related texts reveal how historical-literary justice is argued through documents and polemics. No human participants were involved; the unit of analysis is the historiographic fragment.

B. Methods and Research Instruments

The methodology combines historical-literary, historiographic, literary-discursive, ideological re-evaluation, literary memory, and canonological analysis. This design was chosen because the article does not provide a biography or a chronological survey, but reconstructs the mechanism through which Alash, sakentanu, and the history of criticism become instruments of literary memory restoration and canon formation. Each method corresponds to a different layer of the corpus: historical context, previous interpretation, argumentation, terminology, memory return, and canon-making. A purely quantitative count of names or terms would not explain how Soviet interpretations are revised or how canonical status is rebuilt.

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Historical-literary analysis determines how T. Kakishuly relates Alash, Saken Seifullin, and Kazakh criticism to the development of national literature. It identifies which figures are returned, which periods are reinterpreted, and how author, era, criticism, and literary process are connected. The method treats his works as a system for organizing literary history and corresponds to studies of Soviet national literatures and socialist realism as fields of ideological redescription (**Frank, 2022**; Chmielewska, 2019; McGuire, 2018).

Historiographic analysis identifies the Soviet assessments, scholarly errors, terminological substitutions, and politicized schemes revised in T. Kakishuly's works. It reveals the mechanism of reconstructing knowledge rather than merely listing topics, because it examines which interpretations are disputed, which documents are introduced, and which gaps are eliminated. This approach is relevant to Alash studies because the movement's interpretation depended strongly on political and scholarly contexts (Saktaganova et al., 2020).

Literary-discursive analysis examines argumentation, evaluative formulas, polemical techniques, and the representation of literary figures. It shows how T. Kakishuly constructs a scholarly position through terms, comparisons, refutations, archival evidence, and new status attribution, in line with discourse-historical approaches to nomination and argumentation (Mansouri et al., 2017).

The analysis of ideological re-evaluation focuses on ultshyl ("nationalist"), baishyl ("pro-bai / pro-rich class-oriented"), burzhuaziyashyl ("bourgeois-oriented"), and alashshyl ("Alash-oriented / associated with Alash ideas"). These units are examined not as isolated words but as markers of the shift from accusation to historically grounded literary interpretation.

The analysis of literary memory shows how names, texts, biographical facts, archival evidence, and cultural roles return in T. Kakishuly's works. It explains how a document or name becomes part of national literary memory rather than remaining a source reference only. This method draws on the relationship between literary theory, memory studies, archive, and cultural canon (Milevski & Wetenkamp, 2022; Youngman et al., 2024).

Canonological analysis determines how Alash and sakentanu function as mechanisms of national canon reconstruction. It considers which authors and texts return, which criteria of significance are formed, how Saken Seifullin and Alash acquire renewed literary-historical status, and how the history of criticism becomes a basis for rethinking the national literary process. This corresponds to studies of canon formation through historiographic rediscovery (Rydholm, 2025).

The main instrument is a coding matrix recording the source, year, object of analysis, literary figure or movement, earlier ideological framework, evaluative term, mode of re-evaluation, argumentation type, form of memory restoration, inclusion in literary history, and canon-forming effect. The matrix links each method to a specific analytical result: historical-literary analysis locates the author or movement; historiographic analysis records revision; literary-discursive analysis reveals terminology and argument; memory analysis identifies return; and canonology determines inclusion. This procedure ensures that the final model is derived from textual evidence rather than from a general descriptive impression.

To reduce interpretive subjectivity, each historiographic fragment was analyzed according to the same set of coding categories: source, object of analysis, earlier ideological framework, evaluative term, mode of re-evaluation, argumentation type, form of memory restoration, and canon-forming effect. Interpretive conclusions were drawn only when a fragment combined terminological revision with documentary, polemical, or literary-historical evidence. This procedure helped distinguish textual evidence from general evaluative impression.

C. Research Procedure

The procedure included six stages. First, T. Kakishuly's works on Alash, sakentanu, and Kazakh literary criticism were selected. Second, the corpus was limited to fragments concerning ideological distortion, aqtandaq, returned names, Saken Seifullin, Alash, or the canon. Third, the fragments were entered into the coding matrix. Fourth, historical-literary, historiographic, and literary-discursive analysis was conducted. Fifth, the material was grouped into three clusters: Alash, sakentanu, and the history of criticism. Sixth, the results were generalized as the sequence ideologically distorted interpretation → critical re-evaluation → restoration of literary memory → reconstruction of the national literary canon.

IV. Results

The study revealed four interconnected levels of results: historical-literary, historiographic, literary-discursive, and canon-forming. Historical-literary analysis made it possible to determine how *Alash*, the literary and intellectual legacy of the *Alash* movement; *sakentanu*, or *Saken Seifullin* studies; and the history of Kazakh literary criticism are correlated in T. Kakishuly's works. Historiographic analysis identified the ways in which Soviet ideological interpretations are revised and *aqtandaq* ("suppressed / blank pages of literary history") is restored. Literary-discursive analysis showed how a new scholarly position is formed through terminological substitutions, polemical formulas, archival arguments, and evaluative constructions. Canonological analysis made it possible to establish how *Alash*, *sakentanu*, and the history of Kazakh criticism become mechanisms for reconstructing the *national literary canon*.

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The presentation of the results follows the research procedure: corpus systematization of T. Kakishuly's works; identification of historiographic strategies of re-evaluation; definition of three analytical clusters of *critical historiography*; and generalization of the model of *national literary canon* reconstruction.

A. Corpus Systematization of T. Kakishuly's Scholarly Legacy

The results of corpus systematization showed that T. Kakishuly's works do not form a simple thematic list of studies about individual authors or literary periods. Their internal research logic is connected with the restoration of distorted literary history, the revision of earlier ideological assessments, the return of suppressed names, and the clarification of the structure of national *literary memory*. This is why three stable directions are distinguished in the corpus: *Alash*, *sakentanu*, and the history of Kazakh literary criticism.

The coding matrix made it possible to correlate each source with a specific research function in the general model of T. Kakishuly's *critical historiography*. As a result, the corpus was systematized not according to an external chronological or bibliographic principle, but according to the analytical role of the works in revealing the topic of the article: restoration of the *literary memory* of *Alash*, reconstruction of the literary figure of *Saken Seifullin* within the framework of *sakentanu*, rethinking the history of Kazakh literary criticism, and identifying the canon-forming effect of the researcher's scholarly legacy. This systematization records the first result of the study: T. Kakishuly's works constitute not a fragmented thematic array but an interconnected structure in which each corpus block participates in the transition from ideologically distorted interpretation to the reconstruction of the *national literary canon*; these results are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
CORPUS SYSTEMATIZATION OF T. KAKISHULY'S WORKS

Analytical direction	**Corpus sources**	**Main research focus**	**Result of analysis**
Alash, the literary and intellectual legacy of the Alash movement	*Sanadagy jaralar* ("Wounds in Consciousness"); *Ker zamannyn keregar oilary* ("Contradictory Thoughts of a Troubled Time"); *Magzhan-Saken* ("Magzhan and Saken")	Revision of Soviet assessments, restoration of the status of Alash, critique of ideological labels	Alash is presented as an object of scholarly rehabilitation, restoration of literary memory, and historical-literary re-evaluation
Sakentanu, or Saken Seifullin studies	*Qyzyl sunkar* ("The Red Falcon"); Saken Seifullin; *Sakennin soty* ("Saken's Trial"); *Tar jol, taigaq keshudin tagdyry* ("The Fate of The Thorny Path, the Slippery Road"); *Dauir dauylpazy* ("The Herald of the Era"); *Dala dauylpazy* ("The Herald of the Steppe")	Reconstruction of Saken Seifullin's personality and work through archival, biographical, textual, and polemical materials	Sakentanu functions as a model for the comprehensive re-evaluation of a literary figure
History of Kazakh literary criticism	Works on the history of criticism, polemics, and literary-critical thought	Determination of the role of criticism in the formation of literary history	The history of criticism is revealed as a basis for reconstructing the national literary canon
Terminological re-evaluation	Fragments in which the concepts *ultshyl* ("nationalist"), *baishyl* ("pro-bai / pro-rich class-oriented"), *burzhuaziyashyl* ("bourgeois-oriented"), and *alashshyl* ("Alash-oriented") are revised	Replacement of Soviet evaluative labels with scholarly substantiated historical-literary concepts	A transition is formed from ideological classification to scholarly interpretation of the literary process
Canonical reconstruction	Fragments concerning the place of Alash, Saken Seifullin, and the history of criticism in the literary process	Inclusion of authors, texts, and critical directions in national literary history	The canon-forming function of T. Kakishuly's scholarly legacy is revealed

Table 3 confirms that T. Kakishuly's legacy is organized around a model of critical historiography: Alash restores literary memory, sakentanu reconstructs a complex figure, and the history of Kazakh criticism provides the historiographic basis for rethinking the canon.

B. Historiographic Strategies of Re-Evaluation

Historiographic analysis shows that T. Kakishuly treats literary history as a space for the scholarly revision of earlier ideological schemes. Soviet evaluative formulas in his works are not merely rejected; they are tested through archival documents, historical facts, polemical sources, textual evidence, and literary-historical context. For this reason, re-evaluation in T. Kakishuly's work has an evidentiary rather than a declarative character.

Table 4 systematizes the historiographic strategies through which earlier ideological interpretation in T. Kakishuly's works is transformed into a scholarly argued literary-historical description. This systematization records the result of historiographic analysis: re-evaluation is carried out through the revision of Soviet evaluative formulas, terminological clarification, archival-documentary substantiation, polemical restoration of historical justice, and the subsequent inclusion of an author or movement in the literary process. In this respect, Table 4 demonstrates the mechanism of transition from ideological classification to critical reconstruction of national literary history.

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TABLE 4
HISTORIOGRAPHIC STRATEGIES OF RE-EVALUATION IN T. KAKISHULY'S WORKS

Strategy	**Discursive and research realization**	**Result of analysis**
Critique of the ideological label	Rethinking the formulas *ultshyl* ("nationalist"), *baishyl* ("pro-bai / pro-rich class-oriented"), and *burzhuaziyashyl* ("bourgeois-oriented")	The Soviet evaluative scheme loses the status of a scholarly explanation
Terminological clarification	Use of the concept *alashshyl* ("Alash-oriented / associated with Alash ideas") instead of accusatory formulas	Alash is described as a historical-literary and national-intellectual phenomenon
Archival-documentary substantiation	Involvement of documents, biographical data, memoirs, and polemical materials	Re-evaluation receives an evidentiary basis and moves beyond ideological prescription
Polemical restoration of justice	Disputing earlier interpretations connected with repression, silencing, and distortion of facts	The literary and historical subjectivity of authors is restored
Inclusion in the literary process	Determining the place of authors, texts, and critical directions in the history of Kazakh literature	Re-evaluation culminates in a canon-forming effect

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that historiographic re-evaluation in T. Kakishuly's works has a systemic character and is implemented through several interconnected operations: critique of the ideological label, terminological clarification, archival-documentary substantiation, polemical restoration of historical justice, and inclusion of an author or movement in the literary process. In this logic, the literary figure ceases to be treated as an object of Soviet evaluative classification and receives the status of a historical-literary subject connected with a specific era, textual tradition, critical reception, and national *literary memory*.

The scholarly significance of this result lies in the fact that in T. Kakishuly's work the reconstruction of the canon begins not only with the return of previously suppressed names but also with the revision of the language of literary-critical description itself. The replacement of accusatory formulas such as *ultshyl* ("nationalist"), *baishyl* ("pro-bai / pro-rich class-oriented"), and *burzhuaziyashyl* ("bourgeois-oriented") with more precise historical-literary concepts, including *alashshyl* ("*Alash*-oriented / associated with *Alash* ideas"), changes the research optics: an author or movement is interpreted not as an ideological deviation but as part of a complex national literary process. Historiographic analysis thus identifies the key mechanism of T. Kakishuly's *critical historiography*: the transition from ideological delegitimation to scholarly reconstruction of *literary memory* and canon.

C. Analytical Clusters of Critical Historiography

Literary-discursive and canonological analysis made it possible to identify three analytical clusters through which T. Kakishuly's model of *critical historiography* is formed: *Alash*, *sakentanu*, and the history of Kazakh literary criticism. These clusters should be regarded not as thematic sections of the corpus but as functional components of T. Kakishuly's critical-historiographic model. Each of them performs a specific analytical role in reconstructing the *national literary canon*: *Alash* actualizes the problem of restoring suppressed *literary memory*; *sakentanu* reveals the mechanism for re-evaluating a complex literary figure; and the history of Kazakh literary criticism provides the theoretical-historiographic basis for a systemic rethinking of the literary process.

Alash in T. Kakishuly's works functions as a zone of *literary memory* restoration. The main result here is the overcoming of the earlier Soviet scheme in which *Alash* was described through accusatory categories. The researcher transfers this material into the plane of historical-literary analysis: he clarifies concepts, restores context, turns to documents, and demonstrates the role of *Alash* in the development of national literature and criticism.

Sakentanu functions as a model for re-evaluating a literary figure. T. Kakishuly considers *Saken Seifullin* not only as a Soviet writer or revolutionary figure but as a complex literary-historical figure connected with poetry, public activity, literary polemics, archival memory, and the national canon. Therefore, *sakentanu* in his scholarly legacy becomes not a personal research topic but a methodological model for analyzing a complex literary biography.

The identified clusters require systematization not by theme but by function, since each of them performs an independent role in reconstructing literary history. *Alash* is connected with the restoration of suppressed *literary memory*; *sakentanu* reveals the mechanism for re-evaluating a complex literary figure; and the history of Kazakh literary criticism provides the theoretical-historiographic basis for renewing the national canon. This clustering makes it possible to show that T. Kakishuly's model is constructed not as a set of separate research directions but as an interconnected system of critical-historiographic analysis; the results of this systematization are presented in Table 5.

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TABLE 5
ANALYTICAL CLUSTERS OF T. KAKISHULY'S CRITICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

Analytical cluster	Research function	Main result
Alash, the literary and intellectual legacy of the Alash movement	Restoration of suppressed literary memory and revision of ideological assessments	Alash returns to literary history as a significant national-intellectual phenomenon
Sakentanu, or Saken Seifullin studies	Comprehensive reconstruction of a literary figure through biography, archive, text, polemic, and historical context	Saken Seifullin receives a more complex literary-historical status
History of Kazakh literary criticism	Linking individual authors, movements, and polemics into a general system of the literary process	Criticism functions as a mechanism for forming and revising the national literary canon

Table 5 shows that Alash, sakentanu, and the history of criticism jointly form T. Kakishuly's model. Canon reconstruction occurs not through the simple addition of excluded names, but through changes in research optics, terminology, and literary-historical interpretation. The three clusters create a single critical-historiographic structure in which memory restoration, personal re-evaluation, and criticism mutually support one another.

The finding expands the understanding of critical historiography as a mechanism of canon formation. It redefines the conditions for including authors and texts in national literary history through archive, polemic, memory restoration, and conceptual clarification. Consequently, literary criticism becomes an active agent of the canon rather than only a commentary on already recognized texts.

D. The Model of T. Kakishuly's Critical Historiography

The synthesis of historical-literary, historiographic, literary-discursive, and canonological results made it possible to formulate T. Kakishuly's model of critical historiography. The model moves from identifying ideological distortion to scholarly re-evaluation, terminological clarification, memory restoration, and canonical inclusion. It is therefore a procedure of reconstructing literary-historical knowledge rather than a linear description of facts.

Table 6 presents this model as a multi-level procedure that changes not only separate errors in literary history but also the mode of describing the national literary process.

TABLE 6
THE MODEL OF T. KAKISHULY'S CRITICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

Stage of the model	Analytical mechanism	Function in T. Kakishuly's scholarly legacy	Final result
1	Identifying ideologically distorted interpretation	Determining the assessments, concepts, and historical schemes that require revision	The problem field of critical historiography is established
2	Critical re-evaluation	Testing earlier assessments through documents, texts, archival data, and literary context	The Soviet scheme is replaced by a scholarly argued interpretation
3	Terminological clarification	Translating evaluative labels into a system of historical-literary concepts	A more precise language for describing the literary process is formed
4	Restoration of literary memory	Returning names, texts, biographical facts, and cultural roles	Suppressed or one-sidedly interpreted figures are incorporated into literary history
5	Historical-literary systematization	Correlating author, movement, and era with the development of national literature	The literary process receives a more integral description
6	Reconstruction of the national canon	Determining the place of Alash, Saken Seifullin, and the history of criticism in the structure of literary memory	A renewed model of the national literary canon is formed

The model captures the core result: T. Kakishuly's critical historiography moves from ideologically distorted knowledge to restored literary memory and canonical reconstruction, with Alash, sakentanu, and Kazakh criticism functioning as connected mechanisms.

Theoretically, the result shows that the national literary canon is reconstructed through the inclusion of suppressed authors, the revision of evaluative language, the recovery of archival evidence, and the rethinking of critical tradition. In this sense, T. Kakishuly's model expands literary historiography by showing how evidence, terminology, and memory become canon-forming. The formula below summarizes this mechanism.

Ideologically distorted interpretation + critical re-evaluation + restoration of literary memory + reconstruction of the national literary canon = model of critical historiography.

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V. Discussion

The study identified T. Kakishuly's critical-historiographic model and showed how literary memory and the national canon are reconstructed through Alash, sakentanu, and Kazakh literary criticism. The findings confirm that his works form an integral model in which ideological interpretation is re-evaluated, substantiated by archive and literary context, and transformed into canon-forming knowledge. This confirms the article's central claim that critical historiography is both analytical and reconstructive, because it changes not only conclusions about individual writers but also the language of literary history itself.

The first result concerns corpus systematization and the relationship among Alash, sakentanu, and the history of criticism. Alash restores suppressed memory, sakentanu re-evaluates a complex literary figure, and criticism integrates personalities, texts, polemics, and periods. The finding is consistent with Kesici (2017), who links Alash to the formation of a national community, and with Yerdembekov et al. (2025), who treat the Alash idea as a cultural and educational code. In T. Kakishuly's work, Alash functions not as an object of accusation but as a restored component of national literary memory, while sakentanu demonstrates how a contested literary biography can be returned to a more complex historical context.

The second result concerns the strategies by which T. Kakishuly transforms Soviet evaluative schemes into scholarly description. The terms ultshyl, baishyl, and burzhuaziyashyl are tested through archive, biography, polemic, and literary context, while alashshyl becomes a more precise concept. This interpretation is comparable with Kassimova et al. (2023) on Saken Seifullin's broader status, Barré et al. (2023) and Karpukhina (2023) on canon formation, and Parui (2024) and Annus (2016) on memory and post-imperial return. Thus, terminology becomes a means of restoring literary subjectivity. The results also show that canon formation is inseparable from the evidence and language through which literary value is argued.

The practical significance of the model is that it can be used to analyze Kazakh and broader post-Soviet literary-critical material. It helps distinguish biography, ideological re-evaluation, archival reconstruction, discursive argumentation, and canon-forming effect. In education, it may be applied in courses on Kazakh literature, literary criticism, post-Soviet historiography, canon theory, and memory studies, especially when explaining how contested figures return to literary history through scholarly procedures rather than through declarative rehabilitation alone.

A limitation of the present study is its exclusive focus on T. Kakishuly's corpus. This focus makes it possible to reconstruct the internal logic of one scholarly model in detail; however, it also limits direct comparison with other Kazakh, Central Asian, and broader post-Soviet literary-critical traditions. Therefore, the proposed model should be regarded as a theoretically grounded case model that requires further comparative testing across wider corpora.

Further research should compare T. Kakishuly's model with the critical historiographic practices of other Kazakh literary scholars and with similar processes in other former Soviet literatures. Such comparison would make it possible to determine which elements of the model are specific to Kazakh literary memory and which reflect broader post-Soviet mechanisms of terminological re-evaluation, archival restoration, and canon reconstruction. Particular attention should be paid to how aqtandaq, alashshyl, ultshyl, baishyl, burzhuaziyashyl, and related concepts changed status across the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods. It would also make it possible to test the coding matrix on wider corpora of literary-critical writing.

VI. Conclusion

The study shows that T. Kakishuly's scholarly legacy constitutes a model of critical historiography aimed at revising ideologically deformed literary history and reconstructing the national literary canon. Alash restores suppressed national-intellectual heritage, sakentanu re-evaluates a complex figure, and the history of criticism links authors, texts, polemics, archives, and periods within one critical-historiographic field.

Historiographic analysis shows that T. Kakishuly overcomes Soviet evaluative schemes through scholarly verification. The labels ultshyl, baishyl, and burzhuaziyashyl lose explanatory authority, while alashshyl shifts interpretation from ideological accusation to national-intellectual and literary-historical characterization.

The main conclusion is that T. Kakishuly's critical historiography transforms distorted knowledge into a reconstructed literary-historical system. The restoration of aqtandaq and the rebuilding of the canon depend not only on returning names and facts, but also on changing evaluative language, criteria of evidence, and modes of inclusion. In this process, critical scholarship itself becomes an instrument of memory restoration.

T. Kakishuly's legacy is significant beyond Kazakh literary studies because it exemplifies how scholarship reconstructs historical memory and cultural identity through the revision of ideological classifications, the recovery of suppressed memory, and a renewed understanding of the literary canon. His works therefore provide a theoretically meaningful example of how literary studies participate in national cultural self-description and demonstrate that the canon is formed through interpretation, evidence, and critical language.

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Interactive Listening in Teaching Vietnamese to Foreigners: Defining Criteria and Exploring Perceptions of Teachers and Learners

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***Abstract*—Listening is a fundamental yet difficult competence of foreign language learners, especially of the Vietnamese language, whose instruction and evaluation methods are still predominantly passive and transactional. The paper deals with the necessity to re-interpret the concept of listening as a two-way process, and to focus on the aspects of two-way communication, active participation of a listener, problem-solving, and goal attainment in communication. The method involves a quantitative survey of 118 respondents, including teachers and learners of Vietnamese as a foreign language. Based on theoretical constructs and research findings, the study outlines the requirements of interactive listening and the shortcomings of the available textbooks and tests that ignore communicative interaction. The results indicate a great deal of support for including interactive aspects in teaching, learning and assessment. The research suggests criteria to assess interactive listening and recommends guidelines to create more communicative Vietnamese textbooks and testing systems.**

***Index Terms*—interactive listening, Vietnamese as a foreign language, communicative approach, language teaching, assessment criteria**

I. Introduction

Listening is known to be one of the most difficult skills among the learners of a foreign language. In the study, listening theory plays a double role and serves as the theoretical basis for analyzing. The difference between listening and reading, speaking or writing is that the former demands that the learner receive spoken information in real time, decodes meaning based on the context, and reacts accordingly, usually when under pressure. To most students studying Vietnamese as a foreign language, listening is an obstacle to efficient communication, which makes both students and their teachers seek ways of making listening practice more realistic and interactive. "The process of non-native language training at the basic stage should always correspond to the communicative needs of the foreign students that came to get a higher education in the higher educational establishments" (Ushakova & Artiomova, 2020). Traditional teaching and assessment have been conducted in a passive manner towards listening. Students will generally undertake passages of comprehension by listening to passages they are given, out of which questions that may be multiple choice or short answer in format are administered. Motivational teaching strategies (MTS) are pivotal in shaping learning outcomes (Trinh et al., 2024). This strategy verifies the ability of learners to recognize information; it is not quite an accurate mirror of the reality of the communication process in real life. In real life, listening is more of a two way process where the listener should always be engaged in a dialogue with the speaker and the speaker needs to be sensitive to the way the listener interprets what is being said because the listener is expected to be actively involved in creating a mutual meaning in which the speaker aims at achieving some communicative objectives and the listener will also be expected to input in order to help the speaker achieve the communicative objectives. In the realization of this void, scholars and teachers have further focused on interactive listening, which underscores the issue of listening as a two-way process. "In daily interactions, speakers change how they speak depending on their audience in order to meet the communicative and emotional needs of different listeners" (Rothermich et al., 2019).

Interactive listening deals with the communication between listening and responding in communicative situations. "In two-way interactive listening, listeners are expected to use interactional skills or strategies to understand meaning, recognize interlocutors' intentions, make responses, and establish common ground" (Chou, 2023). It helps learners not only to decode spoken language but also show the understanding by means of verbal or non-verbal feedback, using turn taking and dealing with misunderstandings. The mentioned interactional features prove to be particularly useful in determining communicative competence, which replicates those within the real life. Interactive listening is not well developed in the area of teaching the Vietnamese language to foreigners, as opposed to better developed practices in the English language and other commonly taught languages. "Listening in language learning and language use includes complex processes, different ways of examining these processes result in different classifications of listening" (Gu,

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2018). This research will explore the composition and the structure of interactive listening skills and the discussion of effective approaches to both teaching and evaluation of the same in the foreign language of Vietnamese. It examines the available literature, studies bodies of interactive listening activities written in English and Vietnamese, and discusses their possibilities of application in teaching Vietnamese. "Listening is a fundamental aspect of language acquisition and proficiency, yet many learners find it challenging due to factors such as limited exposure to the target language, variations in accents, and rapid speech rates" (Mukhtorova & Ilxomov, 2024). The issues studied in the research also include the definition of interactive listening, the identification of the components of interactive listening, the teaching methods, the evaluation criteria, and the suggestion of evaluation standards. Conceivable results comprise a compilation of suggestions on the way of teaching, realistic standards of evaluation interactive listening, and the rules of creating Vietnamese listening textbooks reflecting the principles of interactivity. "Repeated listening to English as a Foreign Language (EFL)/second language (L2) podcast has been recognized as cognitively beneficial, while it is usually perceived as boring by learners" (Şendağ et al., 2018). Through its combination of interactive listening during the teaching and evaluation process, the study aims at developing the communicative competence of learners, where listening is not only more effective but also more interesting and natural. "Interactionist literature in L2 learning has primarily examined interactions between native language and L2 speakers or L2 peer interaction" (Dizon, 2020).

Therefore, the research question is: How has the understanding of listening evolved, and why is it necessary to focus on interactive listening in teaching and assessing Vietnamese as a foreign language?

II. Literature Review

A. Early Views of Listening

There was a time when listening was mostly viewed as a passive skill in its conceptualizations. The learners were to be presented with information, focus on what they heard and then interpret it in the best way they could. "Listening comprehension and word decoding are the two major determinants of the development of reading comprehension" (Lervåg et al., 2018). This strategy presented listening as one-way process where messages flowed down through the speaker to the listener and did not need a lot of feedback or contact. The key task of the listener was merely to identify the sounds, give meaning to the sounds and memorize the information. These views were very focused on the end-state of listening, i.e., whether the listener was able to remember and recite information or not, but dismissing the way the dynamic processes occurred. "There is an increasingly pressing demand for improving the quality of teaching and learning English in Vietnam to meet the needs and interests of learners in the global integration" (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020). In this perspective, the process of listening was like reading a written document, in which the learner was presupposed to passively receive information without making any real impact on the interaction. This limited perspective failed to acknowledge the fact that spoken language is commonly spontaneous, quick and reliant upon social and cultural context. "Practitioners repeatedly note that the everyday behavior of asking followers open questions and attentively listening to their responses is a powerful leadership technique" (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018).

Early concepts of listening were centered on comprehension but ignored the interactive aspect and instead learned to act as a passive receiver but not as an active participant in the process of communication. "An integral part of human language is the capacity to extract meaning from spoken and written words, but the precise relationship between brain representations of information perceived by listening versus reading is unclear" (Deniz et al., 2019). This view influenced teaching and testing to be in form of artificial practice which included listening passages and answering questions but this did not reflect real conversation where the listener is expected to give a response, request clarification or an negotiate meaning. Students were likely to develop shallow listening habits based on memorizing but not critically analyzing what it is that is spoken. As a pedagogical tool and a learning tool, digital stories have been implemented in numerous new forms at every level of education (Rahiem, 2021). Although these early models presented a platform on which language pedagogy could be established, its shortcoming elicited the establishment of models that would consider listening as the interactive and dynamic process, which would culminate to the development of more communicative practices in subsequent literature and practice.

B. Shift Toward Interaction

The language teaching field began to undergo a significant shift in the perception and training of the concept of listening. Verbal and non-verbal discursive practices are used by L2 listeners when negotiating and co-constructing a common understanding, which involve the use of reception strategies (Huang, 2020). The former process of turning listening into a mere receptive process had become increasingly tainted by studies that showed that the best way of learning a language is by interaction. Learners were not passive consumers of the spoken input, but instead active players who build a meaning through a collaborative process with other learners. "With ongoing environmental degradation at local, regional, and global scales, people's accepted thresholds for environmental conditions are continually being lowered" (Soga & Gaston, 2018). The new outlook reiterated the importance of communication beyond the mere understanding of words; it was additionally essential to be able to utilize language to establish relationships, retain social connections and achieve a common objective. spoken language was known to have two main purposes. It has an interactive role, which is aimed at maintaining the relationships, control of conversations, and

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demonstration of the attention to other people. It bears a transactional role, in that, it is aimed at either exchanging information or passing content. In communication in real life, these two functions are always intertwined. E.g., during the classroom discussion, students can answer the question posed by the teacher (transactional) and at the same time show politeness and respect by using the tone and body language (interactive). "For many language learners, listening represents a major source of anguish, with apparent success in the confines of the classroom failing to be mirrored in the ordinary interactions of daily life" (Ryan, 2022).

These two functions were being recognized and this changed the way of thinking when it comes to teaching listening. In the scope of communication studies, as well as "in the teaching of listening in language pedagogy, there has been a tendency either to treat this skill as discrete from speaking, particularly as extended texts to be responded to after hearing them, or to focus on speaking rather than listening in the teaching of conversational skills" (Polishchuk, 2025). Scholars and teachers started to claim that listening exercises were not supposed to be based on comprehensions control but were expected to reflect real-life communication. This included integration of features such as contextual interpretation, turn taking, feedbacks and negotiating meanings. Social listening can be described in a context of a variety of mediation; however, it has not been explicitly defined within the spectrum of communication and listening studies (Stewart & Arnold, 2018). Not only were the listeners supposed to receive the messages spoken but also demonstrate what they have received through meaningful ways. It also led to the construction of more interactions in the classroom by teachers as a result of this shift in interaction, such as role-plays, group discussions, and problem-solving tasks. The activities enabled the learners not only to perform the interpretation of information but also to communicate with individuals in authentic communicative situations. This caused the revision of listening as a collaborative process that supports the learning of language and the social connectivity and, therefore, the contemporary interactive modes of teaching and assessing listening. The benefits of high-quality listening include a cornucopia of goodness to speakers, listeners, teams, and organizations (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022).

C. Interactive Communication Today

During the digital era, engagement has been a feature of communication in every aspect of life. Collaborative learning implies variations in the degree to which the students engage in social interaction and in the types of interaction that may be cognitive (i.e., sharing knowledge, monitoring learning) or more socio-emotional (i.e., encouraging, positive appraisal) in nature. The changes in technology have totally changed the way people interact with one another where the one-way linear interaction has been replaced by two-way interaction which is dynamic. It has been perceived that reading books, watching television or attending lectures are all passive experiences where the audience is receiving something and cannot in any way respond to it or in any way contribute to it. The same modes have recently been re-invented by the technology in interactive modes. Digital communication technologies, including the Internet, have become so engrained in everyday life that the government is so heavily criticized by the United Nations Human Rights Council when disrupted (Hohman et al., 2020). The television programs are usually accompanied by live voting or voting by the audience; books are published in the form of interactive e-books and lectures are delivered through online press where they can be discussed and work with in real time. Electronic media have proven to be more interactive in communication than ever. Social media allows users not only to consume, but also to create, share and comment in real time, which makes interaction the most important element in international exchange of ideas. Video conferencing devices and virtual environments enable persons in different locations and cultures to interact in the same room with one another, and this interaction results in the formation of collaboration that was limited by geography before. Similarly, online games, augmented reality and virtual reality platforms have also created new spheres of immersive and interactive communication where players must actively engage in communication with each other and the space. The past few decades have caused social life to be dramatically altered, beginning with the first email sent in 1965, which has seen a decrease in the number of offline (in-person) interactions and an increase in the number of online (technology-mediated) ones (Lieberman & Schroeder, 2020).

This transition reveals how it is not frequently a passive process to listen in the real-life situations. Rather it is continuous negotiation of meaning, critical interpretation of messages and working together to solve problems. "Today's effectiveness of and easy access to knowledge increase the need for a flexible and solution-oriented workforce" (Aslan, 2021). Listening involves feedbacks, inquiries and adapting to changing communicative situations, which are expected of the listeners. The digital era, thus, supports the concept that listening should be perceived as an interactive and dynamic skill. In the case of language education, this point of view offers a solid reason as to why teaching and testing of listening should be done in a manner that reflects real-life communication.

D. Need for Assessment Reform

There has been a progressive development of knowledge on the interactive essence of listening, there has not been a significant change in the assessment practice of language education. The majority of the listening tests are still centered on the understanding of spoken work, usually in multiple choice or short answer formats, which merely assess the ability of the learner to remember. Although these formats are useful in testing a high number of students, they do not reflect the aspect of listening as it is in a real communication situation. The listening in the real-life environment encompasses far more than retrieving details; it involves the listeners giving feedback, overall negotiation, clarification of unclear meaning, and responses in specific situations within the social setting. The issue of discrepancy of classroom

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testing and practical communication has historically been a topic of concern among teachers and scholars. Conventional tests take a danger of sending the wrong signal to the learner because they enhance the perception of listening as a one-way skill that is passive in nature. The process of listening can be perceived as a process of extraction of information rather than a critical and collaborative process of interaction with speakers by students. This does not only limit their communicative competency but also it suppresses their belief of encountering the real-world situation in which responsiveness and adaptability are highly valued. This can be particularly observed in the Vietnam teaching of the foreign language Vietnamese. The current listening instructional approaches applied in the Vietnamese classrooms are largely premised on decoding of messages and they do not focus on the interactive nature of communication. Students are taught to pay attention to what they are listening but are rarely taught about the act of active listening such as seeking clarification, responding to others, or taking turns. Vietnamese assessment methods are thus of limited methods because they have not eaten up interactive activities which are a reflection of authentic communication circumstances. In order to seal this gap, new teaching methods, new assessment methods and new criteria depending on the realities of communication will have to be developed. The interactive nature of the listening tests can assist the teachers to promote greater acquisition of natural language and prepare the students with more life-based interaction.

TABLE 1
STUDY TABLE

Authors	**CS**	Listener behaviors							Purposes		Listener - Speaker
		FP	ChC	US	CR	NM	TT	SD	SP	GA	
Anderson, 2005	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	-
Anderson & Lynch, 1988	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-
Bahns, 1995	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+
Brouwer, 1999	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-
Buck, 2001	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-
Ducasse & Brown, 2009	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dunkel, 1991	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
Gardner, 1998	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
Kaplan & Stefanopoulos, 1994	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lynch, 1995	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-
Morley, 1991	-	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
Nunan, 2002	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rost, 2002	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rost & Candlin, 1991	-	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	-
Tokeshi, 2003	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	-	-
Vandergrift, 1997	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	-	+	+
Vandergrift, 2002	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-
Vandergrift, 2007	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-
Yule, 1991	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	-	+
Total	**8**	**9**	**2**	**7**	**7**	**2**	**7**	**4**	**6**	**1**	**3**

In Table 1 above, "+" is the existence of a characteristic; "-" is the lack of a characteristic. CS = Communicative Situations; FP = Feedbacks Providing; CC = Checking Comprehension; US = Understanding Signaling; CR = Clarification Requesting; NM = Negotiating Meaning; TT = Turn-Taking; SD = Shaping Discourse; SP = Solving Problem; GA = Goals Accomplishing; Listener-Speaker = Listener-Speaker Relationship.

The above table in the first place relates to the four important aspects of a listening activity namely, communicative situations (CS), behavior of the listener, interactive motivation and the relationship between the listener and the speaker (LS). The most unique feature of the interactive listening that involves the different elements as FP, ChC, US, CR, NM, TT and SD is definitely the behavior of the listener. They define the various types of anticipated responses the listener must respond to when approached by a transferred message that involves giving feedback (FP), checking understanding (ChC), indicating understanding (US), seeking clarification (CR) and negotiating meaning (NM). In response, listeners in fact change to the role of the speaker and the opposite, turns taking (TT) to talk and hence discourse shaping (SD), to advance and/or contribute to the flow of the discussion. The listener will possess such dissimilar kinds of reactions when he/she is actively involved in the process. The activity of listening has long been viewed as an active one. According to Lynch (1995), we will never have the Dickensian concepts of listening whereby our ears are vessels into which we pour the information and all one has to do is to sit back and receive the message. And Lynch described listening as an active process in that the listeners choose and derive the information that is presented by auditory and visual signals to know what is happening and what the speakers are attempting to convey (1995). Active role of the listener in interactive listening is shown through the type of expected feedbacks as discussed above given by the listener during and after listening.

Scholars such as Anderson and Lynch (1988), Buck (2001), McGregor (1986), Rost and Candlin (1991), etc. came with the role of the listener in the sense of his/her active contribution to discourse making. McGregor represented the power of listeners to engage in discourse production as continuum of collaborative discourse (1986). His model employed the terms participant, addressee, auditor, overhearer, and judge with implications as to different features of

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the continuum between the least and most collaborative. And Rost and Candlin (1991) borrowed the model of McGregor. Anderson and Lynch (1988) and Buck (2001), in the meantime, identified fewer functions of a listener. Anderson and Lynch mainly differentiated between two categories of listeners namely, the eavesdroppers, and the participants (1988). Buck recognized three important functions of the listeners: the participant, the addressee and the non-participant, the overhearer (2001).

Those three different roles of the listener can be defined as below:

The participant: is the person being spoken to directly and this one has equal right to speak with other participants while making the discourse.

The addressee: is the person being spoken to directly but this one has limited right to give responses.

The overhearer: Not the intended recipient, but within the earshot of the speakers, with not any right or expectation to give responses.

III. Methodology

A. Research Design

The research design applied in this study was primary quantitative, in order to check the key characteristics of interacting listening as a means of learning the Vietnamese language by foreigners. It was aimed at defining components of interactive listening as a part of its structure and determining their significance in the eyes of learners and teachers. A structured survey was created to gather quantifiable information on how the participants view interactive listening.

B. Data Collection

The data collection was done based on a random survey of 118 respondents, which included teachers of the Vietnamese as a foreign language as well as students who learn Vietnamese. Questions in the survey were closed ended where the respondents were called upon to rate the extent of their agreement with each of the five interactive listening criteria which include, (1) the role of communication situations, (2) the need to have two-way interaction, (3) the active role of the listener by means of feedback, (4) problem solving during communication and (5) the realization of communicative purpose. These parts were chosen according to the known theoretical models, especially the Integrated Listening Process Model, and also used the experience of the previous models, like the three-step model by Anderson (2005) and the listening skills chart developed by Rost and Candlin (1991).

C. Data Analysis

Data gathered were examined through descriptive statistical analysis in order to determine pattern and degree of agreement amongst the participants. It was calculated in terms of percentages showing the percentage of the respondents who agreed with each criterion. The results provided a clear indication that the majority of teachers and learners were firm believers of the five characteristics that were suggested about interactive listening. These impressive percentages in all categories imply that there is overall agreement that interactive listening cannot be described in passive understanding but can be understood as a dynamism and a two-way process that must be guided towards achieving communicative results. These findings thus affirm both the theoretical frameworks that inform this study together with highlighting the importance of considering interactive listening as a component of teaching and assessment of Vietnamese as a foreign language.

D. Ethical Consideration

This research was carried out in compliance with the ethical code stated in the Declaration of Helsinki (last edition in 2013), which describes the universal position on conducting ethical research with the inclusion of human participants. The study was started with an ethical approval of the relevant institutional review board. All participants (or their legal guardians, where applicable) provided with written informed consent after having received a fully explanation of the research's aims, potential risks, benefits, and procedures. Participant confidentiality and data anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

IV. Results

The answers were gathered and were quantified and the findings were presented on charts in accordance with each of the five criteria. In one instance, 92.3 percent of the respondents said that interactive listening involves having a communication situation whereas 97.5 percent of the respondents agreed that it must be a two-way interaction. Likewise, 89.8% focused on the active role of the listener, 94% accentuated the significance of problem-solving and 89.7% validated the necessity to attain communicative objectives.

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Figure 1. Communication Situation

Interactive listening is done in a communication situation. The listener and the speaker are involved in a particular communication situation, and they engage in a constant interaction with one another. In the absence of a communication scenario, it is not interactive listening, but simply transfer listening, passive listening or unintentional listening.



Figure 2. Two-Way Interaction

The empirical result shows that 97.5% of the people we surveyed think that interactive communication requires two-way interaction between participants.

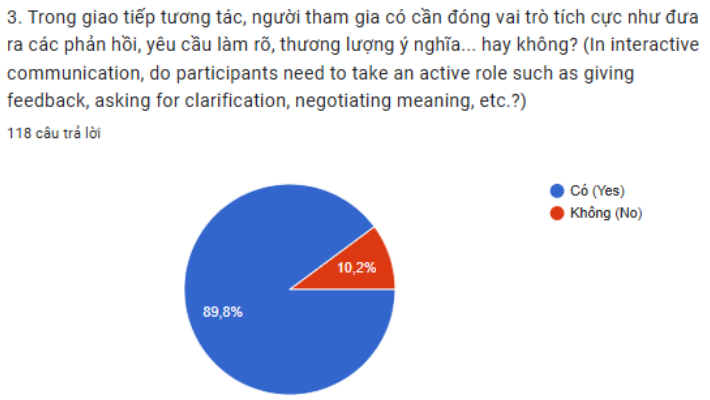


Figure 3. Active Role in Communication

One of the foundations of the interactive, social aspect of language is interchangeability. The listeners are also actively involved in the communication with the speaker through feedback. Such listener behaviors are giving feedback, seeking to understand, indicating understanding, requesting clarification, negotiating meaning and turn taking. The discourse has been fashioned after these activities. We have empirically found that 89.8% of the individuals interviewed assumed that in interactive communications, individuals are required to have an active role e.g. providing feedback, seeking clarification, bargaining meaning, etc.

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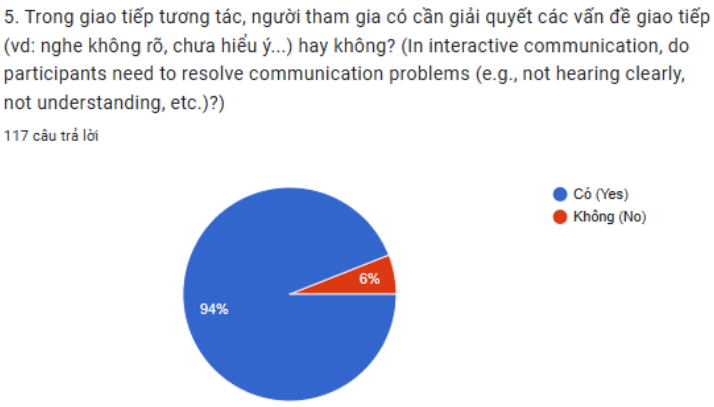


Figure 4. Problem Solving

In listening activities, the problems from communication happen and the problem-solving process is essential in order to reach for the ultimate goal of interaction. In our empirical survey, 94% stated that in interactive communication, participants need to resolve communication problems.

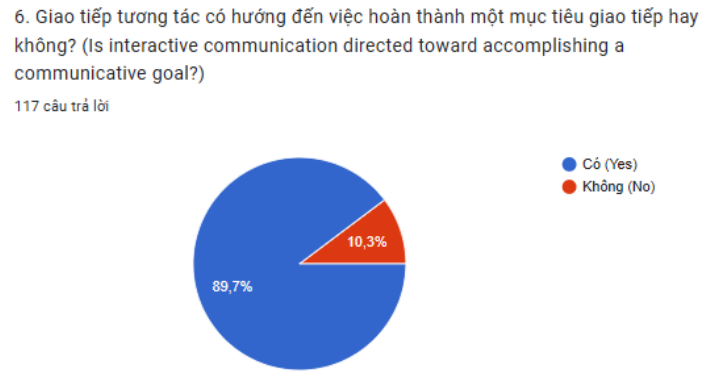


Figure 5. Interactive Goal

When the audience actively collaborates with the speaker by giving constant feedback, taking turns, and negotiating meaning with the speaker, it implies that they are indeed collaborating with the speakers in order to move the dialogue forward and accomplish the communication objective after all. When the respondents of our empirical survey were requested to state whether interactive communication is guided towards the achievement of a communicative goal or not, 89.7% of them encouraged that it should accomplish some communicative goal.

V. Discussions

The inadequacy of considering listening as a passive skill has long been indicated by the research on listening. One of the earliest to hold this view was Anderson and Lynch (1988) who argued that comprehension is not merely about getting input spoken but responding to messages in manners that influence the course of a conversation. Similarly, Morley (1991) pointed out that learning to listen should be regarded as the active process of second language teaching, rather than as the exercise of memorization. Research like that of Dunkel (1991) reported the dangers of using assessment methods that restricted listening to non-participatory tasks because the computerized comprehension tests overlooked the interactive aspects in the real communication. A number of researchers have researched the influence interactional behaviors have on listening competence. Rost (1991, 2023) demonstrated that good listening involves skills that include checking understanding, negotiating meaning, and turn taking management. Nunan (2002) also contended that listening was fundamental to language learning since it brings interaction input whereas Vandergrift (1997, 2002, 2007) emphasized receptive strategies, signaling that one understands, seeking clarification, or providing feedback, to make listening an inherently collaborative process. These results are in line with these perceptions as 89.8% of the individuals involved emphasized on the role of learners to play an active role by giving feedback and providing clarity and 94% of the people agreed that problem solving is a very important aspect of the listening activities. These findings are good indications of the argument that interactive listening skills should be taught and assessed. Other studies have enhanced the social component of listening. According to Gardner (1998), listeners express their understanding in a vocality manner so that they can influence the discourse and Yule (1991) has shown that referential conflict resolution through negotiation is an important element through which interlocutors can express themselves effectively. These opinions are intended to remind that meaning cannot exist outside communication: meaning is created and shared during communication. This is highlighted by the fact that just 97.5 percent of the respondents in this study believed that two-way interaction was important in listening.

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Practices in Vietnamese is an expression of the general critique in language testing. As opposed to Alderson (2005) who focused on diagnosing the proficiency in accordance to the textual understanding of a particular text, Buck (2001) pointed out that authentic assessment ought to take into account interactive listening behavior. Ducasse and Brown (2009) also showed that even during oral tests in pairs, raters pay keen interest to the interaction and co-construction of discourse between the candidates, and this aspect proved that interaction is impossible to assess performance validly. Conversely, Vietnamese listening proficiency tests are still bound to the traditional comprehension based testing, and interactive listening is not measured by any criteria and scale. This is why 66.7 percent of those surveyed condemned existing tests as they did not assess communication skills. In the absence of reform, assessment will have a tendency of rewarding test taking strategies as opposed to communicative competence. It has also been proposed in the research on how to enhance interactive listening teaching. Kaplan and Stefanopoulos (1994) put forward the role of learning conversational skills to professional settings, and Bahns (1995) proposed that there is far more than just understanding in listening, that one needs to be aware of discourse and pragmatic meaning. As Lynch (1995) has revealed, the development of interactive listening strategies can be achieved in the academic environment, with the explicit training being worthwhile. Tokeshi (2003) also established that students in interactive classes acquire specific ways of tackling comprehension issues and maintaining communication. Taken together, these studies give a great deal of weight to the need to revise Vietnamese listening materials and pedagogy, such that interaction is made the center of, rather than peripheral to, classroom practice. Another very important problem is textbook design. According to the survey, a majority of the existing Vietnamese textbooks do not have any interactive features, or their features are very minimal. Listening and responding to factual questions are exercises that do not go a long way in fostering communicative competence. In contrast, when tasks are extended to involve peer comparison, group work or role-play as proposed in this study, learners will be provided with opportunities to practice authentic communicative behaviors. This is both similar to the suggestion by Vandergrift (2007) that we need to take instructional practices to a new level of teaching strategies rather than comprehension, and it is similar to the suggestion of Rost (2023) that we need to teach listening as an interactive exercise. The transactional comprehension exercises, though helpful in some small aspects are not enough to equip students in real communication. Based on the experiences of Anderson and Lynch (1988), Buck (2001), Vandergrift (2007), and others, it is evident that teaching and testing should incorporate feedback, negotiation and goal achievement criteria. It is only then that learners will not only be assessed on the possession of knowledge but also on how they apply listening to work together, address issues and attain communicative achievement.

VI. Conclusion

The interaction is not only a competence but also a decisive aspect of communicative competence that determines the ability of learners to apply language in the situation of real life. This paper established that listening ought to be re-imagined as not the passive act of receiving information but two-way, active process in which listeners and speakers are co-constructing meaning. Defining the concept of interactive listening, the study made some important criteria: it has to take place in natural communicative settings, be a two-way communication, the listener should be involved in active listening through feedback, the inclusion of problem-solving, and clear communicative goals should be stipulated. These were highly upheld by the survey findings where most participants, both learners and teachers acknowledged interaction as an important part of listening. The research also explored the limitations of the existing Vietnamese listening instruction where it was found that the textbooks and classroom activities significantly limit learners to transactional listening activities that merely test understanding and inhibit an active interaction. Likewise, assessments have been kept information based without any criteria or standards on which to evaluate interactive competence. The research expands the theoretical knowledge of interactive listening as the communicative construction and provides evidence-based research on how teachers and curriculum developers can integrate interaction-oriented tasks and assessment standards into the immediate classroom instruction.

A. Limitations

There are a number of limitations that must be considered when interpreting the findings. The study was conducted on the grounds of the quantitative survey of 118 participants, both teachers and learners, which is an important source of statistics but not as in-depth as a qualitative study, such as interviews, case studies, or classroom observations. It is also true that the sample, though heterogeneous, was not systematized according to the essential variables such as the level of proficiency of the learners, their age groups, their cultures, or the years of experience that the teachers had, all of which could affect the perceptions of interactive listening. Also, the study assessed the weaknesses of Vietnamese textbooks and listening tests, but did not conduct a systematic content analysis of all extant teaching materials, nor pilot and test reformed exercises in real classrooms. This creates a doubt as to the effectiveness of the techniques proposed in practice. Although the study presented criteria and standards of measuring interactive listening, they were not tested experimentally or put in real assessment scenarios, which makes them theoretical but not empirical. As interactive listening is a variable, which is also subject to social norms, pragmatic rules and discourse styles, the results may not be consistent across languages. The existence of such constraints suggests that more long-term, multi-methodological research is needed, which includes data on a qualitative, practical experimental, and cross-linguistic level.

B. Recommendations

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Number of important recommendations are becoming obvious to the teachers, assessors and curriculum developers. Teachers should begin by changing the existing practices of listening to include some form of interaction even in the textbooks that now simply seem to concentrate on the meaning. An example of this would be after factual questions had been answered by the learners, they might be asked to contrast their answers with those of their peers, argue over interpretations, read out dialogue in groups or get them to role play dialogues. This kind of activities transforms passive listening to the possibilities of taking action, negotiating, and to practice turn taking. At the evaluation level, the redefinition of the evaluation frameworks to include interactive listening criteria is needed. Exams should not just be used to check whether the information has been learnt, but also to improve the response of the learners, request clarification, provide feedback and achieve communicative goals. It could be through paired activities, role plays or group problem solving exercises that were similar to real communication. New Vietnamese listening textbooks, which have been dubbed in Modo material, must be designed so that interaction can be central to these new textbooks and that they give systematized opportunities to learners to use feedback strategies, pronunciation, intonation and pragmatic competence in real life contexts. They can be improved or updated with new activities, even to the existing textbooks, which facilitate communicative interactions. In addition, teacher training programs that empower educators with the ability, tactics and confidence to go beyond the comprehension-based strategies should incorporate interactive pedagogy.

C. Future Implications

The results of this study can inform some important future studies and practice in the field of the Vietnamese language teaching and beyond. The first implication is that the proposed assessment criteria and interactive listening tasks are to be piloted on the real testing conditions, their reliability, validity, and influence on performance of learners are to be examined. This justification would assist to transform interactive listening assessment to a practical activity instead of a theory. The alternative way is the use of the qualitative research methodology such as classroom observation, learner diaries, and teacher interviews to record the experiential experiences of the learners and the teachers in using the interactive means. This would provide additional data on the problems and benefits of action interaction. The additional importance of online tools and other digital means that there can be the introduction of technology into the process of an interactive listening process, which can be video conferencing, simulation or AI-controlled feedback systems. With these guidelines, the future study will be in a position to expand upon the theoretical foundation presented in this study and work to practical solutions that will bring interactive listening to the center stage of language learning in the global arena.

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Poetic Language and Its Representations in *Layali 'Abir Sabil* by Ahmed Atiyah Al-Saudi

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***Abstract*—This study aims to identify a number of poetic elements in the biography *Nights of a Passing Traveler* (*Layali Abir Sabil*) by the writer Ahmed Atiyah Al-Saudi. The study focused on two of these elements, namely the poetry of the title and the poetry of language, which serve the writer's vision and raise issues and topics. The study revealed different aspects of the text's openness to poetry and the effect of this openness on achieving narrative poetry and presenting his vision in a way that serves the biography without undermining its specificity. The writer sought to write within an advanced poetic context, because poetry is a suitable tool for expressing the vision that the biography carried and wanted to express. The study shows that the biography reflects the author's passion for and love of the Arabic language, ever since he heard its melodious sounds in the poems of the archives in his elementary school. He understood the sweetness of its words, the magic of its rhythms, and was captivated by its beauty, so he took up his pen. He wrote many works on its eloquence, arts, and styles. The writer used concise, intense, and profound poetic language filled with shifts, artistic images, irony, similes, and allusions to express this. Readers of the biography, with their literary taste, can appreciate the writer's skill in expressing the stirrings of the soul, the whims of the mind, recalling events, and depicting characters and scenes that portray feelings and emotions and reflect the deep psychological suffering and difficulties the author faced in his life.**

***Index Terms*—poetry, poetic title, between title and text, poetic language**

I. Introduction

Poetic language is one of the most prominent stylistic phenomena that has contributed to the enrichment of modern narrative texts, as it is no longer confined to poetry but has transcended it to manifest itself in autobiographies and novels as an artistic tool that intensifies meaning and imbues the human experience with profound aesthetic dimensions. Hence, this study examines the manifestations of poetic language in the autobiography Nights of a Passing Traveler by Ahmed Atiyah Al-Saudi, as a narrative text open to the horizon of poetry, where subjectivity intertwines with art, and life experience with aesthetic linguistic formation. The significance of this study lies in its endeavor to uncover the mechanisms of poetic formation within the autobiographical text, highlighting its role in deepening the writer's artistic vision and reconstructing the subjective experience within an aesthetic horizon that transcends direct, reportage-style narration. It also contributes to bridging a critical gap regarding the study of poeticism in Arabic autobiographies, particularly in contemporary examples that blend historical documentation with creativity. The autobiography *Nights of a Passing Traveler* is a literary autobiography whose fragrance emanates from the Jordanian countryside, rich in scent and nectar, where its author was born, raised, and grew up. It is a creative work that makes a distinctive contribution to contemporary autobiography, following in the footsteps of distinguished writers such as Ahmed Amin's *My Life*, Tawfiq al-Hakim's *The Flower of Life*, Taha Hussein's *The Days*, Fadwa Tuqan's *A Mountain Journey*, Ibrahim al-Mazni's *A Life Story*, and Mikha'il Na'ima's *Seventy*.

This study has contributed to providing an analytical stylistic reading that identifies the poetic elements in the text by examining the poetics of the title, the poetics of language, and the resulting artistic images, semantic shifts, and expressive rhythms that help shape the text's aesthetic structure. The study adopted a descriptive-analytical approach, drawing on some modern critical concepts in the study of poetics, such as those of Jakobson, Todorov, and Gérard Genette, in their approaches to shift and irony.

The writer Ahmed Atiyah Al-Saudi belongs to a generation of writers who combined academic expertise with literary production; he was born in Jordan, and earned a doctorate in literature and criticism. He has worked at a number of Arab universities and contributed to enriching the cultural scene through his research, literary, and critical contributions. He has produced a diverse body of work in the fields of narrative and criticism, most notably his autobiography Nights of a Passing Traveler, which forms the subject of this study. Its language is characterized by a distinct artistic sensibility, combining eloquence of expression with the depth of experience, The events of this memoir are organized into successive nights spanning fifty years, beginning with the Nights of the Village, the Nights of Cyprus, the Nights of Amman, the Nights of Cairo, the Nights of the Barefoot Teacher, the Nights of Khartoum, the Nights of the Hijaz, and the Nights of Al-Ain, and ending with the Nights of the Peasant Writer. In these nights, we find rich language, enchanting eloquence, a fluent tongue, astonishing rhetoric, eloquent phrases, the power of poetry, precise and astonishing descriptions, and masterful narration; all presented to his readers in an artistic tableau of extreme precision and beauty.

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II. Theoretical Background: Poetics of the Narrative

The concept of poetics is one of the most prominent modern critical concepts. It has been translated in many ways and defined in various ways, but perhaps the simplest definition is that it is “the science of poetry” or “the science of poetic style” (Matloob, 1989, p. 24). Poetics, as defined by Jakobson, is “language about language, challenging language and what lies beyond language, which is expressed by signs that do not appear in words but are hidden in their channels” (Jakobson, 1988, p. 31). Ali Al-Alaq considers it to be “a painful search for the new, an adventure in and with language. It is also a deviation from common and familiar modes of expression to a different horizon based on the pleasure of strangeness and the shock of surprise” (Al-Alaq, 2002, p. 30). It is "a function of the relationship between deep structure and surface structure, and this function is manifested in the absolute or relative correspondence between these two structures. When there is no correspondence, poetry disappears or diminishes to the point of near extinction. and when there is a disruption and divergence between the two structures, poetry emerges and explodes in direct proportion to the degree of disruption in the text" (Abu Deeb, 1987, p. 57).

Formalists in the field of contemporary criticism have focused on new criteria based on the availability of qualities and characteristics found in each literary genre, seeking to define its genre (poetic nature) or specific characteristics. Jean Cohen defined it as follows: “Poeticity is defined as the stylistics of the genre” (Cohen, 1986, p. 6), or as Todorov called it: “the general laws that govern the birth of every work” (Todorov, 1971, p. 23), or "the laws of creative writing" (Ezz al-Din al-Manasra, 1992, p. 31). Poetics embodies a textual form that takes the shape of a network of relationships that grow between primary components, such that each of them can occur in another context without necessarily being poetic” (Abu Deeb, 1987, p. 17).

To overcome the terminological multiplicity surrounding the concept of poeticity and to establish a practical framework governing the analytical dimension of this study, the research adopts a composite approach that integrates Jean Cohen’s structuralist perspective with Roland Barthes’s semiotic and interpretive insights. Accordingly, poeticity is not treated merely as a theoretical concept concerned with genre characteristics or as an autonomous field of stylistics; rather, it is employed as an analytical and procedural tool for examining the aesthetic and semantic mechanisms that shape the language of autobiography in *Layālī ʿĀbir Sabīl* (*Nights of a Wayfarer*). This approach operates through two complementary levels:

First: The Level of Deviation and Defamiliarization

This level focuses on tracing instances in which the narrative language departs from its direct referential and informative function toward an aesthetic and suggestive one. It examines the various forms of deviation and paradox that endow the autobiographical discourse with poetic density, drawing on Jean Cohen’s theory of deviation and Roman Jakobson’s conception of the poetic function of language.

Second: The Level of Structure and Interpretation

This level investigates how textual thresholds—particularly the title—are transformed into interpretive codes and reading units that actively participate in the production of meaning and guide the process of reception. Following Barthes’s perspective, which views the text as a network of signs and open-ended significations, these thresholds and textual structures do not merely record historical or personal events. Rather, they aesthetically reconstruct them, opening them to the realm of creative imagination and generating meanings that transcend their immediate referential reality.

This literary biography, distinguished in form and content, goes beyond a strict historical record to reshape the self—the writer's self—through intense poetic language. The writer does not present himself, nor does he narrate the events of his life in chronological order. Instead, he presents them through eleven nights filled with contemplative human experiences spanning fifty years, in which night is a symbolic time, and the settings for those nights are the nights of the village, the nights of Cyprus, and the nights of Amman... A living memory filled with different experiences.

III. Discussions

A. Poetics of the Title

The title is considered a poetic semiotic threshold, as it is the first text that the recipient encounters. The title in written language functions as the equivalent of the communicative situation in oral discourse in both temporal and spatial terms. Spoken texts usually do not require a title, whereas written texts necessarily call for one (Al-Ghufays, 2021, p. 373). The title may be a reason for acceptance or rejection, as it condenses and indicates the text. It is a key element in reception and interpretation, as meanings revolve around it and are linked to it. Through it, we can determine the identity of the text. The title plays an important role, as Barthes (1994) argues that it “whet the reader's appetite for reading” (p. 29) because it continues to refer to the writer's intentions and expresses his vision within the text. It is “a prior text that casts its shadow over the text and determines its identity” (Barthes, 1994, p. 30). On the other hand, the body of the novel continues to refer to the first threshold, “the title,” as it contributes to defining the objectives and intentions of the body and “suggests possibilities and visions that facilitate our entry into the world of the novel and gives the larger text a semantic value as a summary of the total work” (Barthes, 1994, p. 30).

The influence of the first text (the title) on the second text (the body), and vice versa, presents the reader with possibilities and interpretations, and provokes in the reader a process of interaction, conflict, and numerous shifts, where a set of interpretations and possibilities appear to us at the expense of others through the mutual interaction between the

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title and the body. The body provides us with new insights that take their place in relation to the title, ultimately determining for us the appropriate interpretation and the possibilities to which the title and body contribute together (Al-Rawashda, 2005, p. 134). The title is a semantic structure that interacts with the text and reproduces it in a condensed form. Therefore, the title of the biography, Nights of a Passing Traveler, is a fundamental interpretive key to the second text, the body of the biography, especially since those nights in the title are based on narrative passages, each of which is marked by nights that reached eleven nights of a passing stranger. The title, as a foundational semiotic sign, may prompt you to reread something that was familiar to you, something that is part of your culture, but it may tempt you to reread it because it unleashes new energies in you, as if the act of reading begins with the title, and then the act of interpretation.

The title constitutes a poetic and semiotic threshold that plays a crucial role in establishing the identity of the text. As Gérard Genette argues in his theory of paratexts, the title functions as a "paratext" that stimulates the reader's desire to engage with the work and provides an initial framework for approaching the main text. It serves as a mediating space between the text and its readers, guiding interpretation and shaping expectations before the act of reading begins.

Within a similar semiotic framework, Roland Barthes, in S/Z, attributes to the title a deconstructive and interpretive dimension. He states that "we take the title as a first reading unit… the title here inaugurates a hermeneutic code" (Barthes, 1994, p. 31). This hermeneutic code constitutes the primary interpretive key through which the text generates meaning. The title thus becomes a condensed semantic nucleus that directs the process of reception, unlocks the text's aesthetic intentions, and enables entry into its fictional world through multiple possibilities of interpretation rather than through a single, fixed meaning.

If we look closely at the components of the title of this biography, we find that it consists of a concise nominal sentence composed of three units, the first of which is (Nights). The title of the biography (Nights) suggests a dense collection, of an unspecified number, where experiences accumulate, knowledge expands, and it is well known that the word (night) in our Arab culture is associated with disclosure, confession, storytelling, and contemplation. It is a major irony and a semantic shift that prompts us to uncover those nights, to determine their meanings and dimensions in the text. The second of these units is "transient," which is a verb that carries in its lexical meaning the sense of passing, instability, existential alienation, and proximity to loss, while the word "path," the third unit that makes up the title, has a religious and cultural meaning open to multiple meanings related to destiny, choice, the way, and striving. Thus, the title is formed from the dialectic of accumulation and extension (nights), instability and transience (passing), and the tension of time and the road (path). The first text from the dialectic of accumulation and extension (layali), instability and transience (abir), and the tension between time and the path (sabil). This tension remains active throughout the nights of the biography, reaching its conclusion in the last two pages.

On the other hand, there is a poeticism that combines the plural in (Nights) and the singular in (Passing Way). This aesthetic is achieved through irony, where the writer's life multiplies its nights, and the writer's self passes through those nights without possessing them, as if the second text/body of the biography is built on a central question: How can a person be a passerby at a time that insists on remaining? Therefore, the "nights" in the body of the biography come as independent narrative units, because each night has its own place (the village, Jerusalem, Amman, Khartoum, Cyprus, the Hejaz, etc.), and each of those nights has its own circumstances, its own story, its own symbolic meaning, and its own emotional weight. Thus, the relationship between the title/the first text and the body/second text is articulated through existential pauses in a passing journey, indicating that those pauses and stops are transit points, not points of stability, and each of those nights is a rewriting of the writer himself, as if the writer/narrator did not narrate to chronicle events and record them, but rather to reshape himself, so that the recipient finds himself faced with an incomplete autobiography, facing intermittent nights in different places for a man exhausted by fatigue, who never stopped passing through. The nights are for pain and the accumulation of experiences, and the expansion of human experience. It is a literary biography (Layālīhā) that emphasizes the poetic, aesthetic, and contemplative aspects over the historical and documentary aspects, while (Aabir Sabeel) mitigates the ego that may appear in any autobiography, giving the narrative an aesthetic dimension and transforming the writer's modest self into a mirror reflecting a collective experience filled with wisdom gleaned from those nights.

B. Poetics of the Cover

When looking at the cover page, the reader finds that there is a clear harmony between the title of the biography and its cover, and a complementarity between the title icon and its cover, where we see an image of night and moon, an image of an ancient city, and another image of an elderly man sitting on a concrete bench with his back against a wall, his posture indicating his contemplative gaze at the place where he is sitting. This is a semiotic reference, as the title and cover are largely consistent with each other. The visual symbols on the cover of the biography (the night and the moon refer to the time of narration, contemplation, and revelation of what is in the soul, and an elderly man indicates the weight of those nights, and his contemplative sitting posture indicates his temporary pause before continuing on his way). This is strongly consistent with the meaning of the title/verbal text. and the image/visual text on the cover of the biography confirms the strength of the relationship between them, where we read the night as a space for contemplation and wisdom and a new way of writing life itself, and the crossing as a human destiny filled with different experiences in nights that have reached the age of fifty, for the writer himself—the humble self—who preferred the wisdom gleaned from the experiences of the nights to the heroism proclaimed in any other biography. This mitigated the ego in this biography and gave it a great deal of aesthetic and poetic value.

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Therefore, the relationship between the title of the biography and its cover is a semiotic and aesthetic one. The title, in its compound form, *Nights of a Passing Traveler*, evokes a nighttime that is rich in meaning, associated with contemplation, memory, and revelation. This is reinforced and confirmed by the cover image: a night scene with a dark sky, scattered stars, a clearly visible crescent moon, and dim, yellowish lighting.

C. The Title and the Text of the Biography

Readers are accustomed to linking a writer's literary works with the titles he chooses for them, which highlight the content, visions, and ideas addressed in those works. Therefore, it seems to us that the title chosen by the writer highlights the hidden and implicit meanings of the literary text and its visions. It seems to us that this biography, in terms of its title/first text and the structure of the second text/body, achieves an organic relationship between the nights and their meaning within the text, and there is a clear harmony between them. The writer says: I rode those nights, drank from their nectar and honey, and counted them as Ibn Ma'mar counted them in times past: I count the nights, night after night, and I have been counting the nights for ages! (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 5). How counting the nights and turning over their pages drew me to sail in their crashing waves, to recall memories, and to shed precious tears, as Zain al-Shabab Abu Firas had done before: When night enveloped me, I stretched out my hand of love and shed tears from its creatures, the great ones! (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 6).

From the first page of his biography, the writer declares that he counted those nights, and turned them over, drinking from their nectar and bitterness, their sweetness and sourness, and shedding his precious tears. He does not present his biography as a linear narrative of events, but rather announces the deconstruction and dissection of time into eleven nights based on recollection and condensation. The writer says: "These nights gathered together, piece by piece, light and dark, pulling at each other, some taking hold of each other's necks, until their honeyed juice was poured out. This is the story you hold in your hands, dear reader, mixed with the bitterness of suffering and hardship, infused with the fragrance of learning and perseverance, and embellished with amusing situations, until its memory faded and its fruit ripened" (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 6).

These are nights that have gathered and intertwined, joking with the sweetness and bitterness of the nights, with the bitterness of hardship and suffering, enriched with great lessons and strong perseverance, and embellished with amusing situations. Each night has its own space and story, and they are emotional milestones in the life of our writer, evoking sadness, joy, nostalgia, and memories. This is very much in line with the meaning of “transient,” which has nothing of the past except moments of standing still, reminiscing, and contemplating. The writer's statement, “How much the counting of nights has dragged me down,” makes each night a psychologically inflated time, in which pain accumulates, memories overlap with sorrow, and a consciousness weighed down by experiences is suggested. The writer no longer passes through time in a fleeting manner, but is keen to count the nights with all their memories, turning them into a space for contemplation, raising this documentary biography to the level of a literary biography with an interpretive dimension.

Thus, the relationship between the title of the biography and its text is complementary. According to the semiotic system, it is a relationship based on the transition of the signifier from the threshold of the title to the text, and the production of the signified through the repetition of the word “nights” throughout the pages of the biography. This repetition reinforces the presence of night as a constant time, within which the writer's experience is recounted from multiple angles according to different experiences in different places that are not presented as geographical spaces, but rather as semiotic signs and symbols that are read through the writer's personal experience. The places are transformed into something resembling an emotional space where memories and emotions are concentrated, and the place is reproduced within the semantic structure of the text in accordance with its vision. Likewise, the relationship between the title and the structure and vision of the nights is a deep and interactive one. The nights are not merely a temporal framework, but a structure that produces the vision and subject matter of the biography, liberating the text of the biography from the traditional model to a refined literary and poetic model, as those nights are an intense human experience of transition, recalled through memories.

D. Between the Title of the Biography and the Conclusion of the Nights

Writers have paid attention to titles because they create an expectation and anticipation in the reader. As the reader progresses through the text, they search for the connection between the text and its title, which in this case may match their expectations, or it may contradict it, and it is possible that it may break that expectation and reveal meanings and possibilities that the reader did not expect. The title contributes to guiding the reading and building the horizon of reception and expectation, and when it interacts with the text, it becomes an active element in producing the vision and overall meaning of the text. The nights prepare the reader to enter the world of the text, and after a life of joy and sorrow, sweetness and bitterness, and the accumulation of experiences that the writer went through during fifty years of his life in eleven nights, the conclusion of the nights comes to break the reader's expectations and anticipation. The conclusion does not end the nights with an event, but rather the writer's vision shifts from a narrative of suffering and pain to gratitude to God Almighty and an awareness of the blessings He has bestowed upon him. The writer says: “I never imagined that the waves of the nights would carry me from the desert of Sham and the heart of Africa to the coast of the Gulf, where a tree of honey and dates would grow for me, and the doors of the world would open to me, after I had tasted its bitterness and lived in its darkness!” (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 321). After a long account of the vicissitudes of life, poverty, waiting, suffering, illness, and long hours of work, the conclusion of the nights comes to say: These nights are not evil, but rather

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a test that leads to satisfaction. Here, the aesthetic semiotic convergence between the title of the biography and its conclusion is realized. The nights are a long path that the writer has traveled, and the conclusion is his awareness of what he has accomplished on this path fraught with suffering and the vicissitudes of life.

In the body of the biography, the night is associated with fear, sleeplessness, reflection, anticipation, and anxiety, but in the conclusion, the night is associated with the remembrance of God Almighty, gratitude for His blessings, and satisfaction with what He has decreed for His servants. The author says: "Do not be surprised, my friend, for the world is in the hands of its Owner, who gives it to whom He wills, takes it away from whom He wills, changes the circumstances of its inhabitants, and turns their hearts. Their worth is not known by the extent of their worldly possessions, but by their deeds and piety: In the blink of an eye, God changes one's condition from one state to another! (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 321).

The experience was fraught with suffering, but it turned into light and contentment, and acceptance of what God Almighty had decreed. This profound poetic transformation is rarely achieved except in mature literary texts, as the text of the biography is based on a tight circular structure. The nights began with the difficult nights of the village, burdened with poverty and suffering, and ended with a description of them as a blessing from God Almighty and apparent and hidden blessings that God Almighty bestowed upon our writer. The writer says: "Bakh, Bakh, Abu Mujahid, you have scooped from the dust of this world and tasted its delights. so beware, beware of leaning on it, for it will cover you with its dust and make you one of its seekers. For this world, if it accepts you, it will spoil you, and if it ripens, it will wither, and if it turns green, it will harm you!" (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 324). This conclusion does not depart from the title, but rather returns to it and deepens its meaning, as if we have reinterpreted the title through the conclusion of the nights. The beginning of the nights was wisdom and suffering, and their end was contentment with the will of God Almighty, great favor from God Almighty, and praise for the blessings of God Almighty. The nights reach their climax when they end with gratitude and acknowledgment of God's grace. The author says: "Well done, Abu Mujahid, for God has given you His grace and taught you what you did not know, and He has done you good by healing you of malaria and brought you from misery and hardship to bliss and prosperity; to test you, whether you would be grateful or ungrateful. It is incumbent upon you to acknowledge His favor and praise His blessings, to thank Him and not be ungrateful, and to repeat throughout the night and at the ends of the day: “My Lord, inspire me to be grateful for Your blessings which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents, and to do righteous deeds that please You. And make my offspring righteous. I have repented to You, and I am one of the Muslims” (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 324).

This Qur'anic intertextuality, with which *Nights of a Passing Traveler* concludes, is a reference that adds a moral and spiritual dimension to the experience of the nights. Thus, the conclusion of *Nights of a Passing Traveler* succeeded in interpreting and explaining the title, transcending it, and finally returning it to the reader in a deeper and purer form, thereby achieving organic unity between the title of the biography and the conclusion of Layali, and contributing to the production of a text that is coherent in terms of poetry, aesthetics, structure, and meaning.

E. Poetics of Language

Language is a complex mechanism at the heart of the relationships that exist in a novel, as literary works are formed from the combination of words, their arrangement into meaningful sentences, and then the combination of these sentences into a complete linguistic structure. Through language, we arrive at the writer's vision and the depth of the reality he wanted to express. Language becomes “a tool for communication between people, due to the social nature of human beings, and it carries expressive images from the speaker in the form of stylistic energy” (Bakhtin, 1987, p. 84).

Language is like a mirror that reflects the features of linguistic reality at its multiple levels, and prose literary texts are often not devoid of poetry, as language achieves multiple features that bring the language of prose closer to the language of poetry, such as displacement, imagery, conciseness, implication, and condensation.

In this biography, the author has managed to use concise, expressive language that is extremely profound and focused. This linguistic depth comes from the concise rhetorical charges, poetic imagery, and harmony of meanings in the biography, through language that delves into the depths of humanity and is charged with profound psychological suffering. The reader who examines the biography finds poetic language based primarily on displacement, imagery, and irony, which are among the strongest pillars of poetic imagery. The poetic nature of the biography is also enhanced by the poetic texts that the author has drawn from his cultural repertoire or intellectual output and employed in his biography in a precise and conscious manner that serves his vision in his nights, supports the biography, and gives it depth, poetry, and beauty.

(a). Displacement

Linguistic displacement is “a violation of the laws of language, and it alone provides poetry with its true subject matter” (Cohen, 1986, p. 42). Jean Cohen considered it the element that “constitutes the essential characteristic of poetic language” (Abu Deeb, 1987, p. 108). Metonymy is one of the important elements in expressing strong emotions, as it is “the natural language of tense situations and excitement, because it enables humans to express with concentrated violence the heightened level of the violent situation that arouses them” (Lewis, 1982, p. 113).

Al-Awabdeh argues that deviation "elevates poetic texts toward the aesthetics of expression and the poeticity of literary discourse. Naturally, deviation is not confined to poetry; it is also employed in prose because poetic language does not simply mean the language of poetry, but rather language that departs from ordinary communicative usage. Its features include similes, metaphors, and artistic imagery" (Al-Awabdeh, 2023, p. 4). Furthermore, Al-Hajjami states that

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"deviation is the writer's use of language in a manner that departs from the conventional. Through this departure, the writer achieves individuality, creativity, and the ability to captivate the recipient by attracting attention through the disruption of linguistic norms with aesthetic patterns" (Al-Hajjami, 2021, p. 136).

Jean Cohen provides a comprehensive account of the mechanism underlying both semantic and syntactic deviation under the term "semantic deviation" (Déviation Sémantique), particularly in his discussion of metaphor as its most prominent form. He states:

> Metaphor is a semantic deviation based on the violation of the law of compatibility. It is not limited to destroying the logical meaning of words; rather, it reconstructs a new meaning. It transfers the word from its original contextual domain to an imagistic space that grants the expression an emotional and aesthetic dimension unattainable through referential language. (Cohen, 1986, p. 143)

He further explains:

> The function of metaphor is to destroy the familiar material properties of things in order to endow them with new properties that correspond to the creator's emotional state. (Cohen, 1986, p. 147)

Within this framework, deviation may occur not only at the level of individual lexical items but also in the relational structure between words, as Cohen notes:

> The violation of the norm may occur at the level of the isolated word, and it may also occur at the level of the relationship between words, that is, in their combination within a structure. (Cohen, 1986, p. 49)

This conceptualization clarifies that semantic deviation does not merely disrupt linguistic norms but actively reconstructs meaning through metaphorical transformation.

Al-Saudi clearly relied on displacement in all its forms and shapes in his biography. The writer says in *Nights of Deprivation/The Three Lean Years*: "I said before: Days and nights passed, and months went by without the promises being fulfilled, and now I say: Three harsh lean years have passed in which I have not achieved my goal at any university, and I have remained lying at their doors, hanging on their walls, as if with reproachful tongues saying: Is it not time for this knight to dismount! Is it not time for this young man, who has traveled the length and breadth of the country, whose papers have filled the drawers of universities, to find a job worthy of him, or to enjoy a meal that satisfies him and his children? These lean years have reduced my financial reserves to below zero, emptied my young children's refrigerator of its meager contents, worn out their clothes, and faded their colors and beauty!" (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 248). The shift in this passage of the biography contributes to a clear breach of semantic and syntactic norms and helps to achieve the poetic nature of the text in a way that serves the writer's vision. In the writer's words, "The days and nights passed, and the months passed without the promises being fulfilled." The temporal symbols (days, nights, and months) have shifted from their true meaning to another meaning associated with psychological and social connotations, represented by disappointment, betrayal, and long waiting. These temporal variables are also among the phrases that reflect the weight of the writer's experience, which affected him psychologically and expressed the extent of his suffering during three long years of deprivation. Here, time deviates from its natural course and does not bring about any positive progress in the writer's life. It transforms from a temporal value into a symbol of drought, hunger, and despair, giving the passage an aesthetic poetic dimension based on irony and suggestion.

The writer continues to describe his suffering in this passage, which is reflected in his question: Is it not time for this knight to dismount? Repeating this question, which does not await an answer, shifts the question away from its original meaning and function of awaiting and seeking an answer. It is as if the question carries a connotation of reproach, silent objection, fatigue, and physical exhaustion. This kind of shift/pragmatic shift has achieved a symbolic poetic function based on protesting the writer's situation, even though he deserves a position and work befitting his status as a distinguished university professor. Here, language reveals the writer's deep suffering in a poetic, displaced form that expresses the long wait, helplessness, and loss of dreams. Language becomes an emotional space that conveys the writer's pain and engages the reader in his experience. This gives the text a moving poetic and emotional dimension, deepening the writer's critical view of social reality based on fragile promises and the disappointment of serious, ambitious people in the face of difficult living conditions based on connections and favoritism. The writer confirms this when he says: Days and nights passed, months went by, and my attempts to cross the walls of universities were unsuccessful, despite the many promises I received and the sympathy I enjoyed. but I benefited from it as little as a hungry man benefits from a delicious story about a lamb stuffed with rice and pine nuts on a round table at a resort in Hawaii" (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 246).

The pages of *Nights of a Passing Traveler* are filled with displacement, which the author uses extensively to embody his pain and suffering and express his feelings, sorrows, and worries with great depth. The author says: In the midst of my arduous search for universities, enduring the hardships of travel and transportation and being deprived of good food and nice clothes, in the midst of all that, an incident occurred that shook my being and disrupted my life, had it not been for God's mercy and generosity. I felt a change in my vision, and I saw with my own eyes—on my eyes—balls, threads, and small lights that flashed on and off. I felt that the horizon was beginning to recede and fade, and that the darkness had drawn its tail around me. The images of people and buildings began to shake and grow darker... The colors of my eyes flowed before my eyes like watercolors flowing on a sketchbook (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 254). There is a clear shift in this passage from *Nights of Deprivation/Third of the Three*: It is pitch black, as colors do not actually flow, and the metaphor here embodies visual disturbance, as if the medical problem had turned into a visual scene, with the colors of his eyes flowing before his eyes like watercolors on a sketchbook. The author then says: My eyes became two dark chambers,

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devoid of any ray of light connecting them to this vast world, which narrowed until it became as small as the eye of a needle...!" (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 254). His eyes had been transformed from living organs into dark, lifeless chambers, a shift that deepened his sense of loss, deprivation, and suffering. The author makes the loss of sight something tangible. In contrast, after this intense suffering and the successful operation, the author says: Then, on the morning of the following day, the doctor removed the bandage that had been tied over my eyes, and light crept back in after its farewell. Joy filled my being and my limbs danced, as if the entire universe were dancing to the beat of my heart and my chirping!" (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 255). Light is a living being that returns, not just a reflection, as if light here carries the meaning of salvation, and then the outside world around him becomes a mirror of what is happening to him. The whole universe dances, and in this is a diagnosis of the image of a man dancing in expression of joy and happiness at the return of his sight.

The aesthetic function of displacement in Al-Saudi's work stems from the depth and authenticity of experience, not from the embellishment and ornamentation of language. The text is displaced because reality itself is displaced: the text conveys the sensory experience as felt by the writer, then transforms the suffering into an aesthetic text that is open to contemplation. The vision is disturbed, the light is treacherous, then it returns, and the eye transforms from a window to a wall, then back to a window. It is a shift that writes pain and suffering, then illuminates this pain. What deepens the aesthetic and poetic function of the shift are the rhetorical sentences that came in a meaningful poetic form. The writer says: “I muttered contentedly, counting my blessings: Praise be to God in all circumstances. O God, I ask you to restore my sight. O God, do not burden me with poverty, deprivation, and loss of sight” (Al-Saudi, 2010, pp. 254, 255), and he says: I praised God Almighty for removing the darkness from my eyes and revealing the third veil from my mind" (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 256). It is a sincere religious supplication in which sincere emotional relief is intertwined with religious belief and personal experience.

(b). Irony

Irony is “a rhetorical linguistic expression based primarily on the mental relationship between words rather than on the melodic and morphological relationship” (Ibrahim, 1981, p. 132), and is “a linguistic deviation that leads to an elusive, unstable, and multi-meaning structure” (Shabana, 2002, p. 46). Irony is one of the elements that most contributes to the aesthetics and poetic nature of a text, and Al-Saudi relied on profound poetic language in the formulation of his biography as the main tool for expressing his ideas and visions. In The Nights of the Barefoot Teacher/Catching the Wind, the irony of expectation and disappointment is evident, as the text begins with a positive expectation. The author says: After graduating from university with top honors, I aspired to complete my higher education, so I rushed to the dean of graduate studies, my heart filled with hope and my imagination running wild: I saw myself as a teaching assistant at the university, then as a professor giving lectures and receiving respect and appreciation!" (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 123). The text begins by referring to academic excellence, first place, and great ambition to complete graduate studies and then teach at universities. However, this positive outlook is met with disappointment. The author says: When I met with the dean and expressed my desire, he shocked me by saying, ‘No, the repeat system has ended.’ I argued with him and turned the situation around, but he insisted on what he said. His words were not true, as the teaching assistant position is awarded to the student who achieves the highest grade, which I had achieved, and the system had not yet been abolished, but he had saved it for the lucky one with “connections”! My pleading with him was of no use" (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 123). The dean's sudden decision to end the retake system shatters our expectations, and the irony is manifested in its harshest and most unjust form, because the writer's entitlement to be a teaching assistant at the university is an entitlement that must be deserved, as he has fulfilled the conditions for retaking the exam. However, the matter is decided by those with connections, and the poetic irony is evident in its transition from an individual situation to a collective one in which justice is destroyed, and no specific person is held responsible, but rather the method itself is condemned and rejected.

We pause at another example of irony, a beautiful verbal irony between the apparent and the implied meaning of the words, in *Layali al-Ayn*/Ahwataak al-Ayn. What is apparent to us from this phrase is that it means supplication and protection of a person from falling into envy. The writer says: I remember once when I finished my lecture and they gathered around me as usual, one of them said to me, “I protect you with my eyes, Doctor.” I said, “Thank you.” He repeated what he said, and I thanked him again. I believe that what he meant was: God willing, he is praising me and praying that I will be protected by the eyes of those who love me, not those who envy me!" (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 263), where the meaning of the irony is reversed from its apparent meaning to another meaning intended by one of the writer's students in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, specifically in Al-Ain, as the writer's response reveals his lack of understanding of the student's intention in his spoken Emirati dialect, as he meant: They told me that he invites you after work to take you for a drive in his car in the city of Al Ain. I said, “How wonderful! Now I understand the meaning of your caution, and I have solved the riddle of the pun that caused me confusion in the word Al Ain! How beautiful is caution in Al Ain!” (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 264). It is an aesthetic linguistic irony that reveals the depth of the spoken Gulf dialect and the beauty of what we might consider ordinary and simple.

In another irony from Nights of the Eye/A University Professor, he recounts what happened to our writer in Nights of the Barefoot Teacher, who was disappointed and let down when he was appointed as a teaching assistant at a university, saying: "The happiest day of my academic life was when I entered the university, Ajman University, and gave lectures on literature and criticism, after waiting several years for this blessed day and knocking on every door until I was

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exhausted. When I was exhausted, they spoke to me, or as Al-Farazdaq said, boasting of the company of Abu Amr ibn al-Ala: “I kept opening and closing doors until I came to Abu Amr ibn Ammar!” (Al-Saudi, 2010, p. 12).

IV. Conclusion

Thus, this research may have revealed different aspects of the openness of the biographical text to poetry, and demonstrated the impact of this openness in achieving the poetic nature of the narrative and presenting its different perspectives. As a creative and experienced academic writer, the author has sought to write within a distinctive poetic context. We are dealing with a prose text whose refined language is very close to the language of poetry. The features of poetic language are evident in the author's distinctive attention to the title and his extensive and intensive use of displacement, sensory imagery, irony, description, and other devices. He was able to imbue language, structures, and images with his various feelings of suffering, sorrow, harsh circumstances, and pain. He was able to enrich his meanings and enhance the evocative power of his words with his command of language and its expressive and aesthetic energies. Therefore, his words were a sincere expression of his concerns, feelings, and emotions, and his entire biography became imbued with his constant suffering and many hopes, embodying his convictions and satisfaction with the many blessings God had bestowed upon him despite what he had suffered in his life. Therefore, the technique of poetic language is a suitable technique and tool for expressing the vision that the biography carried and expressed in a way full of possibilities and many interpretations.

At a broader critical level, the scholarly significance of this study extends beyond the analysis of a single autobiographical text to contribute to the reshaping of contemporary critical understandings of the structure of Arabic autobiography in general. The autobiographical experience of Ahmad Atiya Al-Saudi demonstrates that autobiography is no longer merely a historical document or a linear record of life events; rather, it has evolved into a parallel aesthetic and poetic space that transcends straightforward narrative reportage through the transformative power of poetic language.

This stylistic openness, grounded in the interplay of poeticity, paradox, and deviation, opens a new horizon within contemporary Arabic autobiographical writing, where the voice of the self moves beyond the narrow confines of personal confession to engage with broader human and existential concerns. Such engagement is achieved through textual thresholds and narrative structures charged with suggestion, symbolism, and interpretive possibilities.

Accordingly, the study recommends re-examining modern Arabic autobiographical works through stylistic and deconstructive critical perspectives that move beyond their purely historical content. Instead, attention should be directed toward the aesthetic mechanisms embedded within language itself, as these constitute the primary source of the modern narrative text’s identity and its continuously renewed interpretive potential.

Declaration of the Use of AI

The manuscript was originally composed in Arabic and translated into English using the free version of DeepL Translator. The authors confirm that the translation was subsequently reviewed and edited for accuracy and linguistic consistency. The work contains no AI-generated content beyond the use of machine translation for language conversion.

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An Empirical Study on Level-Based Teaching of Kazakh Analytical Verb Formants to Russian-Speaking L2 Learners

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***Abstract*—This study examines why long-term instruction in Kazakh as a second language does not always lead to the productive use of analytical verb formants (AVFs) among Russian-speaking adult learners in Kazakhstan. Drawing on N. Oralbaeva's theory of AVFs and the psycholinguistics of second language acquisition (SLA), the research focuses on A2, B1, and B2 levels within the CEFR framework. Employing a mixed-methods approach that includes a diagnostic survey (n = 72), level-based analysis, and frequency characteristics of AVFs, the study identified 15 AVFs organised according to a three-stage teaching model: learning, application, and free production. Additionally, a corpus meta-annotation table based on the National Corpus of the Kazakh Language was proposed. The findings indicate that mastering AVFs extends beyond grammatical proficiency; it necessitates automating intention into linguistic code, which can be achieved through a targeted, level-based methodological system.**

***Index Terms*—analytical verb formants, Kazakh as a second language, level-based teaching, Russian-speaking learners, corpus-based instruction**

I. Introduction

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, the system for teaching the Kazakh language as a second language (L2) has been implemented at the institutional level for a long time. It is taught as a compulsory subject for 11 years in general secondary schools and for at least one year in higher education institutions. Empirical observations show that a significant proportion of Russian-speaking graduates are admitted to higher education at the A1–A2 level, indicating that long-term instruction does not necessarily lead to communicative fluency. This situation corresponds to Ullman's (2001, 2016) declarative/procedural model in SLA, which suggests that learners may understand grammatical rules (declarative memory) but struggle to apply them automatically in conversation.

The main reason for these difficulties is the lack of a systematic approach to teaching analytical verb formants (AVFs). In everyday spoken Kazakh, forms such as umytıp ketti (forgot unintentionally), oqıp jatır (is reading right now), and kele almay qaldı (ended up unable to come) are frequently used, yet are rarely taught according to proficiency levels. Based on N. Oralbaeva's (1979) theoretical framework, this study aims to select and present AVFs at A2, B1, and B2.

Another factor complicating the issue is that the grammatical material is presented not according to level-based standards, but rather from each author's perspective. As a result, language units such as AVFs are not taught effectively at the A2–B2 levels, creating psychological barriers for both learners and teachers.

Despite growing interest in Kazakh language pedagogy, no empirical research has systematically investigated which AVFs should be introduced at which CEFR level. Furthermore, a level-based linguodidactic AVF teaching framework for Russian-speaking adult learners of Kazakh has not been developed. This study, combining psycholinguistic theory,

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diagnostic survey data (n = 72), and corpus analysis, presents the first evidence-based framework for learners of Kazakh as a second language, namely a levelled AVF teaching system.

Research Questions:

RQ1: *Is there a discrepancy between the ability of A2–B2 level Russian-speaking learners to recognise AVFs in natural Kazakh discourse and their active use of these forms in speech? How can this be explained from a psycholinguistic perspective?*

RQ2: *Based on L1 interference and cognitive load, how can AVFs be categorised into A2, B1, and B2 levels?*

RQ3: *What should the methodological system for teaching AVFs in L2 Kazakh be?*

II. Literature Review

A. N. Oralbaeva's Theory of Analytical Verb Formants: The Theoretical Basis of the Study

The first systematic study of analytical verb formants in Turkic languages was conducted by A.A. Yuldashev (1965). He states that the main characteristic of these formants is that the auxiliary verb loses its original lexical meaning and becomes merely an indicator of a grammatical category. Building on this theory, Professor N. Oralbaeva systematically studied the analytical verb formants in the Kazakh language and in 1971 defended her doctoral dissertation entitled "Analytical Forms of Verbs in Modern Kazakh" (Oralbaeva, 1971). The scholar demonstrates that the vast majority of AVFs are composed of auxiliary verbs and that, regardless of their complexity, the meanings of their constituent elements have idiomatised and coalesced into a single sense – the auxiliary verbs have lost their original meanings and become mere indicators of grammatical categories. In his 1974 work *Modern Kazakh Language: Morphology,* Ysqaqov incorporated Oralbaeva's ideas into an academic textbook.

In her 1975 work, Oralbaeva identified the types of formants. The scholar divided auxiliary verbs into two groups: a) primary (homonymous) auxiliary verbs: *al, bar, ber, bol, baq, basta, bit, qara,* etc.; b) secondary (non-homonymous) auxiliary verbs: *et, edi, eken, emes, etc.* In her subsequent 1979 monograph, Oralbaeva grouped the formants according to the number of morphemes and their semantic characteristics:

Table 1

Classification	Type	Formants	Grammatical function
According to the number of morphemes:			
a) monomorphemic	Simple grammatical markers	еді, екен, емес, жоқ айтқан еді, істеген екен, барған емес, келген жоқ	*These formants are the most frequently used in both spoken and written discourse, conveying the same grammatical meaning, most often in the past tense.*
b) two-morpheme	Progressive aspect markers	-п жатыр, -п тұр, -п отыр, -п жүр. жұмыс істеп жатыр, сөйлесіп тұр, жеп отыр, ойланып жүр	*They indicate a continuous or ongoing action, with an additional nuance relating to the subject's physical state or posture.*
c) three-morpheme	Modal and conditional complex formants	-ушы бол-ма, -ған бол-са, -гің кел-се Қолданушы болма	*They express volitional, conditional, and intentional meanings, reflecting the subject's desire or willingness as a grammatical structure.*
d) four-morpheme	Complex aspectual-modal sequences	-п қоя бер, -п жүре бер, -п кеп қалды Оқып жүре бер	*They encode involuntary completion, unintended results, and permissive continuation, conveying the subject's lack of control over the action or its outcome.*
According to semantic characteristics:			
e) Monosemantic	Formants with a single meaning	-са/-се Ол білсе, айтар еді	*e) Depending on the context, it conveys the meanings of condition, wish, and contrast. Russian-speaking learners acquire this form with relative ease.*
f) Polysemantic	Formants with multiple meanings	-п жүр Ағылшын тілін үйреніп жүр	*f) It denotes continuous and habitual action. Its meaning is determined by context. L2 learners tend to lose the subtle nuances of meaning and resort to the economy-of-processing mechanism.*
g) Homonymous	Same form, different meanings	бара бер (кете бер) ала бер (алуға болады)	*g) They share the same morphological form, so their meanings are distinguished by the semantics of the main verb. Russian-speaking learners are at a high risk of interference.*
h) Synonymous	Different forms, similar meanings	-п бара жат, -п келе жат Сөйлеп бара жатыр; қуанып келе жатыр	*h) They express the same progressive meaning and are used in a non-propositional, directional sense.*

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Gyorfi (2022) analysed the structures of twenty-eight auxiliary verb constructions in Modern Spoken Kazakh, based on fieldwork and corpus data. In this dissertation, the researcher describes the process by which auxiliary verbs lose their original lexical meanings and become grammatical markers, revealing their tense, aspectual, and modal meanings. This work can be considered a foundational study of auxiliary verb formants (AVFs) from a modern linguistic perspective.

In the works of Yuldashev (1965), Oralbaeva (1971, 1975, 1979), and Kalybaeva and Oralbaeva (1986), the linguistic characteristics of AVFs have been studied comprehensively. However, how, at what level, and by what methodology these formations should be taught to L2 learners remains a pressing issue. Accordingly, the main aim of this study is to select and present AVFs in line with the A2-B2 levels.

B. Communicative Anxiety as a Contextual Factor in L2 Kazakh Acquisition

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) – as defined by Horwitz et al. (1986) – refers to a complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning, which significantly impedes communicative fluency. This study does not directly assess foreign language anxiety (FLA); instead, communicative anxiety is identified as a key contextual factor. Survey data indicate that a significant proportion of respondents switched to Russian under communicative pressure, consistent with anxiety-driven avoidance behaviour. Research in Kazakhstan has confirmed the presence of such barriers among Kazakh language learners (Suleimenova, 2013). Additionally, Ospanova et al. (2025) found that emotions are conveyed not only through individual words but also through morphological and syntactic structures, suggesting that AVFs function as carriers of communicative intention and emotional state, beyond their purely grammatical function.

C. SLA Psycholinguistics: Speech Production and Automatisation

According to Levelt's (1992) model of speech production, the connection between the lemma and the word form in L2 remains unstable, resulting in a significant gap. Ullman's (2001, 2016) declarative/procedural model further suggests that adult learners store grammatical knowledge in declarative memory, while the procedural system required for automatic application during speech remains underdeveloped. Similarly, as Ellis (2005) notes, the teaching system often develops explicit knowledge, while the tacit knowledge required for actual communication does not. As a result, the learner, although aware of the grammatical rules, is unable to apply them in real time.

According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1981, 1982) within the Monitor Model, anxiety, stress, or low motivation heightens the learner's affective filter. When the filter is active, even comprehensible input fails to reach the language acquisition device (LAD) in the brain. In other words, it is not processed effectively, and language acquisition does not occur. According to Swain's output hypothesis (1985, 1993), language production is not only the result of acquisition but also an active tool for it. Consequently, to acquire AVFs, it is not enough simply to know them; actual production practice is necessary.

While Western cognitivism emphasises input and the internal rules and modular structures of the brain, the Moscow psycholinguistic school, founded by L. S. Vygotsky (1934) and developed by A. N. Leontiev and his son, the psycholinguist A. A. Leontiev (1967), regards language not as a static system but as a goal-oriented action. According to A. A. Leontiev's model of speech production, the process comprises the following phases: the motivational-intentional phase, orientation and internal programming (at the semantic and syntactic levels), execution, and monitoring. It can be observed that the analytical formant imposes an additional load on the linguistic encoding of this sequence because, at this stage, alongside the primary semantics, a nuancing parameter – such as consequentiality, involuntariness, or inadvertence – must also be encoded.

Belyanin (2004) demonstrated the role of psychological barriers and the mental lexicon in the processing of linguistic units.

D. The Economy-of-Processing Strategy and the Avoidance of AVFs

The economy-of-processing strategy can be explained through Zipf's principle of least effort, according to which speakers tend to minimise processing effort in language use (Zipf, 1949, 1965). In L2 speech production, this tendency may lead learners to avoid morphologically complex forms and choose shorter or more familiar alternatives. In the case of Kazakh AVFs, Russian-speaking learners often replace analytical constructions such as *umyttyp kettim (ұмытып кеттім)* with simpler synthetic forms such as *umyttym (ұмыттым),* thereby reducing cognitive load but losing the intended semantic nuance.

For L2 learners, acoustic and perceptual obscurity make interface processing difficult. Morphological markers, such as verb suffixes, are often overlooked by L2 learners because they merge with surrounding material; instead, learners rely on lexical markers, such as temporal adverbs. Thus, the principle of minimal effort, which leads to a reduction in L1 speakers, paradoxically results in an economy effect for L2 learners, as they simply do not acquire these reduced elements (Fedzechkina & Jaeger, 2020). In this regard, Ysqaqov (1974), in *Modern Kazakh Language,* notes that while two or more nouns can be linked without a connecting element in Kazakh – a familiar phenomenon – verbs never enter into a syntactic relationship without a linking element; that is, while one can say *ayta ber (айт бер)* or *äkele qoy (әкеле қой),* the forms *ayt bar (айт бар)* and *äkel qoy (әкел қой)* as independent verb chains constitute a grammatical error. From this, we observe that for the L2 learner, the grammatical categories of analytical verb formants impede communicative fluency, thereby triggering the economy-of-processing mechanism. In such constructions, the speaker incorporates into

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the intentional plan not only the main action but also its subjective relation, degree of completion, or phasal characteristics. These additional parameters complicate the internal programming stage and place high demands on automating the transition between intention and linguistic code. When automatisation is insufficient, these forms are replaced by simpler alternatives – for example, umytıp kettim (ұмытып кеттім) is replaced by umyttım (ұмыттым), and istey almay qaldım (істей алмай қалдым) by istmedim (істемедім).

E. Research Gaps

The above review reveals the following issues: 1) Oralbaeva's and Győrfi's (2022) formant system has been described linguistically but not analysed at a methodological level; furthermore, although Curry and McEnery (2025) have argued for the need for nationally contextualised corpora, no such corpus for Kazakh AVFs has yet been created; 2) there is no classification of AVFs according to CEFR levels; 3) the impact of AVFs on communicative anxiety in the Kazakhstan context has not been researched; and 4) there is no corpus-based example bank for teachers. These four issues constitute the main focus of the present study.

Recent studies in corpus-based language pedagogy support this need for a pedagogically structured approach. Research on data-driven learning has shown that corpus-based instruction can contribute to second-language learning when authentic examples are supported by guided tasks and classroom scaffolding (Lusta et al., 2023; Ueno & Takeuchi, 2023). Recent discussions also emphasise that corpus-informed pedagogy is moving beyond concordance consultation towards curriculum design, digital pedagogy, and context-sensitive learning resources (Casal & Kessler, 2024; Curry & McEnery, 2025). However, these developments have not yet been applied to Kazakh analytical verb formants. This study therefore addresses the gap by proposing a CEFR-oriented, pedagogically annotated corpus prototype for Russian-speaking learners of Kazakh.

III. Methodology

A. Research Context

The language level classification was conducted at Astana IT University (Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan). At the university, the Kazakh language is taught to second-year students for two semesters. In the final semester of their first year, students are divided into three levels (A1–B1) through an oral diagnostic assessment (a monologue and an interview), in accordance with the CEFR level descriptors (Council of Europe, 2020). As the data are presented in a generalised form, specific statistical information is not disclosed in accordance with the university's internal policy. The primary focus of this study is Russian-speaking learners at the A2, B1, and B2 levels – students who completed their schooling in Russian in Kazakhstan and are studying Kazakh L2.

B. Research Design and Methods

This study conceptualises learners' failure to systematically use AVFs, instead relying on simple verb forms even at the B2 level, as a "linguistic gap". This concept underpins the study's diagnostic framework: first identified and subsequently addressed.

The research employed a mixed-methods approach in which quantitative and qualitative methods complemented each other, enabling the joint examination of Oralbaeva's theory of AVFs and the psycholinguistics of SLA.

The methodological basis is formed at the intersection of pedagogy, psychology, and cognitive science (see Figure 1): 1) the pedagogical component includes didactic diagnostics and strategic goal-setting; 2) the psychological component reduces the affective filter (Krashen, 1982); and 3) the cognitive component addresses L1 interference (Ullman, 2001, 2016), implementing the phased development of the analytical mental system across the A2–B2 levels. The cyclical unity of these three components aims to lead the learner to a stable B2 outcome.

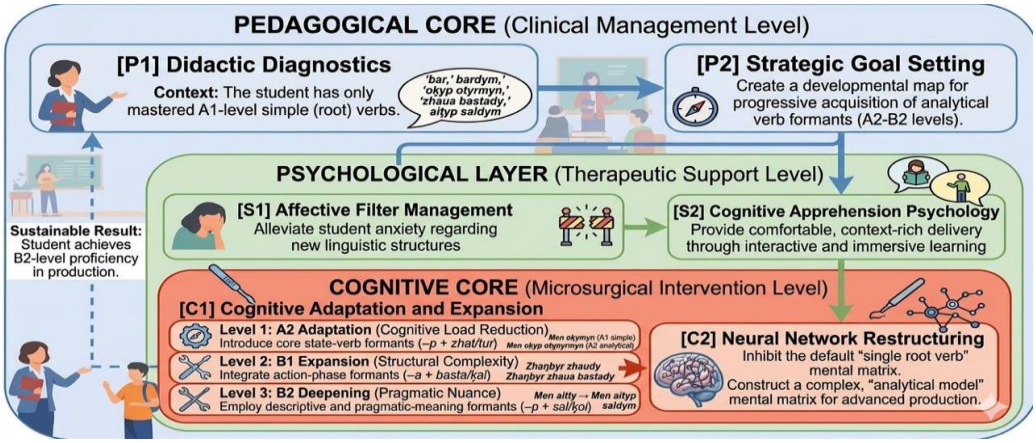


Figure 1. A Three-Level Methodological System for Mastering AVFs: The Unity of Pedagogical, Psychological, and Cognitive Dimensions
Note: The infographic was generated using the Google Gemini (Google DeepMind) artificial intelligence tool; the conceptual framework, content, and all analytical decisions were developed by the authors.

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The psycholinguistic approach was designed to investigate the cognitive processes involved in processing AVFs during speech production, including the dynamics of intention to linguistic code, working memory load, and the degree of automatisation. The methodological approach identified opportunities to present these formants at A2–B2 levels. The comparative approach examined typological differences between Kazakh (agglutinative) and Russian (inflective) languages, thereby helping determine the nature of L1 interference.

C. Participants

The study involved 72 adult Russian-speaking learners of Kazakh as a second language, studying at higher education institutions in Kazakhstan and working in various professional fields (n = 72, age range: 18–56+). Their language proficiency was assessed at A2–B2 on the CEFR scale. Purposive sampling was used.

D. Data Collection

Data were collected via a diagnostic survey administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire was created in both Kazakh and Russian to ensure full comprehension. Participants were also asked not to use translation tools, as this condition was necessary to accurately measure the learner's actual processing level.

The questionnaire consisted of seven thematic blocks: 1) demographic data; 2) motivational state; 3) psychological barriers during speech; 4) the gap between grammatical knowledge and practical application; 5) distinguishing semantic nuances; 6) choice of AVFs in real-life situations; and 7) level of communicative anxiety.

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles. All participants took part voluntarily, were informed of their right to withdraw at any time, and were assured of full anonymity. No personal data was collected.

The diagnostic questionnaire was developed on the basis of three theoretical frameworks: Oralbaeva's (1979) AVF classification, which provided the linguistic content of the tasks; Ullman's (2001) declarative/procedural model, which formed the design of tasks targeting the gap between grammatical knowledge and its spontaneous use; and Horwitz et al.'s (1986) concept of foreign language anxiety, which guided the development of tasks assessing communicative avoidance behaviour. The task formulation was confirmed by the research supervisor and refined iteratively during the data collection phase based on participant feedback. The final questionnaire comprised 21 items distributed across seven thematic blocks.

E. Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods were employed. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used in the quantitative analysis to assess the frequency of learners' AVF choices and their levels of avoidance. Response distributions were calculated for each survey item, and cross-item patterns were examined to identify recurring psycholinguistic tendencies across proficiency levels. Qualitative responses were categorised into the following psycholinguistic categories: cognitive load, affective anxiety, and processing-economy strategies. This provided the basis for classifying the AVFs identified in the questionnaire scenarios by CEFR level.

IV. Results and Discussion

A. Communicative Anxiety and Failure to Integrate Into the Linguistic Environment (RQ1)

The survey results revealed a systematic gap between learners' ability to distinguish AVFs and their active use of these formants. In terms of motivational readiness, 47.2% of respondents (n = 34) rated improving their spoken Kazakh as "Somewhat relevant", and 26.4% (n = 19) as "Very relevant", yielding an overall motivational activity rate of 73.6%. However, empirical observations suggest that high motivation is not consistently realised in communicative practice, as the following questions demonstrate.

The most common manifestation of communicative anxiety is difficulty in selecting and appropriately using the right words. 48.6% of respondents (n = 35) admitted that they could not express their thoughts quickly in Kazakh. A further 31.9% (n = 23) indicated a receptive–productive gap – that is, they understand the language well but cannot speak it. This corresponds to the typical manifestation of the foreign language anxiety syndrome identified by Horwitz et al. (1986).

The results of Question 5 clearly reveal a gap between grammatical knowledge and conversational practice: 26.4% of respondents (n = 19), despite knowing the grammatical rules, were unable to apply them in actual communication, while 22.2% (n = 16) confirmed choosing a simpler alternative despite being aware of the more complex form. This tendency intensifies in Question 6, where 61.1% of respondents (n = 44) confirmed that during conversation they use the most neutral and concise forms – such as ayttım (айттым) or istedim (істедім) – representing a clear manifestation of conscious AVF avoidance.

The main focus of our study is reflected in Question 7, which examined AVF constructions such as umytıp kettim *(ұмытып кеттім),* aytıp jiberdim *(айтып жібердім),* istey almay qaldım *(істей алмай қалдым),* qulap qala jazdadım *(құлап қала жаздадым), and* sönip qalıptı *(сөніп қалыпты). The results confirmed that only 16.7% of respondents (n = 12) actively use these constructions, while 30.6% (n = 22) opted for a simpler alternative and 34.7% (n = 25) showed complete incomprehension of the forms in question. These figures demonstrate a gap between receptive and productive competence.*

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In the short scenario tasks (Question 8), 47.2%–54.2% of respondents switched to Russian, whereas only 6.9%–23.6% selected the appropriate AVF. The most difficult scenarios involved “I almost fell” and an unexpected phone disconnection, where most respondents chose Russian or a simple verb form.

The empirical data demonstrate that communicative anxiety and an inability to integrate into the linguistic environment are directly interrelated during conversation. Respondents indicate that they possess only partial receptive knowledge of AVFs, yet experience difficulty communicating, preferring to respond in their native language or resorting to the simplest available form. The survey thus scientifically confirms the need to specifically direct the methodological system towards the systematic teaching of AVFs.

B. Grammatical Interference and Cognitive Difficulties in Mastering Avfs (RQ2)

The survey data reveal that the difficulties learners face in mastering AVFs are not only motivational or communicative, but also cognitive and grammatical. This discrepancy is interferential in character. In Russian, the completion or incompletion of an action, or the occurrence of an unexpected event, is conveyed by the aspectual category, which does not exist in Kazakh. For example, in perfective forms such as забыл (forgot), выронил (dropped), and чуть не упал (almost fell), these meanings are grammatically encoded, requiring no separate analytical form. In Kazakh, however, an AVF is used to express such meanings: umytıp kettı *(ұмытып кетті)*, istey almay qaldı *(істей алмай қалды)*, and qulap qala jazdadı *(құлап қала жаздады)*. Consequently, the L2 learner's brain, accustomed to the Russian system, does not readily accept Kazakh AVFs, thereby increasing cognitive load. As a result, the learner resorts to the economy-of-processing mechanism, replacing AVFs with simpler alternatives such as ayttı *(айтты)*, bardı *(барды)*, and keldı *(келді)*. It is worth noting that a learner who has not mastered AVFs, upon hearing Kazakh conversation around them, is likely to experience communicative anxiety.

Taken together, the responses to Questions 5–7 confirm that learners’ difficulties with AVFs are not limited to motivation or communicative anxiety. They also reflect grammatical interference and cognitive load: learners may know the rule declaratively but fail to select the appropriate analytical form during real-time speech production. This explains why many respondents preferred simpler synthetic forms or switched to Russian in situational tasks.

Considering the data from both sections, communicative anxiety prompts learners to avoid using AVFs, while the absence of explicit instruction on the Russian aspectual category (вид) in L2 teaching increases cognitive load. This, in turn, highlights the need to redesign the methodological framework for teaching Kazakh as an L2.

C. From Empirical Data to a Methodological Model: Requirements and Principles (RQ3)

The empirical data analysed in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 identify four key instructional requirements for a methodological model for teaching AVFs:

Level-based instruction. The survey results showed that learners' knowledge of AVFs varied considerably: one group demonstrated complete unawareness of the formants (34.7%, n = 25), a second group recognised them receptively but could not use them productively (30.6%, n = 22), and a third group was ready for active use (16.7%, n = 12). These three groups correspond directly to the A2, B1, and B2 levels. Accordingly, the methodological system should not aim to teach all AVFs at a single level, but should organise the formants into a tiered system based on their cognitive complexity and frequency of use.

Teaching is directed from receptive to productive. The results of Question 7 quantitatively demonstrated the gap between receptive and productive knowledge. Accordingly, each stage of the system should include knowledge acquisition first, followed by oral application, and finally free production tasks. This approach constitutes a methodological application of Ullman's (2001) declarative/procedural model.

Interference-focused instruction. As demonstrated in Section 4.2, interference from the Russian aspectual (вид) category – which has no equivalent in Kazakh – leads learners to perceive AVFs as "superfluous" forms. Consequently, each AVF should be introduced alongside a comparative analysis of the Russian aspectual category, demonstrating why mastering these formants is as important as mastering Russian aspectual forms. This cognitive comparison strategy enables the learner's brain to adapt to the system of the Kazakh language.

Corpus meta-annotation principles. The survey results identified three main requirements for the corpus: firstly, each AVF must correspond to a CEFR level, as the difference between learners' proficiency levels has been quantitatively demonstrated and the Kazakhstani language education system has adopted the CEFR framework; secondly, the corpus should provide the Russian equivalent and the cognitive nuance in Kazakh for each formant, given that 72.2% of respondents (n = 52) possessed theoretical knowledge but demonstrated limited practical application; and thirdly, as observed from the short situational tasks, the highest manifestation of cognitive load led learners to resort to their native language (Russian). Therefore, the corpus should include the conceptual semantics of specific communicative situations.

These four requirements form the theoretical basis for the A2–B2 methodological system presented in Section 5 and the corpus prototype in Section 6. As revealed by the survey results, these requirements can effectively address the identified challenges in teaching AVFs.

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V. Methodological System for Teaching AVFs

Based on the requirements defined in Section 4.3, a three-level methodological system for teaching AVFs has been developed. The system is structured according to the CEFR level descriptors. Each level builds upon the receptive base of the previous level, progressively developing productive proficiency. The cognitive difficulties and interference risks identified through oral interviews with students at Astana IT University and survey data from general language learners (n = 72) form the content-methodological basis of the system.

The methodological classification for the selection and presentation of AVFs by level is provided in Table 2.

Table 2
Methodological Classification of AVF Teaching

No.	Formant	Level	Type	Trilingual Example	Cognitive-Conceptual Marker
Level A2: Two-Morpheme, Monosemantic AVFs					
1	-п жатыр	A2	Simple; present tense; continuous aspect	Kaz: *Ol kitap oqyp jatyr* (Ол кітап оқып жатыр) ↳ now, at this moment Rus: Он читает (прямо сейчас) ↳ present continuous Eng: He is reading right now ↳ present progressive	PROGRESSIVE: the action is in progress at this moment
2	-п тұр	A2	Simple; present tense; stative	Kaz: *Ol esik aldynda kütip tur* (Ол есік алдында күтіп тұр) ↳ standing, actively waiting Rus: Он стоит и ждёт у двери ↳ waiting while standing Eng: He is standing waiting ↳ progressive + upright posture	STATE + PROGRESSIVE: body posture adds to the meaning
3	-п отыр	A2	Simple; present tense; performed while sitting	Kaz: *Ol jumys jasap otyr* (Ол жұмыс жасап отыр) ↳ sitting, in a calm state Rus: Он сидит и работает ↳ action in seated position Eng: He is sitting and working ↳ progressive + seated	POSITION + PROGRESSIVE: calm, sedentary action
Level B1: Three-Morpheme, Polysemantic and Synonymous AVFs					
4	-п кетті	B1	Simple; sudden termination of an action	Kaz: *Ol umytyp ketti* (Ол ұмытып кетті) ↳ sudden, involuntary completion Rus: Он вдруг забыл ↳ sudden completion Eng: He suddenly forgot ↳ sudden, unintended completion	SUDDEN COMPLETION: an unintentionally carried out action
5	-п берді	B1	Simple; an action performed for another	Kaz: *Ol mağan audarıp berdi* (Ол маған аударып берді) ↳ an action done for someone Rus: Он перевёл для меня ↳ action done for another Eng: He translated it for me ↳ benefactive: for another's benefit	ALTRUISTIC BENEFACTIVE: the action benefits another
6	-п жүр	B1	Polysemantic; habitual action or movement process	Kaz: *Ol än aityp jür* (Ол ән айтып жүр) ↳ habitually / in motion Rus: Он обычно поёт / ходит и поёт ↳ habitual or in motion Eng: He habitually sings / goes around singing ↳ habitual OR ambulatory	HABIT / MOTION-PROCESS: context-dependent
7	-п жүре бер	B1	Four-morpheme; permission + continuation	Kaz: *Oqyp jüre ber* (Оқып жүре бер) ↳ permission to continue without stopping Rus: Продолжай читать ↳ permission + continuation Eng: Keep on reading ↳ permissive continuative	PERMISSION + CONTINUATION: encouragement to continue without interruption
8	-п бара жат / -п келе жат	B1	Synonymous pair; present tense; directional process	Kaz: *Jügirip bara jatyr / Jügirip kele jatyr* (Жүгіріп бара жатыр / Жүгіріп келе жатыр) ↳ only the direction changes. Rus: Бежит туда / Бежит сюда ↳ difference only in direction Eng: Running	DIRECTIONAL PROCESS: The motion vector is grammatically encoded

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				away / Running towards us ↳ directional vector differs	
9	бара бер / ала бер	B1	Homonymous AVF; same form, different meanings	Kaz: *Bara ber / Ala ber* (Бара бер / Ала бер) ↳ same form, different meaning in context Rus: Иди / Бери ↳ one form, different meanings Eng: You may go / You may take it ↳ same form, different meaning	HOMONYMY: the main verb determines the meaning
Level B2: Four-Morpheme, Homonymous, and Compound AVFs					
10	-а жаздады	B2	Synonymous pair; near-action; stopped just before completion	Kaz: *Qulap qala jazdadym* (Құлап қала жаздадым) ↳ stopped just in time. Rus: Я чуть не упал ↳ almost happened. Eng: I almost fell, ↳ nearly-completed action; narrow escape	LIMITED ACTION: an action that is not fully completed
11	-гің келсе	B2	Conditional; volition + condition	Kaz: *Bargyn kelse, bar* (Барғың келсе, бар) ↳ permission depending on wish Rus: Если хочешь – иди ↳ condition + desire Eng: If you want to go, go ahead ↳ volitional conditional	VOLITION + CONDITION: desire becomes a condition
12	-п болды	B2	Synonymous pair; final stage; full completion	Kaz: *Jumysty bitirip boldym* (Жұмысты бітіріп болдым) ↳ action fully completed Rus: Я закончил работу ↳ full completion Eng: I have finished the work ↳ completive: fully accomplished	COMPLETION: the action is fully accomplished
13	-п жіберді	B2	Synonymous pair; sudden brief action	Kaz: *Shynyny syndyryp jiberdi* (Шынының сындырып жіберді) ↳ suddenly, involuntarily Rus: Он нечаянно разбил стакан ↳ sudden, involuntary action Eng: He accidentally broke the glass ↳ sudden, involuntary action	UNINTENTIONAL, SUDDEN: the action is unplanned
14	-п алды	B2	Simple; action for one's own benefit	Kaz: *Ol kitapty oqyp aldy* (Ол кітапты оқып алды) ↳ for oneself Rus: Он прочитал (для себя) ↳ in one's own interests Eng: He read it (for himself) ↳ benefactive: for one's own benefit	BENEFACTIVE: action for the subject's own benefit
15	-ған болса	B2	Three-morpheme; conditional; counterfactual	Kaz: *Bilgen bolsa, aytar edi* (Білген болса, айтар еді) ↳ counterfactual condition Rus: Если бы знал, сказал бы ↳ counterfactual condition Eng: If he had known, he would have said ↳ counterfactual conditional	COUNTERFACTUAL: imagining a situation that did not occur

Note: The ↳ symbol is used to indicate semantic nuance. The formant levels are arranged according to morphological complexity, frequency of use and morphological type. The risks of interference, the communicative situation, and levels of mastery are fully presented in the article.

A. Level A2: Receptive Learning Phase

In line with the CEFR criteria (Council of Europe, 2020), the main objective of teaching AVFs to learners at Level A2 is to introduce two-morpheme progressive aspect formants and to develop receptive competence. According to the empirical data, 34.7% of respondents (n = 25) were completely unfamiliar with AVF structures. Accordingly, the primary task at the A2 level is to explain the meanings of the formants and to ensure their recognition.

The formants to be mastered at this level are: -p jatyr (-п жатыр), -p tur (-п тұр), -p otyr (-п отыр). These formants are introduced at the A2 level for three reasons: first, they are highly frequent in everyday descriptions of ongoing actions; second, their meanings are relatively transparent, indicating an action in progress or the physical state of the subject; and third, they have low cognitive complexity, as each formant carries a clear and stable meaning.

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Russian lacks a direct equivalent of the present progressive category; thus, the Russian sentence "он читает" may correspond to either qazir oqyp jatyr (қазір оқып жатыр, is reading right now) or ädette oqidy (әдетте оқиды, usually reads) depending on the context. At the A2 level, learners are first trained to recognise and use the basic progressive formants that mark an ongoing action or the subject's physical position during the action.

Tasks at A2 progress from recognition to controlled application and simple free production.

B. Level B1: Application Stage

At the B1 level, in line with the CEFR descriptors (Council of Europe, 2020), the aim is to teach modal-nuance formants and train learners to use them in specific communicative situations. According to the survey results, 30.6% of respondents (n = 22) indicated awareness of the formants at a receptive level but were unable to use them productively.

The formants to be mastered at this stage are: -p ketti (-п кетті; sudden or involuntary completion), -p berdi (-п берді; action performed for another person), -p jür (-п жүр; habitual action or movement process), -p jüre ber (-п жүре бер; permission and continuation), -p bara jat / -p kele jat (-п бара жат / -п келе жат; directional progressive process), and bara ber / ala ber (бара бер / ала бер; homonymous formants). These formants are introduced at the B1 level because their meanings are more context-dependent than those of A2 formants and require learners to distinguish additional semantic nuances such as sudden completion, benefactive meaning, habituality, continuation, direction, and homonymy.

From the perspective of an interference-countering strategy, the distinctive feature of the B1 level is that the Russian equivalents of the formants are introduced through comparative analysis. For example, the formant -p ketti (ұмытып кетті) expresses sudden or involuntary completion, whereas the simple form umytty merely denotes the completed action "forgot". In Russian, this nuance is often conveyed lexically or contextually, while in Kazakh it is encoded grammatically through the full form umytyp ketti (ұмытып кетті) rather than simply umytty (ұмытты).

The pair -p bara jat / -p kele jat is also placed at the B1 level because, although it expresses a progressive meaning, it additionally encodes the direction of movement. Therefore, learners must process not only the ongoing nature of the action but also its deictic orientation, which increases the cognitive load compared with the basic A2 progressive formants.

B1 tasks move from contextual recognition to role-play and situational production.

C. Level B2: Production Stage

At the B2 level, in line with the CEFR descriptors (Council of Europe, 2020), the aim is to teach cognitively complex, context-dependent formants and to train learners to use them freely and accurately. According to the survey results, only 16.7% of respondents (n = 12) reported using AVFs freely.

The formants to be mastered at this level are: -a jazdady (-а жаздады; near-action or almost completed action), -giñ kelse (-гің келсе; volition and condition), -p boldy (-п болды; full completion), -p jiberdi (-п жіберді; sudden or involuntary action), -p aldy (-п алды; action performed for one's own benefit), and -gan bolsa (-ған болса; counterfactual condition). At the B2 level, learners master cognitively complex, context-dependent formants such as -a jazdady, -giñ kelse, -p boldy, -p jiberdi, -p aldy, and -gan bolsa. These forms require abstract semantic operations, including near-completion, volition, full completion, suddenness, self-benefactive meaning, and counterfactual thinking.

The Russian subjunctive "если бы знал" uses two separate components, whereas the Kazakh "bilgen bolsa" (білген болса) conveys this through a single grammatical sequence, which learners are trained to perceive as a unified unit.

In line with the stages of mastery, tasks at the B2 level are performed at the discourse level: first, reading – distinguishing the metaphorical or counterfactual use of the formant from a text or corpus example; second, discussion – expressing opinions, making predictions, and using the formant freely on a given topic; and third, free monologue or dialogue construction – using all the taught formants freely and accurately when describing a specific situation.

VI. A Corpus Prototype for Teaching AVFs

A. Principles of Corpus Annotation

Recent corpus-based language learning research shows that corpora are pedagogically more effective when they are transformed into instructional resources rather than used only as descriptive databases. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses indicate that data-driven learning is more productive when learners engage with authentic examples through guided noticing, structured comparison, and supported production tasks (Lusta et al., 2023; Ueno & Takeuchi, 2023). In this regard, Curry and McEnery (2025) argue for a closer integration of corpus linguistics with language teaching and learning, while Casal and Kessler (2024) emphasise the need to expand data-driven learning towards broader pedagogical applications. Accordingly, the corpus prototype proposed in the present study is not treated as a general linguistic database but as a teaching-oriented resource organised by CEFR level, communicative situation, cognitive-conceptual marker, and interference risk.

The corpus prototype combines an annotation model with authentic examples from the National Corpus of the Kazakh Language (qazcorpus.kz). Each record is annotated by CEFR level, cognitive-conceptual marker, interference risk, communicative situation, and stage of mastery. Examples are selected for authenticity, semantic correspondence with the marker, and clear source specification.

B. A Corpus Example: Based on the Verb "Baru"

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To demonstrate the working principle of the corpus prototype, an example is presented based on the lemma "baru". The lemma "baru" was chosen for two reasons: 1) frequency (Zipf, 1965). This verb is one of the most frequent verbs in the Kazakh language; 2) semantic breadth (it covers all AVF types).

TABLE 3
CORPUS PROTOTYPE BASED ON THE LEMMA BARU (БАРУ)

No.	Measure	Content
1.	Lemma	*baru* (бару)
2.	Formant	*-a jatyr* (-а жатыр)
3.	CEFR level	A2
4.	Communicative-conceptual marker	PROGRESSIVE: the action is in progress at this moment
5.	Communicative situation	Everyday description: "Where are you going?"
6.	Interference risk	Russian lacks the present progressive; learners often substitute the simple present, e.g., *barady* (барады)
7.	Stage of mastery	Learning → Application → Free production
8.	Pedagogical example	– *Qaida bara jatyrsyñ?* (Қайда бара жатырсың?) – *Dükenge bara jatyrmyn.* (Дүкенге бара жатырмын.)
9.	Authentic example NCKL (**ҚТҰК**)	*Meirbek quandy. "Demek, paradqa bara jatyr. Soñynan qalmaiyn..."* (Мейірбек қуанды. «Демек, парадқа бара жатыр. Соңынан қалмайын...»)
10.	Source	NCKL (**ҚТҰК**) (qazcorpus.kz), Reading Corpus: *Anthology of Kazakh Children's Literature.* Comp. Baybota Koshym-Nogay. Almaty: "Ädebiyet" Publishing House, 2021. Vol. 6. 480 pp.

VII. CONCLUSION

The study identified, based on empirical data, the psycholinguistic and methodological foundations for teaching analytical verb formants (AVFs) to Russian-speaking adult learners of Kazakh as a second language (L2).

In line with RQ1, the survey results demonstrated that learners possessed only partial receptive knowledge of AVFs but were compelled to switch to Russian or resort to simple synthetic forms due to increased communicative load. In the short situational tasks, 47.2%–54.2% of respondents chose to answer in Russian, indicating an inability to integrate into the linguistic environment due to the emergence of foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986).

In line with RQ2, the main mechanism of grammatical interference was identified: auxiliary verbs are perceived as "superfluous" because AVFs in Kazakh are not taught, unlike the Russian aspectual category (вид). This leads learners to adopt a cognitive easing strategy, opting for neutral, simple, and concise forms during conversation – a tendency confirmed by 61.1% of respondents (n = 44). Furthermore, drawing on Ullman's (2001, 2016) declarative/procedural model, a gap was identified that hinders the transformation of theoretical knowledge into procedural skill. In accordance with the level of cognitive difficulty and the risk of interference, AVFs were divided into three levels: two-morpheme, monosemantic formants (A2), polysemantic and synonymous formants (B1); and four-morpheme complex formants (B2). This division was based on morphemic complexity in Oralbaeva's (1979) classification and on the interference risks identified in the empirical data.

In accordance with RQ3, a three-level methodological system (A2-B2) and a corpus prototype were proposed to meet the four requirements derived from the empirical data. The system is based on the principles of tiered, receptive-to-productive instruction, a comparative interference-countering strategy, and corpus-based meta-annotation grounded in the National Corpus of the Kazakh Language (qazcorpus.kz).

The scientific contribution of the study is established from three perspectives: firstly, from a psycholinguistic perspective, the receptive-productive gap in the acquisition of AVFs has been demonstrated with quantitative data for the first time; secondly, from a methodological perspective, a trilingual classification system was developed linking AVFs with CEFR levels, cognitive-conceptual markers, and interference measures; and thirdly, from a corpus perspective, an annotation model for teaching AVFs was proposed, providing a flexible foundation for future corpus research.

Research Limitations: Two types of limitations were identified. The first concerns the generalisability of the survey results (n = 72); the second is a corpus limitation – the corpus prototype was restricted to the lemma baru (бару) alone. The creation of a fully-fledged corpus remains a task for future research.

Future research proposes three directions: first, expanding the corpus beyond the “baru” (бару) lemma to include other high-frequency verbs; second, experimental verification of the proposed methodological system with control and experimental groups; and third, extending the level to encompass A1 and C1–C2 within the full CEFR progression.

In conclusion, this study was grounded in identifying the psycholinguistic barriers to mastering AVFs for Russian-speaking adult learners and seeking methodological solutions to overcome them. The system demonstrates that a targeted, level-based teaching model – capable of responding to the learner's actual cognitive load – is both feasible and theoretically justified.

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Declaration of the Use of AI

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De-Arabizing and the Politics of Identity in Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans*

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***Abstract*—In this study, "de-Arabizing" is presented as a vital conceptual tool to analyze the process of negotiating one's identity in the work of Laila Lalami, titled *The Other Americans* (2019). For this purpose, a complex theoretical framework consisting of concepts from disciplines including, but not limited to, literature, culture studies, sociology, psychology, and critical theory was developed. Specifically, Said's theory of Orientalism (1978), Bhabha's third space theory (1994), Hall's processual understanding of the nature of diasporic identity (1990), and critical race theory (CRT) put forward by Delgado and Stefancic (2017) will be utilized. Close reading and narrative analysis will be used as primary analytical techniques to explore the construction of de-Arabizing through characterization, dialogue, structural features of the narrative such as multiperspectivity, and symbolic motifs. Through analyzing the various reactions to assimilation among members of the Guerraoui family, the current research will demonstrate that de-Arabizing may serve both as a survival technique and experience of traumatic dispossession, while still leaving room for transformation. Crucially, although the characters are primarily shown as caught in between cultures in Lalami's narrative rather than occupying productive third spaces, there are indications of transformation at the end of the narrative.**

***Index Terms*—De-Arabizing, Laila Lalami, Orientalism, third space, critical race theory**

I. Introduction

During the period subsequent to the events of 9/11, there have been instances where Arab and Muslim identities in America have undergone rigorous levels of scrutiny and racialization, along with being misrepresented culturally. In this context of social and political dynamics, the position of Arabs in America is often one marked by negotiations and tensions regarding their presence within the American socio-cultural fabric. Through literature, therefore, there emerges an opportunity to explore these experiences by providing nuanced and insightful accounts of the identity development of individuals. The novel *The Other Americans* by Laila Lalami (2019) becomes a relevant addition to the literature surrounding the theme.

Laila Lalami is a highly respected contemporary writer who has written extensively about migration and belonging in the globalized and postcolonial world. Lalami was born in Morocco but moved to the United States later on. Her fiction deals with the lives of Arabs and Muslims living in the Western countries and how their sense of belonging to the host country changes over time due to their different cultural backgrounds. Lalami writes with sensitivity about the personal history of people from her community and relates that to political situations to show their struggles for racial equality and other social justice concerns. Works like *The Other Americans* are an excellent example of Lalami's multi-voiced narrative style and use of themes of inclusion and exclusion among contemporary American immigrants.

The story takes place in Yucca Valley, which is located in the Mojave Desert area of California. It centers on the suspicious death of a man called Driss Guerraoui, who is killed in a hit-and-run accident. The core of the mystery lies in the circumstances surrounding his death as well as the possibility of a racially motivated attack. Lalami creates an intricate web of narration through nine different voices, including Driss's daughter, a jazz composer named Nora, Driss's wife Maryam, and his other daughter, Salma. These characters reflect the experiences of immigrants living in a country characterized by xenophobia and prejudice towards minorities. Every person tells his or her own story touching upon themes like exclusion, invisibility, and the idea of the American dream.

Right at the heart of the novel is the complex phenomenon referred to in this study as "de-Arabizing," whereby an Arab individual consciously or unconsciously reduces, changes, or obliterates his or her Arabness so as to move freely through the social landscape shaped by prevailing Western standards. This process is not universal or unequivocal; indeed, it manifests itself differently among different individuals. Some individuals may opt for assimilation into Western culture as a means of ensuring safety, acceptance, and freedom; others may choose to navigate two cultures in balance. It should thus be clear that the act of de-Arabizing is not simply an individual's free choice. This study will suggest that de-Arabization in *The Other Americans* can be understood as a complicated survival mechanism that responds to post-9/11 racialization. It uses concepts from postcolonial theory, drawing especially on the works of Said (1978), Bhabha (1994), Hall (1990) and theories of CRT put forward by Delgado and Stefancic (2017). This paper will investigate cultural identity as it intersects with issues of power and race through postcolonial theory. By way of an analysis of the characters and narrative technique of the novel, this research examines de-Arabizing as an adaptive tool

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and at the same time as a process of loss, and highlights the psychological, cultural, and political implications involved in being part of contemporary America. Through this work, contributions can be made towards wider debates on Arab-American literary works and on diasporic studies, where identity cannot be seen as a stable concept but is rather something negotiated.

II. Literature Review

Recent literary research seems to be preoccupied with the significance of *The Other Americans* as a relevant text for analyzing diasporic identity. For instance, Abdellah El Boubekri (2024) approaches *The Other Americans* from the perspective of developing paradigms of diasporic critique. The researcher indicates that the focus has shifted from the idea of displacement to transnational belonging. He also claims that the integration is facilitated by the impact of affectional mechanisms, namely love and forgetting, and not by direct confrontation. On the contrary, Edouihri (2021) focuses on othering and disillusionment, showing how the novel reveals the process of excluding Arab immigrants from the social stratum that operates according to racial stratification. In other words, he attempts to explore the representation of such phenomena regarding 'new identities' that occupy the lower social hierarchy. The scope of discussion is broadened by Shalabi and Abu Amrieh (2025), who adopt a comparative methodology for their textual analysis of the novel in relation to *Cockroach*, a novel by Rawi Hage.

The analysis focuses on the notion of Occidentalism, which claims that modern Arab diasporic authors have rejected past perceptions about the West in order to reveal the social and political realities of immigrants' lives. This discussion, while offering valuable insights into the East-West relationship, primarily concentrates on representation. In a similar vein, Ait Nasseur (2024) turns to the family aspect and examines how the cultural influences of the West transform the family life of Arab immigrants. Generational conflict is pointed out by the author, who emphasizes the need for resistance to ensure cultural persistence. On the other hand, Issafi (2024) makes use of post-colonialism and Bakhtinian dialogism to explore the polyphony of the novel. As a whole, these scholarly articles offer important information about identity construction, representation, and resistance in diaspora. They address issues like hybridity, otherness, transnationalism, cultural conflict, and the novel's polyphony of voices. Yet, even as they make significant contributions to our understanding of diaspora, these scholarly articles usually approach identity negotiation from a theoretical standpoint, whether that involves categorization or binaries such as assimilation and resistance. It is, however, important to examine the micro processes involved in the strategic reduction, manipulation, or modification of the Arab identity due to social pressure.

Rationale of the Study

Considering the above, this research endeavors to fill a crucial gap in literature by proposing "de-Arabizing" as an analytical approach. The notion of "de-Arabizing" focuses on the more intricate and often paradoxical ways through which people maneuver themselves within socio-political restrictions rather than simplifying identity negotiation into dichotomies.

It can thus be argued that de-Arabizing can be seen as an array of different acts, including switching, silencing, changing one's cultural background, and selective representation. These acts do not emerge out of choice but are informed by larger dynamics of power including racialization, nationalism, and cultural hegemony post-9/11 America. Although the existing scholarship on *The Other Americans* has done much in explaining its themes and complex plot, there has been a need to examine the active process of visibility and negotiation through the means of partial or complete Arab erasure. This paper attempts to fill the gap by focusing on a close reading of the novel in terms of de-Arabizing identity. Moreover, through the integration of ideas generated by postcolonial theories, diaspora studies, and critical race theory, an interdisciplinary approach will be used that underscores the importance of considering the intersectionality of identity in any given analysis. This is important because it allows for a better appreciation of the interaction between race, culture, and power and provides new opportunities for future study.

III. Theoretical Framework

This paper is based on the analysis of the process of constructing and negotiating Arab American identity in the 2019 novel *The Other Americans* by Laila Lalami, which can be understood using the concepts of postcolonial theory, diaspora studies, and CRT. All these theories help to identify key mechanisms used to construct Arab American identity.

A. Postcolonial Theory

It will be essential to consider postcolonial theory in the analysis of power relations behind Arab and Muslim immigrants' experiences in the United States. Indeed, Said's *Orientalism*, a concept that provides the fundamental premise for postcolonial approach, will guide the discussion here. Following the theoretical background laid out by Said, this study aims at uncovering discursive practices through which Arab/Muslim subjects are defined as always-already being foreign, threatening, or culturally inferior in relation to the white western self. For Said, "Orientalism" refers to "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (1978, p. 2). According to Said, Orientalism operates not only as a form of knowledge but as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (1978, p. 3). As the author highlights,

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"the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (1978, pp. 1-2). Consequently, Orientalism represents a discursive structure within which the West acquires cultural and political dominance over the East. Said discusses political context that influences the definition of the Orient as "not Europe's interlocutor, but its silent Other" (2000, p. 202). This muteness of the Orient as an object is precisely what becomes problematic in terms of Arab identity formation. Along similar lines, Said poses a philosophical query that is hard to reconcile with reality. It goes: "How knowledge that is non-dominative and non-coercive can be produced in a setting that is deeply inscribed with the politics, the considerations, the positions, and the strategies of power?" (2000, p. 200). Since politics will always find their way, it is impossible to produce knowledge that is both impartial and independent and not used as a tool for domination.

In terms of theories about the formation of Arab identity in the American society, it is necessary to point out that the situation that arose after the September 11 attacks in 2001 illustrates well this problem of the politicization of knowledge. Indeed, in that period of time, knowledge production related to Arab identity became intrinsically connected with processes of surveillance, securitization, and racial profiling. The post-September 11 period saw an escalation of Orientalist discourse that Said described as a particular system of knowledge production based on the political necessities of national security and the War on Terror and that created certain ideas about what the "Arab" or "Muslim" subject was like. Arab Americans, therefore, faced a process of interpellation into existing discourses of alienation and threat to the American society. According to Said, "knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control" (1978, p. 36). The Arabs who have immigrated to the United States go through the process of identity formation while struggling with imposed identities. All the knowledge produced about the Arabs through the media, government documents, academia, and popular culture was directly linked to the politics of military intervention both outside and inside the United States.

Thus, it is not possible to understand Arab identity in this situation as a process of self-identification that operates independently from the existing discourses of power relations. Every act of self-representation is subject to pre-existing paradigms according to which Arabness is viewed as suspicious, dangerous, or in need of reformulation. This impossibility of "non-dominative" knowledge production, therefore, becomes the condition under which Arab Americans are forced to choose between adopting into dominating discourse which erases cultural specificity, or resisting such discourse at the cost of always being outside the boundaries of acceptable American identity. Orientalist logic has been intensified in the post-9/11 era in the United States. The racialization of Arab and Muslim American people post-9/11 is explored in Bayoumi's (2008) and Naber's (2008) studies. Bayoumi writes that "in the years since September 11, 2001, Arab and Muslim Americans (along with those perceived to be Arab or Muslim) have been haunted by a suspicious society that watches them closely" (2008, p. 1). This logic can be described using the term Arab racialization. According to Naber, "in the post-9/11 era, U.S. empire produces Arabs and Muslims as essentially and culturally distinct from Americans, as well as essentially prone to anti-American terrorism" (2008, p. 3). Moreover, she states that this process of racialization is achieved through the "gendering and racializing Arabs, Arab Americans, Middle Easterners, Muslims, and South Asians through the notion of culture" (2008, p. 3). Indeed, Bayoumi's and Naber's works explicitly build upon the thesis of Said on Orientalism. Both demonstrate how this discourse intensified after 9/11 through surveillance and racialization.

Bhabha's discussion of hybridity and his idea of the "third space of enunciation" (1994) is similarly crucial for this examination as Bhabha explains, "All forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity" (1994, p. 211). The importance of hybridity is not to trace two original moments, rather hybridity "is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge" (1994, p. 211). The "third space," for Bhabha, is one in which the histories of that space are displaced, and sets up "new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom" (1994, p. 211). What is important here is the concept of the interstitiality involved in this negotiation of identity and culture. For Bhabha, the "negotiation of contradictory and antagonistic instances...opens up hybrid sites and objectives of struggle, and destroys those negative polarities between knowledge and its objects" (1994, p. 162). Again, there is no middle ground. Instead, this is an attempt at constructing a new reality where Arab Americans don't have to accept erasure through assimilation and don't have to resist and isolate themselves. This is something other than either assimilation or resistance, in that the very categories being constructed are undergoing change. This conceptualization is especially useful in understanding Lalami's particular characters.

B. Diaspora Studies

This analysis also examines the diaspora studies, namely the important conceptualizing of diasporic identity as an on-going process of "production" by Hall (1990). According to Hall, cultural identities "are never completed, never finished; that they are always, as subjectivity itself is, in process" (1990, p. 222). Identity, for Hall, cannot be understood as "something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture" but rather as a process of "becoming" as shaped by "history, culture and power" (1990, p. 225). Moreover, according to Hall, cultural identity is "a production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (1990, p. 222). These important theoretical considerations are integral to any examination of the multi-perspectival narrative of *The Other Americans*, wherein the identity and belonging of the Guerraoui family shift over generations, genders, and individual subjectivities. Additionally, Gilroy's theory of diaspora as a counter-hegemonic alternative to

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ethnic absolutism (1993) will inform this analysis. Gilroy posits that diasporic communities create hybrid cultures that cannot be categorized into neat essences of race and nationality.

According to Gilroy, "the cultures and consciousness of black people were not sealed off hermetically from each other" but rather emerged through "processes of cultural exchange and intermixture" (1993, p. 80). Gilroy also problematizes "the idea of nationality as an ethnically absolute condition" to argue that diasporic identity is the result of lived "complexities of racial politics" (1993, p. 2). For Gilroy, diaspora "disrupts the fundamental power of territory to determine identity by breaking the simple sequence of explanatory links between place, location, and consciousness" (1993, p. 111). The application of this theoretical approach to Lalami's novel allows for an analysis of how the characters negotiate their sense of belonging to America and maintain diasporic memories without being coerced into the binary opposition between Arab and American identities. The theoretical positions of Hall, Gilroy, and Bhabha show a remarkable level of mutual understanding and agreement on such an important issue as the anti-essentialist nature of diasporic identities.

C. Critical Race Theory

The next step in formulating the interpretive strategy for Lalami's novel involves the inclusion of CRT as the third pillar. CRT allows for the study of the legal, social, and institutional aspects of racial inequality among Arab Americans. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), there is nothing natural about racial classification. It is not a biological reality but rather a social construct created by the power of law, narration, and politics. Delgado and Stefancic emphasize that "race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient" (2017, p. 9). The emphasis made by these theorists on the central importance of narrative and counter-narrative in the struggle against racism and discrimination is particularly applicable to literature studies. As Delgado explains, "oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation" and that counter-storytelling is aimed at "cast[ing] doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (1989, p. 2436). Thus, the above theory supports the relevance and significance of literary analysis and confirms its potential as a method of critical inquiry into racial issues.

IV. Methods

For the purpose of this study, the methodology used will be qualitative in nature with a focus on the textual analysis based on close reading of the narratives. The object of analysis in this paper is the novel *The Other Americans* (2019) written by Laila Lalami. In contrast to using only one interpretative method, an interdisciplinary approach is applied, whereby the principles of literary analysis are combined with those of cultural analysis, racial sociology, and postcolonial criticism. The technique of close reading is employed as the principal analytical approach. It refers to a careful analysis of the rhetorical aspects of literary texts and characterizations. The following questions guide this analysis:

1. How does the author textually construct characters' de-Arabization in *The Other Americans*?
2. How can de-Arabization be read through frameworks of Orientalism, hybridity, and diasporic identity?
3. What is the significance of de-Arabization in the novel? Is it Survival, Loss, or Transformation?

Textual analysis is conducted in relation to the larger socio-historical context. In the case of *The Other Americans*, it will be framed against the backdrop of the contemporary post-9/11 political scenario. Scholarly literature from Arab American Studies, post-colonial literary theory, and cultural theory will be employed to contextualize the text in question. In particular, the study will explore theories that deal with issues of Orientalism, racialization, and assimilation politics.

V. Analysis and Discussion

In Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans*, de-Arabizing is shown to be part of an intricate narrative web that demonstrates this concept as a multifaceted one rather than a monolithic approach. In this context, the paper will discuss de-Arabizing as a concept in relation to several characters in the novel, analyzing it from multiple perspectives: as a means of survival, personal loss, or potential transformation.

A. Textual Construction of De-Arabization

In this case, Lalami constructs de-Arabization via sophisticated and subtle narrative techniques. By choosing a polyphonic narrative technique, she shows the fragmentation of identity and the processes associated with de-Arabization through voices of characters that never form an integrated voice of Arab-Americans.

(a). De-Arabization as Strategic Assimilation: Driss Guerraoui

The example of Driss Guerraoui, the Moroccan immigrant patriarch, whose death in a hit-and-run introduces the narrative, demonstrates the symbolic representation employed by Lalami in addressing strategic assimilation. Notably, he has anglicized himself in both his entrepreneurial approach and consumption patterns while ensuring that his public presentation remains in sync with dominant conventions – "It was called the Pantry. What could be more American than

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that?" (2019, p. 37). His diner offers the most American type of food, and he aims at securing "an alcohol license…appeal to the kind of people…" (2019, p. 158). It should be noted that these decisions are not just contextual features but deliberately chosen by the author as an illustration of how the process of de-Arabization takes place through absence—the Moroccan restaurant does not open, the Arabic language is not spoken outside domestic spaces, and the practices are limited within domestic life.

Furthermore, the dialogues of the novel contribute significantly to the depiction of such absence because Driss converses in impeccable English in his diner, reserving the use of his Moroccan Arabic only for his conversations with his wife Maryam. With regard to his personal life, he dedicates his time towards enhancing his American identity: "Usually, he was in his lounge chair doing his crossword puzzles; that was how he improved his English" (2019, p. 33). This behavior is an example of assimilation, since he makes efforts to improve his language skills, which is considered to be one of the indicators of becoming part of the mainstream American society. In addition, it is shown how Driss is hypersensitive regarding his exposure to suspicion in light of his status as an Arab Muslim, as seen in "Maryam wanted the whole family to go the mosque in Riverside for morning services. Take the girls if you want, I said, but why would I go?" (2019, p. 57). His efforts to avoid being perceived as suspicious through his conduct reflect the nature of conditional citizenship among Arab Americans as noted by Bayoumi: "In the years since September 11, 2001, Arab-Americans have faced a kind of 'conditional citizenship' – that is, a citizenship that is always in question" (2008, p. 2). Even his inner consciousness shows a relentless attempt at keeping a check on and suppressing Arab mannerisms and culture.

Instead of having fun with his fellow Arabs, he tries to befriend white Americans, which is an attempt at creating some kind of social security for himself; however, even that turns out to be unsuccessful when Mr. Baker refuses to befriend him. In the wake of September 11, the Pantry is burnt—a case of racialized violence that the novel makes a point of depicting the vulnerability of such a precarious existence in terms of conditional belonging: "You remember his business was arsoned after September 11th? They never found out who did it. And then he put up a huge flag outside his restaurant, like he had to prove he was one of the good ones" (2019, p. 25). His reaction becomes the most significant symbolic gesture: he hangs a huge American flag from the rebuilt Pantry—an image that Lalami constructs repetitively through the narrative without a single interpretation. The American flag is becoming a representation of the disproportionate burden Arabs were under to demonstrate their loyalty and allegiance to the US. This practice becomes part of what Naber calls the "internalization of the securitized gaze"—the monitoring and disciplining of their own cultural practices by Arab Americans in anticipation of scrutiny (2008, p. 3). However, the process of internalization was continuous since "that feeling of being watched came over" again (Lalami, 2019, p. 294). In this textual construction, Arabs' assimilation into the American identity becomes an exercise in navigating coexistence in an environment determined by power relation. The second-generation Arab American identity, which is marked by assimilation and ambiguity, is reflected through Nora.

(b). De-Arabization and Second-Generation Identity: Nora Guerraoui

Throughout her life, she has been engaged in a constant act between embodying the cultural identity of America as someone educated within the American education system, fluent in American expressions, and successful professionally while still retaining the essence of otherness through her name, looks, and preconceptions about her background. Nora struggles with constantly attempting to assimilate into her surroundings, knowing that "the savagery of a man named Mohammed was rarely questioned, but his humanity always had to be proven" (2019, p. 165). Nora's childhood trauma creates the template for self-scrutiny through adulthood, as seen when she takes eggplant to school and her peers taunt her as "poop-eater… nobody wanted to sit next to me" (2019, p. 18). The spatial exclusion of such trauma teaches Nora that the visibility of her Arab culture will be met with violence, necessitating self-erasure. Racialization becomes even more pronounced in the post-9/11 era, where "We were both thought to be Muslim….We were both called the same names. Ragheads. Talibans" (2019, p. 92) and "a few days after 9/11, he defaced my locker" (2019, p. 167) along with the fact that "No one came to my side, no word was spoken in my defense" (2019, p. 234). This shows how the phenomenon of de-Arabization is not limited to what Nora does to herself but what forced upon her. By using Nora's romantic relationships as the structure of an allegory, Lalami shows the problems that occur within assimilation. In her relationship with Beckett, Nora participates in self-erasure by saying, "I started to arrange my life around his. Beckett didn't like poetry, so I stopped going to the spoken-word performances" (2019, p. 120). This relationship becomes problematic as well since "cheating had so damaged my ability to trust" (2019, p. 120). Here, she expresses her inability to trust another person and sees the betrayal that assimilation entails: Nora fulfilled all conditions necessary for assimilation, but she was still cheated on, showing that assimilation does not promise anything. Within professional spaces, where she works as a music composer, Nora continues facing difficulty in integrating with the American mainstream in spite of her attempts. Her creations are dismissed by judges, who find them "too cerebral. Too out there. Too something or other" (2019, p. 136); here, the criticism symbolizes Nora's failure to fit in. Even though she has been admitted to a prestigious event, she still "felt out of place" (2019, p. 272). As a character, Maryam Guerraoui is used to represent an antithesis of Driss and Nora's process of assimilation.

(c). Cultural Resistance and Preservation: Maryam and Salma

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Through the use of strong motifs such as those of dislocation and silenced embodiment, Lalami brings to fore Maryam's act of resistance. The image of "orphaned" is used to indicate that immigration is not only geographical dislocation but also a state of losing the connections which made up the individual's identity (2019, p. 31). In the fact that she misses "her old house, her childhood friends, the call for prayers at dawn," Lalami shows that dislocation happens at multiple levels at once (2019, p. 53). However, Lalami's textualization of Maryam's silencing is not figurative but literal in that "nothing came out; my heart was beating too fast inside my chest," revealing her own body's resistance to American spaces (2019, p. 32). The wedding scene wherein "paroxysms of nostalgia" make her "house a bazaar filled with henna patterns, embroidered belts, brass trays," demonstrates resistance in the form of sensory and spatial excess: she rejects discreet multiculturalism and instead fills American domestic spaces with elements of her Moroccan material culture (2019, p. 53). In her Islamic faith, she has found one resource that resists the complete colonization by American institutions: turning to her Qur'an each day after the attacks indicates increasing religious devotion during a time when being visible as a Muslim could have been fatal (2019, p. 37). These acts of remaking domestic spaces and maintaining an Islamic faith represent her chief means of preserving her culture, yet Lalami depicts such acts as painful and incomplete. Religious devotion creates insurmountable distance between Maryam and her secular daughter, further exacerbating generational alienation and making Nora "like a stranger" (2019, p. 81). Salma's resistance is built mainly around the motif of Arabic. She falls in love with her husband who "speaks Arabic, it is as if music is streaming from his mouth" (2019, p. 196); this linguistic activity is transformed into aesthetic and erotic by Lalami. However, such positive remarks do not last as Salma, "no longer dream in it [Arabic]" (2019, p. 195). The above line is symbolic of a breach that has occurred because the very core of Arab identity—its language—is no longer within reach in the realm of the unconscious mind.

By explicitly favoring one of her daughters for being "married, has two children, and lives a respectable life" while noting that "my younger daughter had lost her way" (2019, p. 270), Maryam clearly shows the link between cultural preservation and tradition, especially when it comes to gender expectations. Her despair is well-expressed through the statement, "my heart was aching from hearing my daughters fight, like strangers rather than sisters" (2019, p. 81). Through the use of simile, the phrase "like strangers" emphasizes the alienation caused by the contestation of cultures within the diaspora, where sisters who are connected by blood and upbringing cannot understand each other anymore because of their incompatible views on assimilation.

B. De-Arabization Through the Lenses of Orientalism, Diasporic Identity, and Critical Race Theory

Said's Orientalist discourse helps to read Driss's choice of assimilation and the way he engages with an existing system wherein being Arab means being a potential threat to America, an Oriental other, someone who is primitive and incompatible with the contemporary American reality. The idea stated by Said in the opening pages of his *Orientalism* (1978) is critical here in terms of understanding the reasons why Driss has chosen to behave and live the way he does. Specifically, Said claims that when creating representations of people, the West has used its unique representation techniques to define "the Arab" as an individual, recognizable, yet dangerous category (1978, p. 36). One has to consider the above-mentioned ideas developed by Said in order to understand that Driss's attempts to assimilate are not a result of personal choice. By using Western representation techniques, he has been labeled as a potentially dangerous Arab, and now his decision to avoid mentioning his native language, to rename his business with an anglicized name, to change his menu into an American menu, and so on, is not his choice – but rather a response to the existing discourse. Driss has accepted the idea that he is an Oriental threat to America. He has internalized Orientalism as it is understood by Said (1978, p. 3): the dominant Orientalist representation imposes certain ideological, political, and structural superiority over Eastern societies. Moreover, according to Naber, by policing oneself and absorbing the dominant culture's surveillance gaze, the Orientalist practices help to impose racial and gender stereotypes on different groups and thus treat them all in an equally negative manner (2008, p. 3).

Specifically, the idea put forward by Hall that identity involves constant processes, rather than an unchanging essence, is essential to understanding why Lalami chooses not to see Arab-American identity as something definite, which one can either preserve or, conversely, lose in its entirety. Thus, Hall's assertion that cultural identities are not unchangeable and static but, on the contrary, are always unfinished and in a process of development (1990, pp. 222, 225), sheds light on the polyphonic nature of this narrative that does not allow defining Arab-American identity in a single way. In other words, Driss is not simply assimilated or, otherwise, de-Arabized; instead, his identity keeps changing depending on the evolving sociopolitical context – the era before September 11, when his Moroccan roots could serve him well as cultural capital, and the time right after this date, when he had to blend in and use the largest possible American flag as camouflage.

According to Hall, identity is "always constituted within, not outside, representation", implying the importance of the particular viewpoint in shaping someone's ethnic identity and rendering it as "never complete" and unstable phenomenon (1990, p. 222). As it becomes clear from the very technique used by Lalami – namely, focusing on the various ways in which the identity of the Guerraouis' family members is represented from several perspectives, there are no such thing as "Arab-American" per se; instead, there is the variety of ways to perceive, interpret, and understand this concept depending on who is looking, when, and from what social angle. Furthermore, Driss, Maryam, Nora, and Salma demonstrate the processual nature of identity discussed by Hall by adopting different strategies for negotiating it owing to their different experience of migration, language, gender, and historical conditions. The theorization of

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diaspora offered by Gilroy, who challenges the conventional view that geographic location necessarily predetermines one's identity by breaking the direct link normally established between one's geographic position and one's culture or identity (1993, p. 111), offers us a critical insight into the simultaneous claims made by the members of the Guerraoui family of their American identity alongside their continued diasporic memory. Gilroy's idea of the identity that cannot be reduced to a simple national or ethnic identity (1993, p. 2) is especially useful in interpreting the feelings of dislocation expressed by Maryam, whose perception of living in America is that of having been "orphaned" and who misses "her old house, her childhood friends, the call for prayers at dawn" (Lalami, 2019, pp. 31, 53).

It must be pointed out that this is not a yearning for an authentic Moroccan identity that she can reconnect to but, rather, the feeling known by Gilroy as diasporic consciousness, developed as a result of a continuous process of intercultural exchange (1993, p. 80). Moreover, it is clear that the selective maintenance of cultural practices, which Maryam achieves when turning her house into a bazaar in celebration of her daughter's wedding (Lalami, 2019, p. 53), aligns with Gilroy's ideas about diasporic cultural creativity. The same applies to Salma, who exemplifies the very diasporic condition defined by Gilroy through her relationships to the Arabic language. The claim in CRT that race is a socially constructed concept (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 9) becomes a useful lens with which to approach the notion of Arab-Americans' racialization as a politically created category that serves a certain purpose for the State.

The description of Arab and Muslim Americans as those haunted by a suspicious society (Bayoumi, 2008, pp. 1, 15) allows for grasping the conditions that led to the process experienced by members of the Guerraoui family in the novel. For instance, Nora's depiction along with her Hindu friend, as both thought to be Muslims, Talibans, illustrates CRT concept of racial lumping, which occurs when people belonging to various groups are classified into monolithic categories to serve the interest of the dominant group. In this case, Arab and Muslims are considered as one entity. The vandalizing of Nora's locker is consistent with Delgado's theory that posits racism as a systemic phenomenon in which individual violence is supported by a larger silence of the system (1989, p. 2436). Nora's experience of belonging to help staff at the musical festival while she was a performer as a composer (Lalami, 2019, p. 272) shows the permanency of racially constructed perception as articulated in CRT. Despite having high professional education and status, Nora cannot avoid getting stuck in a help position due to the color of her skin. Thus, it is noted that Nora's experience also reveals intersectionality, as described by Crenshaw (1991, p. 1242). In other words, different characteristics come together to create unique marginality. The example above demonstrates that de-Arabization cannot be seen only as a matter of personal preference or even as cultural practice; rather, it is a strategy that responds to what CRT would define as racialization—an institutionalized system that creates a certain perception of Arab-Americans, making them forever suspicious, provisionally tolerated, and marginalized no matter how assimilatingly they act or look like.

C. De-Arabizing: Survival, Loss, or Transformation

The most politically powerful element in the novel is precisely its rejection of the question of de-Arabization: is it a way to survive, cultural dispossession, or transformation? Instead, the novel insists on its dual nature and the fact that precisely its irreconcilability is the defining feature of Arab-Americans' existence in post-9/11 America. As far as most of the novel goes, Lalami represents her characters as being constantly in liminality rather than the Bhabha's productive third space: Driss's attempt to assimilate himself into America cannot ensure him safety, Nora's professional success is unable to transcend her status as a woman of color, and Maryam's preservation of her culture brings her nothing but loneliness and intergenerational conflicts. This, in turn, suggests that, unlike Bhabha who emphasizes that the third space allows "new structures of authority, new political initiatives" (1994, p. 211) to emerge, the characters of the novel seem to be caught in the middle of the two cultures, neither of which can accept them as equals, forcing them to navigate hostile grounds rather than altering the structure itself.

The entire narrative seems to revolve around exhaustion, loss, and hopelessness; assimilation promises nothing even when it asks for everything, and any form of resistance leaves characters with suspended identity but no place to call home. Nevertheless, as the novel progresses towards its end, Lalami hints at the possibility of such interstitial subjectivity escaping from being stuck between two categories and entering the realm of Bhabha's generative third space – a space where the in-betweenness may lead to hybridization of identity that goes beyond negotiating between the Moroccan and the American definitions of the self and creates new categories instead. The point at which Nora realizes that "the present could never be untethered from the past, you couldn't understand one without the other" (2019, p. 284) is particularly crucial here. By realizing that the past is the present and that they cannot be considered separately from each other, Nora finally achieves the kind of epistemological transition of which Bhabha speaks – the displacement of "the histories that constitute it" (1994, p. 211) in order to conceive of an understanding of the self as constituted precisely by those histories, not necessarily integrated but existing together and creating new identities in the process. Nora's realization of how "I would've felt belonged somewhere…to see myself through my own eyes… I wouldn't have wanted so badly to fit in" (2019, p. 274) shows how she finally understands her lifelong pursuit of fitting into American identity has been a misguided endeavor based on surveillance from the outside – neither fitting in perfectly enough to be recognized as one of them nor rejecting assimilation to remain an authentic Arab will help; rather, it's important to realize the ability to create the conditions of one's own existence by stepping out of this binary of categories altogether. The realization is further expressed in Nora's statement that "private memory was nothing but a struggle against erasure" (2019, p. 223), which shows how cultural memory has to be conceptualized not as nostalgic preservation but as active resistance – precisely what Bhabha describes when speaking about "the negotiation of

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contradictory and antagonistic instances" that opens up a space for the development of hybridity and the creation of a third objective, new sites of struggle (1994, p. 162). Even though the novel doesn't offer any solution in the end and doesn't show that Nora manages to find herself in the third space, it shows that the awareness of having been trapped between two identities is already a breakthrough necessary for such transformations to happen.

VI. Contributions and Limitations of the Study

This study makes several important contributions to Arab American literary criticism. First, it develops "de-Arabization" as a new analytical concept for investigating the strategic negotiation of Arab identity beyond the traditional binary of assimilation versus resistance. Second, it brings postcolonial theory, diaspora studies and critical race theory together in a common interpretive framework that shows how identity negotiation operates at once on cultural, political and institutional levels. Third, by closely reading *The Other Americans*, the study makes a contribution to the current scholarship by demonstrating that de-Arabization is not only a strategy of survival but also a process of cultural loss and a possible site of identity transformation. In so doing, the paper provides a new interdisciplinary framework for the study of other Arab American literary texts and post-9/11 immigrant narratives. However, the study has its limitations. The analysis is focused on a single literary work, *The Other Americans*, which restricts the potential for generalization of the proposed concept of de-Arabization. Future research may test the applicability of the concept of de-Arabization across different authors, genres and historical contexts.

VII. Conclusion

By theorizing "de-Arabizing" as an analytical tool to unpack and examine the contradictory nature of Arab American processes of negotiating their sense of self, visibility, and belonging within the post-9/11 United States, this study has shown how this process can be understood not only as one of mere survival, but also as a process of profound loss and possibility for transformation, by analyzing closely the novel *The Other Americans* by Laila Lalami. Through engaging with concepts and ideas from postcolonial, diaspora, and critical race theory, this analysis has shown how de-Arabization is not a question of assimilation versus resistance but must be understood instead as multifaceted process of strategic erasure, silencing, modifying cultural expression, and generational transmission—conditioned by Orientalist discourse, racialized surveillance, and conditional citizenship. Through a close textual analysis of *The Other Americans*, it became clear how Lalami's narrative construction of "de-Arabization" involves making it a visible and invisible process: the failure of Driss's assimilation in trying to ensure his safety as he is murdered shows the futility of this strategy; Nora's attempts to blend in to survive conditions in which one's Arab humanity needs constant validation leads her to forget what it means to be different while her racialized perception overrides her professional one; Maryam's resistant preservation of culture leaves her isolated and breaks the intergenerational link; and Salma's linguistic mastery fails to stop the erosion of Arabic in her psyche. Most importantly, the study contends that during most of the novel, Lalami's characters are not in Bhabha's productive third space but are caught in between cultures, with their interstitial positioning.

Nonetheless, the ending of the novel seems to hint at possibilities that are much closer to what Bhabha's third space is about, with Nora realizing that "the present could never be untethered from the past," thus marking an epistemological shift from the antagonism between heritage and present, with their respective positions entailing choice, toward viewing them as necessarily linked. The notion of her wish to see herself "through [her] own eyes" instead of through surveillance implies an understanding that there may be another kind of belonging, one that involves taking control over the definition of one's existence. Although the novel does not ensure the possibility of successful transformation, Lalami implies that being aware of one's entrapment "in between" could be seen as an important step toward making this condition work to the advantage of generating a hybrid identity, which will not be based on negotiation but will be transformative. The ambiguity of this conclusion—the combination of possibility without assurance and the promise of achievement without actual achievement—is the novel's most significant political message and the main idea of this study, namely, that de-Arabization should be considered both a necessary condition of survival and a process of traumatic dispossession as well as a possible point of departure for transformation, because these contradictions correspond to the reality of post-9/11 Arab American experience.

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Technology Integration in Indonesian Language Teaching: Insights From TPACK, SAMR, and TAM Frameworks

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***Abstract*—The adoption of technology in language instruction has brought substantial changes to the educational landscape; however, challenges remain in bridging the gap between its potential benefits and its practical application among educators. This study examines the use of digital technology tools by Indonesian language teachers and pre-service teachers' perceptions of technology use in learning processes. The study employed a mixed-methods approach involving five Indonesian language teachers from five schools and 112 pre-service teachers from five universities. Data analysis was guided by three established theoretical frameworks: the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Substitution Augmentation Modification Redefinition (SAMR) framework, and Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK). Qualitative data were obtained through interviews with in-service teachers, while quantitative data were collected through questionnaires administered to pre-service teachers. The findings revealed significant convergence between the two groups in their preference for efficient and user-friendly tools. Pre-service teachers emphasised interactivity and active engagement, whereas experienced teachers prioritised effective classroom management and pedagogical accuracy. This study offers theoretical and practical contributions to the development of educators' digital competencies, particularly in the context of language education in regions with limited digital infrastructure.**

***Index Terms*—language learning, SAMR, TAM, technology integration, TPACK**

I. Introduction

Digital technology has had a transformative impact on all aspects of human life, including language education. Although technology can enhance learning, its effectiveness depends on pedagogical implementation (Margareth et al., 2025; Lane et al., 2024; Linardon et al., 2024). Various digital tools are now widely used in language learning in Indonesia, including social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram, language-learning applications, video-conferencing platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet, and online learning platforms such as Google Classroom and Moodle. The main advantage of these tools lies in their ability to help students learn independently at their own pace and according to their ability, while also providing access to a wide range of authentic and relevant language materials (Eryansyah & Erlina, 2023; Gani et al., 2024; Priante & Tsekouras, 2025).

According to Anjani et al. (2025), digital technology offers substantial benefits for language learning, and its application should extend beyond classroom boundaries. Consequently, collaboration among stakeholders and policymakers is essential for establishing an ecosystem that facilitates effective technology integration in education. In contrast, Abbey et al. (2024) identified a divergence in priorities between teachers and students regarding technology use: teachers primarily emphasise instructional quality and professional development, whereas students focus more on active engagement and improved learning outcomes. Furthermore, the successful implementation of educational technology is influenced by factors such as teachers' attitudes, digital competence, and the availability of adequate infrastructure (Chang, 2026). Similarly, the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK), Substitution Augmentation Modification Redefinition (SAMR), and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) frameworks collectively highlight the importance of continuous professional development to ensure that teachers' pedagogical practices remain aligned with technological advancements (Vancova, 2025).

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The main objective of this study is to examine the extent to which digital tools are used in language learning by in-service teachers and pre-service teachers. The study was conducted using three theoretical frameworks: the TAM framework (Davis, 1989), the TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), and the SAMR framework (Hamilton et al., 2016). These three frameworks are used simultaneously because each provides a distinct yet complementary perspective, ranging from how users accept technology, to the knowledge teachers require to integrate it, and the extent to which technology changes the quality of learning.

II. Literature Review

A. Technology Use in Learning

The success of technology integration in learning is inseparable from teachers' ability to apply it appropriately and judiciously in the classroom. Teachers play a central role in optimising the use of various digital tools (Gozali et al., 2023). Their role also includes ensuring a balance between technological innovation and established pedagogical approaches. However, the use of technology in the classroom is not without challenges. Several studies have revealed that many teachers still lack an adequate understanding of how to fully utilise technology in their teaching practices, particularly in assessing student learning outcomes (Nguyen & Habok, 2023). This situation is also evident in higher education, where instructors often face a digital competence gap, especially in evaluating and monitoring students' learning progress, even though digital tools can provide real-time data on learning development (Basilotta et al., 2022).

Limited access to collaborative learning forums among teachers exacerbates this situation, as many teachers ultimately learn independently without sufficient collaborative support, which may hinder their professional growth. Li et al. (2023) found that teachers with greater familiarity with digital technology tend to be more active and confident in using it as part of classroom learning strategies. However, Fernández-batanero et al. (2020) caution that the technology training teachers have received so far has primarily been oriented towards technical mastery, while underemphasising its application in classroom pedagogical contexts, even though this dimension is a crucial determinant of learning effectiveness.

Equipping pre-service teachers with adequate technological skills is therefore an urgent need, given the diverse learning situations they will encounter in the classroom (Behforouz & Ghaithi, 2025). Although digital tools were previously used mainly by independent and highly motivated students, their use has now expanded and become an integral part of both blended and online learning. Therefore, the successful implementation of technology in education depends heavily on the availability of teachers who are not only digitally literate but also able to align technology use with curriculum demands and students' actual classroom needs (Mulyadi et al., 2025).

Thus, strengthening teachers' technological competencies is not merely a supplementary concern but a core component of continuous teacher professional development. Teacher education programmes need to be designed not only to address technical aspects but also to equip pre-service teachers with contextual pedagogical strategies for utilising technology. Meaningful technology integration can only be achieved if teachers possess both confidence and a deep understanding of how technology can enhance, rather than replace, classroom learning interactions (Anwar et al., 2025). Ultimately, digitally and pedagogically competent teachers are key to creating adaptive, inclusive, and relevant learning in the modern era of education.

B. TPACK Framework

TPACK refers to a framework composed of three fundamental domains of knowledge: content knowledge (CK), pedagogical knowledge (PK), and technological knowledge (TK). The interrelationship among these core components leads to the emergence of intersecting forms of knowledge, including pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), technological content knowledge (TCK), and technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK), which together form the holistic TPACK framework. As a knowledge construct, TPACK is inherently situated, complex, multidimensional, integrative, and transformative (Angeli & Valanides, 2009; Koehler et al., 2013; Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

TPACK illustrates how technology can be meaningfully integrated into teaching practices, from selecting appropriate digital tools to adapting pedagogical strategies to support optimal learning outcomes (Adelya et al., 2025). Implementing this framework requires teachers to align their teaching practices with technological developments, minimise limitations in the use of digital tools in educational contexts, and ensure that educators receive adequate training to utilise technology effectively and responsibly (Noortyani et al., 2024).

In the context of teacher training, Koh and Divaharan (2013) developed a TPACK-based learning model implemented in a pre-service primary teacher education programme. The model was designed through three interconnected stages: developing openness to technology and technical proficiency, modelling the use of technology in pedagogical contexts, and applying technology-based pedagogical strategies directly in the classroom. Their findings showed that participants experienced significant development, particularly in technological and pedagogical-psychological knowledge. However, the researchers emphasised the need for further in-depth studies, particularly regarding pedagogical modelling, the evaluation of learning products, and mechanisms for knowledge sharing among teachers.

C. SAMR Framework

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The SAMR framework is a model developed by Puentedura and discussed by Hamilton et al. (2016) as a guide for educators in integrating technology into learning in a gradual and meaningful manner. This model describes four hierarchical levels of technology utilisation in education, ranging from the simplest to the most transformative. At the lowest level, Substitution means that technology simply replaces conventional tools without functional change, for example, replacing handwritten text with digital documents. Augmentation occurs when technology still functions as a substitute but provides significant functional improvement, such as the use of commenting and autocorrect features in word processing (Puentedura, 2006; Hamilton et al., 2016).

The next two levels bring more fundamental changes to learning practices. At the Modification stage, technology enables significant redesign of assignments, such as requiring students not only to write essays but also to present them in interactive multimedia formats that can be reviewed by peers online (Puentedura, 2014b, 2014a). At the highest stage, Redefinition, technology creates opportunities for new learning tasks that would have been impossible without technology, such as real-time cross-border project collaboration or artificial intelligence-based simulations. This division emphasises that effective technology integration involves more than replacing media; it also transforms the learning experience as a whole (Puentedura, 2014b).

In language education and teacher professional development, the SAMR framework has been widely used as a reflective tool for educators to evaluate the extent to which the technology they use genuinely improves learning quality (Puentedura, 2006). Numerous studies have shown that most teachers remain at the two lower levels of Substitution and Augmentation and have not fully utilised the transformative potential of technology at the Modification and Redefinition levels (Hamilton et al., 2016). Therefore, a thorough understanding of the SAMR model should be incorporated into teacher training programmes so that educators are not only technically literate but also able to design innovative and contextually oriented learning experiences that strengthen students' overall competencies.

D. TAM Framework

TAM, first formulated by Fred D. Davis in 1989, is a theoretical model used to explain and predict how users accept and adopt information technology. It is derived from the Theory of Reasoned Action proposed by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen, but was later simplified and contextualised by Davis for technology-related behaviour. TAM focuses on two principal determinants: perceived usefulness, which describes the degree to which an individual believes that technology enhances work or learning performance, and perceived ease of use, which refers to the perceived effortlessness of using a system. These two factors shape users' attitudes towards technology and consequently determine their behavioural intentions and actual usage patterns (Scherer & Howard, 2018; Teo, 2015).

Over time, TAM has undergone several extensions and refinements to accommodate increasingly diverse and complex contexts of technology use. Venkatesh et al. (2000) developed TAM2 by adding social and cognitive factors, such as subjective norms, job relevance, and output quality, as variables that influence perceived technology usefulness. Furthermore, Venkatesh et al. (2000) introduced the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as an integrative model that combines TAM with various other technology acceptance theories. In the educational context, TAM has been widely applied to assess teachers' and students' readiness for and acceptance of various digital learning platforms, learning management systems, and artificial intelligence-based technologies (Teo, 2015).

The relevance of TAM in education, particularly for understanding teacher behaviour in adopting technology in the classroom, has been demonstrated through various international empirical studies. Teo (2015) found that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness significantly influence teachers' intentions to integrate technology into their teaching practices. Moreover, Scherer and Howard (2018) emphasise that digital self-efficacy and institutional support act as moderating variables that influence the relationship between technology acceptance and classroom implementation. Consequently, as proposed by Davis (1989), TAM functions not only as an explanatory framework for technology adoption but also as a conceptual foundation for the development of teacher training programmes aimed at identifying critical barriers to and drivers of effective and sustainable technology integration.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods design comprising a quantitative questionnaire for pre-service Indonesian language teachers from various universities and qualitative interviews with Indonesian language teachers already teaching in schools. Both designs were chosen because they offer a comprehensive view of the research problem (Benavides, 1997). This mixed-methods approach provided a complex perspective on the level of acceptance of digital tools among in-service teachers and on pre-service teachers' perspectives regarding technology-based digital learning tools (Insani et al., 2024). Each participant was given a detailed explanation of the research purpose, accompanied by assurances that their responses would remain confidential and that their identities would not be disclosed or traceable. The interviews were conducted individually and in person, with informed consent secured from every informant before the interviews commenced. Recordings were stored in a password-protected digital system. Similar procedures were applied to the management of questionnaire responses. The questionnaire was designed to be completely anonymous,

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and participation was voluntary, with the entire research process adhering to university-established research ethics guidelines.

B. Setting and Participants

This research involved 112 pre-service teachers from various universities and five senior high school Indonesian language teachers. Details are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

TABLE 1
PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

No.	Institution	Number of Students	Location	Instrument Used	Percentage
1	Universitas Madura	60	Pamekasan	Questionnaire	53.6%
2	Universitas Trunodjoyo Madura	10	Bangkalan	Questionnaire	8.9%
3	Universitas PGRI Sumenep	14	Sumenep	Questionnaire	12.5%
4	Universitas Islam Negeri Madura	18	Pamekasan	Questionnaire	16.1%
5	STKIP PGRI Sampang	10	Sampang	Questionnaire	8.9%
Total		**112**			**100%**

TABLE 2
SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL INDONESIAN LANGUAGE TEACHERS (IN-SERVICE TEACHERS)

No.	Institution	Location	Number of Teachers	Instrument Used	Teaching Experience
1	SMAN 1 Pamekasan	Pamekasan	1	In-depth interview	7 years
2	SMAN 3 Pamekasan	Pamekasan	1	In-depth interview	8 years
3	MAN 1 Pamekasan	Pamekasan	1	In-depth interview	7 years
4	MAN 1 Sumenep	Sumenep	1	In-depth interview	10 years
5	SMAN 2 Sumenep	Sumenep	1	In-depth interview	14 years
Total			**5 Teachers**	**Average: 9.2 years**	

C. Data Collection and Analysis

A mixed-methods strategy was implemented in this study to integrate quantitative and qualitative data systematically. The quantitative component involved the distribution of structured questionnaires to 112 pre-service teachers across five universities, whereas the qualitative component consisted of in-depth interviews with five senior high school Indonesian language teachers who had substantial teaching experience. The use of both instruments corresponds with the triangulation principle proposed by Creswell and Clark (2017) and Cresswell (2012), which emphasises that integrating numerical and narrative data can enhance the validity of research findings. The interviews were conducted directly in face-to-face settings, recorded with participants' consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy. Furthermore, all collected data were securely stored in a password-protected digital system to safeguard confidentiality, in accordance with established research ethics guidelines (Listyowati et al., 2025).

Descriptive statistical analysis was applied to the quantitative data to examine the frequency distribution, mean scores, and percentages of students' responses to the questionnaire statements. This approach allowed the researchers to identify general patterns and tendencies in participants' perceptions (Creswell & Clark, 2017). In the qualitative phase, interview data were processed through thematic analysis encompassing open, axial, and selective coding procedures, in accordance with the qualitative analytical approach outlined by Creswell and Clark (2017). This process was carried out iteratively, with the researchers rereading the transcripts to identify emerging themes inductively. To ensure the reliability of the analytical results, inter-coder reliability checks were conducted so that data interpretation was not subjective and could be scientifically justified.

To ensure data credibility and validity, this study adopted source triangulation by combining the perspectives of pre-service teachers and experienced teachers as complementary data sources. Yin (2009) emphasises that the use of multiple sources of evidence is a key strength in research design, as it allows findings from various perspectives to converge, thereby producing stronger and more convincing conclusions. Furthermore, Yin (2009) also emphasises the importance of establishing a clear chain of evidence, namely the logical link between the research question, the data collected, and the conclusions drawn. In this study, this principle was applied through systematic documentation at every stage of data collection and analysis, from interview protocols and questionnaires to verbatim transcripts and analytical memos, so that the entire research process could be traced and verified transparently (Gerring, 2007).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

Before the main data analysis was conducted, the reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's alpha for each TAM dimension. The test results showed statistically acceptable values, with the Ease of Use dimension categorised as acceptable, the Behavioural Intention dimension categorised as good, and the Perceived Usefulness dimension categorised as very good, in line with the criteria proposed by Taber (2018). Furthermore, the feasibility of factor analysis was tested using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The KMO value of 0.874 indicates that the data were well suited to factor analysis, and the significance of

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Bartlett's Test ($p < .001$) supports this finding (Vancova, 2025). Overall, the results of these statistical tests confirm that the research instrument had an adequate level of reliability and validity to produce scientifically accountable findings.

TABLE 3
RESULTS OF KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST

Test	Parameter	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	-	0.874
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1389.25
	df	286
	Sig.	< .001

1. Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Learning Technology (TAM)

Questionnaire data from 112 pre-service teachers were analysed based on the three main components of TAM: Ease of Use (EoU), Behavioural Intention (BI), and Perceived Usefulness (PU). The results of the descriptive statistical analysis are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4
PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INDONESIAN LANGUAGE LEARNING TECHNOLOGY (N = 112)

Code	Statement Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Category
Ease of Use (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.672)					
EoU1	Technology does not create time pressure in learning.	3.61	1.02	-0.61	High
EoU2	Technology makes it easier for me to support the teaching and learning process.	4.31	0.74	-1.69	Very high
EoU3	Technology helps meet learning needs effectively.	3.84	0.86	-0.73	High
Behavioural Intention (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.831)					
BI1	Technology helps with time management in my studies.	3.95	0.97	-0.89	High
BI2	Technology has become an integral part of my learning.	4.02	0.99	-0.80	High
BI3	I plan to use technology consistently in teaching.	4.21	0.88	-0.91	Very high
BI4	I would recommend the use of technology for students.	3.87	0.93	-0.75	High
Perceived Usefulness (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.908)					
PU1	Technology increases student motivation and engagement.	4.47	0.81	-0.90	Very high
PU2	Technology provides fast and high-quality feedback.	4.01	0.76	-1.35	High
PU3	Technology supports flexible learning.	4.22	0.72	-1.10	Very high
PU4	Technology is engaging and interactive.	4.49	0.79	-1.03	Very high
PU5	Technology helps students master Indonesian language skills.	4.05	0.83	-0.88	High
PU6	Technology encourages active student engagement.	4.46	0.77	-0.95	Very high
PU7	Technology helps connect theory and practice.	3.66	0.94	-0.49	High

Scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree. Categories: Low (1.00-2.60), Medium (2.61-3.40), High (3.41-4.20), Very High (4.21-5.00).

The results show that the highest mean score was obtained in the Perceived Usefulness dimension, particularly for the interactivity item (PU4; M = 4.49) and active student engagement (PU6; M = 4.46). This finding indicates that pre-service teachers highly value the potential of technology to encourage active and engaging learning. This result is consistent with the findings of Vancova (2025), who stated that pre-service teachers tend to emphasise interactivity and engagement as the main value of technology in language learning. Meanwhile, the lowest mean score was found for the item related to the ability of technology to encourage critical and independent thinking (PU7; M = 3.66), indicating that pre-service teachers have not fully recognised the transformative potential of technology in developing higher-order thinking skills. In terms of digital device use, the majority of pre-service teachers reported using computers (87.5%) and

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smartphones (74.1%) as their primary devices. The most frequently used software included instructional videos (83.0%), mobile applications (72.3%), and language-practice websites (54.5%). Notably, 58.9% of respondents expressed interest in learning how to integrate artificial intelligence (AI) into Indonesian language teaching, reflecting their awareness of current technological developments.

2. Teachers' Practices and Perceptions in the Use of Technology (SAMR and TPACK))

Thematic analysis of interview transcripts from five Indonesian language teachers yielded four main, interrelated themes. All interviewed teachers reported using official digital platforms such as Google Classroom and WhatsApp Groups as their primary classroom management tools. The main reasons cited were convenience in sharing materials, submitting assignments, and ensuring accessibility for all students. This finding aligns with Vancova (2025), who found that experienced teachers tend to prefer centralised and efficient platforms for managing the learning process. Within the SAMR framework, this use ranges from Substitution to Augmentation, where technology is used as a replacement for, and functional enhancement of, conventional methods without fundamental changes to learning design.

"It is easier for me to share materials because everything is in one place, and I can also create interactive assignments there."

Teacher at SMAN 1 Pamekasan

Experienced teachers consistently prioritise technology that is not only easy to use but also capable of ensuring content accuracy and pedagogical appropriateness. They tend to choose academically recognised tools such as Quizizz, Google Forms, and educational YouTube content rather than adopting new, unvalidated technologies. This attitude reflects the Technological Pedagogical Knowledge (TPK) dimension within the TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), namely the ability to select and utilise technology appropriately to support the learning process. Vancova (2025) also confirmed that experienced teachers prioritise classroom management effectiveness and pedagogical accuracy over mere technological novelty.

"I cannot rely solely on AI to grade my students' writing; I have to read it myself because it concerns the quality of their language analysis."

Teacher at MAN 1 Pamekasan

All informants consistently identified limited digital infrastructure, particularly unstable internet connections and limited student device ownership, as the most significant barriers to optimising technology use. These conditions represent external variables in Davis's (1989) TAM model, which directly influence teachers' perceptions of technology's usefulness in the field. Such infrastructure challenges are distinctive to educational contexts in regions such as Madura and differ from the findings of Vancova (2025), whose study was conducted in university settings with more adequate digital infrastructure.

"An unstable internet connection makes it impossible for me to rely entirely on online activities; I always have to prepare offline alternatives."

Teacher at MAN 1 Sumenep

An analysis of the technology-use practices of five teachers revealed varying levels of integration based on the SAMR framework. The findings indicate that all teachers' practices ranged from the Substitution to Augmentation levels, with a small proportion reaching the Modification level. None of the teachers reached the Redefinition level. This pattern is consistent with the findings of Vancova (2025), who found that educators tend to implement lower SAMR levels more frequently to increase accessibility and efficiency.

TABLE 5
TEACHER TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION LEVELS BASED ON THE SAMR FRAMEWORK

SAMR Level	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5
Substitution	Digital PDF and PPT	Digital PDF and PPT	PDF and digital modules	PDF and video	PDF and digital books
Augmentation	Quizizz and Google Forms	Google Forms and YouTube	Online quizzes and worksheets	YouTube and podcasts	Online practice
Modification	Collaborative feedback	Not observed	Digital writing project	Collaborative feedback	Not observed
Redefinition	Not observed	Not observed	Not observed	Not observed	Not observed

3. Convergence and Divergence: Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

The integration of findings from both methods revealed patterns of convergence and divergence between the perspectives of pre-service and experienced teachers. The most significant convergence lies in their general acceptance of technology; both groups view technology as an essential component of Indonesian language learning. However, a clear divergence is evident in the orientation of its use: pre-service teachers are more oriented towards engagement and interactivity, whereas experienced teachers prioritise pedagogical reliability and operational efficiency. These findings align with Vancova (2025), who concluded that the two groups hold complementary views and that these views can serve as a foundation for developing more integrated and contextualised teacher education programmes.

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TABLE 6
CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE OF FINDINGS BETWEEN PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS AND EXPERIENCED TEACHERS

Dimension	Pre-Service Teachers (Quantitative)	Experienced Teachers (Qualitative)	Pattern
Primary value of technology	Student interactivity and engagement (M = 4.49)	Classroom management efficiency and pedagogical accuracy	Divergent; different emphasis
Technology acceptance (TAM)	Very positive PU and high EoU	Positive but selective and critical	Convergent; both accept technology
Adoption level (SAMR)	Aspiration: Modification-Redefinition	Reality: Substitution-Augmentation	Divergent; theory-practice gap
TPACK competencies	Dominant TK (tool mastery)	Dominant TPK and PCK (pedagogical integration)	Convergent; integration as a foundation
Main obstacles	Confidence and readiness to teach	Infrastructure and internet connection	Divergent; different contexts
Development needs	AI training and digital media design	Institutional support and further training	Convergent; both require development

B. Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that both pre-service and experienced Indonesian language teachers in several regions showed positive attitudes towards the use of digital technology in learning. Pre-service teachers consistently gave the highest ratings to the perceived usefulness dimension, particularly in relation to interactivity (M = 4.49) and active student engagement (M = 4.46), indicating that they view technology as a key instrument for creating engaging and meaningful learning experiences. This finding is consistent with the core constructs of TAM proposed by Davis (1989), namely that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are two main determinants of users' technology acceptance. This result is also corroborated by Granić and Marangunić (2019), who, in their systematic review of 84 TAM studies in educational contexts, concluded that perceived usefulness is consistently the strongest predictor of technology acceptance among learners, including pre-service teachers. Meanwhile, experienced teachers placed greater emphasis on classroom management efficiency and pedagogical accuracy, reflecting maturity in assessing technology not solely based on its features but also on its suitability for learning objectives. This attitude is in line with the findings of Al-Khalidi (2021) and Bui (2022), who emphasised that active teachers tend to evaluate technology based on its contribution to instructional quality and ease of classroom management, rather than merely on its popularity or novelty.

One of the most striking findings of this study is the clear gap between the aspirations of pre-service teachers and the reality of teacher practice in the field, particularly in relation to technology adoption as defined by the SAMR framework. Analysis of the practices of five teachers showed that all remained at the Substitution to Augmentation levels, with only a small number reaching the Modification level and none reaching Redefinition. This finding is consistent with research by Al-Khalidi (2021), who found that teachers tend to use technology at lower SAMR levels because of limited time, resources, and training. In their systematic review, Blundell et al. (2022) also confirmed that most teachers in various contexts are only able to implement technology at the substitution and augmentation stages, while the transformative modification and redefinition stages are rarely achieved without strong institutional support. This condition is also reinforced by limitations in digital infrastructure in the research area, especially unstable internet connections and minimal student device ownership, which constitute external inhibiting factors, or external variables, as identified in TAM by Venkatesh et al. (2000). These findings underscore the urgency of developing teacher training programmes that focus not only on technical mastery but also on strategies for transformative technology implementation in environments with limited infrastructure.

Analysis using the TPACK framework revealed that both pre-service and experienced teachers have relatively strong Technology Knowledge (TK) as a common foundation, but both also show weaknesses in cross-domain integration, namely TPACK in its entirety. Pre-service teachers tend to excel in mastering digital tools (TK), but they are not yet able to integrate these tools deeply with pedagogical strategies and Indonesian language content (PCK and TCK). This may lead to cosmetic technology use, in which conventional activities are merely transferred to digital media without meaningful pedagogical transformation. This result corresponds with the findings of Tseng et al. (2022), whose comprehensive examination of TPACK research in language education demonstrated that language teachers generally face challenges in simultaneously integrating the seven TPACK domains, while technology use remains largely concentrated in teacher-centred pedagogical practices. Furthermore, according to Mishra and Koehler (2006), the effectiveness of TPACK depends on a comprehensive understanding of the relationships among technology, pedagogy, and content, rather than on separate competence in each component. Thus, the findings of this study indicate the need for a reorientation of the Indonesian language teacher education curriculum towards greater emphasis on holistic and contextual TPACK development, particularly in relation to language learning in regional areas.

These findings highlight an important theoretical contribution, indicating that a multi-framework approach involving TAM, SAMR, and TPACK facilitates a more comprehensive and nuanced interpretation of technology integration in

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language education than an approach based on a single theoretical framework. As emphasised by Vancova (2025), the combination of these three frameworks can synergistically capture the dimensions of psychological acceptance (TAM), pedagogical transformation (SAMR), and the depth of teacher knowledge (TPACK). Practically, these findings suggest that Indonesian language teacher education programmes need to be redesigned to integrate hands-on experience in using technology in a transformative, rather than merely substitutive, manner from the pre-service education stage onwards. This recommendation aligns with Haškov et al. (2021), who emphasised the importance of equipping pre-service teachers with the ability to use technology effectively in various teaching scenarios, including under conditions of limited infrastructure. Furthermore, collaboration between higher education institutions and secondary schools is key to bridging the gap between pre-service teachers' technological aspirations and the realities faced by experienced teachers, as recommended by Hamilton et al. (2016), who found that access, competence, and hands-on experience were the three main predictors of successful technology integration by pre-service teachers in their teaching practice.

V. Conclusion

Drawing on the research findings and subsequent discussion, it can be concluded that both pre-service and practising Indonesian language teachers responded positively to the adoption of digital technology in learning environments. Despite this similarity, each group reflected distinct orientations towards the application of such technology in teaching practices. Pre-service teachers emphasised interactivity and active student engagement as the primary values of technology, whereas experienced teachers tended to prioritise classroom management efficiency and pedagogical accuracy in selecting digital tools. These differences in orientation suggest that teaching experience affects individuals' understanding and utilisation of technology in Indonesian language education. Furthermore, both orientations function synergistically in supporting the advancement of educators' digital competencies.

Analysis using the SAMR framework shows that all experienced teachers participating in this study remained at the Substitution to Augmentation levels, and none reached the Redefinition level. This indicates that technology use in Indonesian language learning remains functional and substitutive and has not yet reached a genuinely transformative stage. This condition is influenced by several inhibiting factors, including limited digital infrastructure, unstable internet connections, a lack of technology training oriented towards pedagogical practice, and curriculum pressures that do not provide sufficient space for technology-based innovation. Therefore, it is important to develop teacher training programmes that focus not only on technical mastery but also on encouraging teachers to integrate technology more creatively, collaboratively, and transformatively into Indonesian language learning.

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Analyzing Translation Strategies of Culture-Specific Items From English Into Arabic in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

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***Abstract*—Despite growing interest in translating African-American literature, little research has examined how Culture-Specific Items (CSIs) are handled, especially the balance between preserving cultural authenticity and ensuring translation readability. This study analyzes the procedures and strategies used to render CSIs in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* into Arabic. By employing Newmark's (1988) taxonomy of translation procedures and Venuti's (1995) domestication and foreignization strategies, 713 CSIs were systematically identified, extracted, and analyzed from the source and target texts using a mixed-methods approach. The analysis reveals that literal translation was the predominant procedure, used to translate 43.5% of the items, followed by functional equivalence (11.8%) and synonymy (9%). Based on the CSI analysis, 60.6% of the items were foreignized. Furthermore, back-translation assessment indicates that while 54.8% of the CSIs maintained semantic accuracy, 45.2% experienced semantic shift. Of these, 19.8% showed a slight change in meaning, 3.4% showed a significant change in meaning, 8.3% exhibited a breach of the target language system, 13% resulted in distortion of meaning, and 0.7% were not translated. These findings suggest that although literal translation preserves source culture elements, it often compromises the semantic accuracy, especially when handling items used idiomatically and metaphorically to express African-American folklore and traditions.**

***Index Terms*—Culture-Specific Items, African-American literature, domestication and foreignization**

I. Introduction

The translation of culture-specific items in literary texts requires translators to have extensive knowledge of the source and target cultures. When rendered correctly, these translations help bridge the gap between cultures and peoples. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a novel by the famous African-American novelist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston published in 1937. It was translated into Arabic by Samah Jafar in 2016. It describes the lives of African-Americans during a troubled period of American history when the civil rights of African-Americans were still being contested. The novel has been translated into many languages but it was translated into Arabic only in 2016. The novel is rich in cultural references, creating a gap between the source and target texts, especially because Arab and African-American cultures have limited overlap (Gohar, 2018). The concept of culture gained significant interest in the field of translation studies, and it has since been identified as one of the main obstacles facing translators especially in translating culturally loaded literary texts with distinctive ideological characteristics (Wang, 2024).

The main focus of this paper is to classify and analyze the translation procedures and strategies used in translating the CSIs in the Arabic translation of the African-American folklore novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. CSIs, as defined by Newmark (1988), are elements in the source text tied to specific cultural contexts that require certain translation approaches to convey their meaning effectively. Due to their strong cultural and contextual grounding, researchers perceive CSIs as problematic because they do not always have equivalents between different languages (Rababah & Moindjie, 2025; Sketchley, 2021; Tian, 2023). While CSIs have received significant scholarly attention in translation studies (Al-Khazzaaleh et al., 2025; Korneenkova et al., 2025; El Zahra & Indhiarti, 2023), little research has examined the translation of CSIs in African-American folklore texts into Arabic despite the growing interest in translating such texts (Gohar, 2018).

The novel describes the life and struggles of an African-American woman during a troubled period of American history when civil rights of African-Americans were being contested especially in the South. Published during the Harlem Renaissance, the novel captures culturally and historically significant references from this period. Hurston herself affirms

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her intention to preserve the African-American folk talk, stories, and ways of life (Hurston, 1942) making this text particularly rich in CSIs reflecting the African-American folklore and culture.

Research Objectives and Questions

The objectives of this study are:

1. Identify and classify the CSIs in the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* using Newmark's 1988 taxonomy.
2. Determine the translation procedures employed by the Arabic translation based on Newmark's 1988 framework.
3. Assess the semantic accuracy of translated CSIs through back-translation analysis.
4. Evaluate the overall orientation of the translation towards domestication and foreignization using Venuti's (1995) dichotomy.

The paper attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the CSIs in the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and how are they classified based on Newmark's taxonomy?
2. What translation procedures were employed in translating the CSIs in the novel from English into Arabic?
3. What is the semantic accuracy of the translated CSIs and what type of errors occurred?
4. Does the Arabic translation predominantly employ domestication or foreignization strategies?

This study addresses an important gap in translation studies by examining the translation procedures of CSIs in African-American folklore literary text into Arabic. As the only available translation of any of Hurston's works in Arabic to date, this analysis provides significant insights into the challenges of translating culturally distant texts. The study contributes to the limited research on Arabic translation of African-American literary texts and offers practical guidance for translators working with source texts rich in cultural references and CSIs. Moreover, it highlights the relationship between the semantic outcomes and the procedural choices in the translation demonstrating that consistency in approach does not guarantee achieving translation quality.

II. Literature Review

A. Theoretical Foundations of CSI Translation

Culture-Specific Items (CSIs) constitute a major part of literary texts, and they have been conceptualized differently across translation studies. Newmark's (1988) taxonomy classifies them into five comprehensive categories: ecology, material culture, social culture, social organizations, and gestures and habits. Other taxonomies such as Aixelá (1996), who classifies them into two main categories: proper nouns and common expressions. However, this binary classification oversimplifies the identification process and complicates the systematic corpus analysis as they involve more than just individual items (Amenador & Wang, 2022). Recent studies have successfully applied Newmark's approach to different literary texts and yielded successful results (Al-Soghiar, 2025; Juan et al., 2023; Laabed & Bekouche, 2022; Obeidat, 2019; Prompan, 2024; Rababah & Moindjie, 2025; Shalimova & Shalimova, 2020). For analyzing early twentieth-century African-American folklore texts, Newmark's 1988 taxonomy provides clear and systematic analytical results.

B. Translation Procedures for CSIs

Newmark (1988) proposes 18 translation procedures for rendering CSIs from literal translation and transference to more adaptive procedures such as paraphrase and cultural equivalent. Studies show considerable variation in the effectiveness of these procedures depending on the type of text, cultural distance, and target audience characteristics (Borysenko et al., 2024; Obeidat, 2019; Tian, 2023). Literal translation, Newmark's preferred procedure, is often criticized for producing unnatural target translations when the target and source cultures are distant. However, it can preserve the source culture if the target readers possess sufficient cultural background or if preservation is the purpose of the text (Venuti, 1995). However, studies consistently show that employing literal translation in rendering idiomatic and metaphorical CSIs often produces semantic distortion (Davies, 2003). Other procedures such as functional equivalence and cultural substitution emphasize semantic accessibility but compromise the source culture elements (Nida, 2001). Recent studies suggest that employing a variety of procedures yields effective results more than depending on a single approach (Borysenko et al., 2024).

C. Domestication and Foreignization

Venuti's dichotomy of foreignization and domestication has significantly influenced literary translation studies despite the criticism it received due to its binary nature. Some researchers argue this dichotomy oversimplifies the translator's decision-making process (Pym, 2014) while others argue it fails to account for the power dynamics of cross-cultural translation (Munday, 2016). However, the paradigm offers insights into the translator's orientation patterns, and the success of the translation can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used. Studies of Arabic literary translation show translators' tendency towards domestication when translating Western classical texts while translations of contemporary texts show the use of a variety of procedures (Abdelwahab, 2022; Al-Ramadan et al., 2025). The translation of African-American literature poses a particular challenge to translators with its historical and political implications for Venuti's domestication and foreignization dichotomy. Certain procedural choices may neutralize the African-American identity and dilute the translation's impact on the target readers (Le Gall, 2022).

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D. Arabic Translation of African-American Literature

Literature on the translation of African-American literary texts remains limited to date, with most studies focusing on established authors like Amiri Baraka's Dutchman (Gohar, 2018) which does not present African-American culture as comprehensively as *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Existing studies show that translations of African-American literary texts are faced with challenges related to vernacular speech, historical and cultural references such as slavery, segregation, white supremacy, and religious expressions rooted in Christian American life which are largely unfamiliar to a predominantly Muslim Arab readership. Such challenges are compounded by translators' unfamiliarity with African-American history and culture (Gohar, 2018).

III. Methodology

A. Corpus and Text Selection

This study analyzes Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) Arabic translation of " عيونهم كانت تراقب الرب, (Oyounuhum kanat turaqibu arrab) by Samah Jafar (2016). The source text was selected based on its richness in CSIs depicting African-American folklore and culture, the novel's canonical status in American literature, and the temporal distance between the original and the translation which allows for an objective analysis. The Arabic translation, published by Dar-Athar in Saudi Arabia, is the only Arabic translation of Hurston's work to date making it a unique corpus for study.

B. Research Design and Approach

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative analysis. The qualitative approach examines the semantic accuracy through back-translation and contextual analysis, while the quantitative approach involves systematic identification and classification of the CSIs and their translation procedures. The CSIs in the original text were identified and classified through a systematic analysis using Newmark's (1988) five categories. The process of identifying the CSIs was strict; the items had to be linked to a specific cultural context, pose comprehension challenges for the target readers, and express cultural knowledge specific to the source culture. Generic cultural references were excluded unless they carried specific cultural connotations in the text. The second step of the analysis involved providing back-translation to the CSIs to allow for a better judgment of the procedures and strategies used in the translation and decide the semantic accuracy of the translation. The translation procedures were identified using Newmark's framework of his proposed 18 translation procedures. Furthermore, Venuti's 1995 dichotomy of foreignization and domestication was applied to determine the orientation of the items.

C. Identification and Classification of Culture-Specific Items

The researcher identified potential CSIs from both texts. The items were then revised and approved by a professional English-Arabic translator. Any disagreements were resolved through discussion and consultation. The process yielded 713 CSIs across the five categories. The procedures used in translating the CSIs were analyzed using Newmark's framework of 18 translation procedures. The translation strategies were analyzed and identified by applying Venuti's 1995 dichotomy of foreignization and domestication. The researcher identified the procedures and the strategies, and an independent professional translator approved them. Any disagreements were resolved through discussion and research. Back-translation was provided by an independent translator proficient in Arabic and English to assess the semantic fidelity.

Semantic accuracy was assessed using the following five-category framework adapted from studies investigating translation of CSIs including Mozaheb et al. (2021) and Naguib (2021):

1. Successful translation: no change in meaning
2. Slight change in meaning: minor semantic change does not affect comprehension
3. Significant change in meaning: clear semantic change affecting comprehension but does not obscure the meaning
4. Distortion of meaning: substantial semantic change in meaning obscuring comprehension of the meaning
5. Breach of target language system: translation violates the Arabic idiomatic, grammatical or stylistic norms.

The use of this framework distinguishes between changes representing a legitimate translation choice to enhance readability and those compromising the meaning of the original.

IV. Limitations of the Study

Many limitations affect the generalizability and the scope of the study. First, analyzing only one translation limits drawing conclusions about Arabic translation practices in general and in rendering African-American literary texts in particular. Moreover, focusing on Newmark's taxonomy, although it provides a systematic analysis, may discard other culturally significant translation issues. Third, the reception of the target text and its impact cannot be captured using back-translation alone. Finally, the study does not consider editorial or social constraints that may have affected the translator's decision-making process.

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V. Results

A. Distribution of CSIs and Translation Procedures

Table 1 presents the distribution of the CSIs across Newmark's categories and the translation procedures employed in their translation.

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF CSIS BY CATEGORY AND TRANSLATION PROCEDURE

No.	CSI category / Procedure	Ecology	Material culture	Social culture	Social organization	Gestures and habits	Total
1	Literal translation	95	101	37	48	29	310
2	Expansion	11	17	1	0	1	30
3	Reduction	6	14	7	3	10	40
4	Cultural equivalent	3	14	2	3	3	25
5	Synonymy	13	16	22	3	10	64
6	Descriptive equivalent	1	3	1	0	0	5
7	Shift	17	12	4	4	9	46
8	Footnote	1	0	1	2	0	4
9	Modulation	9	3	1	2	3	18
10	Couplet	4	1	4	0	0	9
11	Paraphrase	3	4	2	2	3	14
12	Transference	4	50	5	3	0	62
13	Functional equivalent	13	21	23	10	17	84
14	Recognized translation	0	0	0	1	0	1
15	Translation label	0	0	0	0	0	0
16	Compensation	0	0	0	0	0	0
17	Naturalization	0	0	1	0	0	1
18	Through translation	0	0	0	0	0	0
19	Componential analysis	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	180	256	111	81	85	713

The analysis reveals that literal translation dominates CSI translation procedures at 43.5%, followed by functional equivalence at 11.8% and synonymy at 9%. This distribution suggests an approach toward foreignization, preserving the source culture elements while potentially compromising the target text accessibility.

Table 1 also shows that material culture CSIs constitute the largest category accounting for approximately 36% of the items, which reflects the novel's attention to the material aspects of African-American life. Ecology CSIs constitute almost 25% of the CSIs, largely describing the flora and fauna references that characterize the nature of the American South. Social culture items account for about 16% and refer to the leisure activities, community interactions and their work habits of the African-American community in the south. Social organizations account for about 11% of the CSIs and represent the religious, political and institutional references. Gestures and habits account for about 12% of the items and reflect the behavioral and nonverbal ways of communication of the African-Americans within certain cultural contexts.

The distribution of the translation procedures varies across the categories. Literal translation dominates in the translation of social organizations accounting for 59% of their total, followed by ecology terms, accounting for 53%, material culture at 39%, social culture at 33%, and gestures and habits at 34%. Social culture, material culture, and gestures and habits show more varied use of the translation procedures which reflects the complexity of translating social practices and culturally embedded behaviors.

B. Domestication and Foreignization Strategies Analysis

Based on the classification of the translation procedures used to translate the CSIs, the results show that foreignization procedures (including literal translation, transferences, shift, footnotes and couplets), totaling 520 occurrences representing approximately 61%. While domestication procedures (functional equivalence, cultural equivalent, adaptation, expansion, reduction, naturalization, and paraphrase) totaled 193 occurrences representing 27.1%. This distribution reflects a clear foreignization strategy, suggesting the translator aimed to preserve source cultural elements while introducing Arab readers to African-American culture and history.

C. Semantic Accuracy Analysis

Back-translation analysis shows unusually high levels of semantic shift in the target text (Table 2).

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TABLE 2
SEMANTIC SHIFT IN TRANSLATING CSIS

Semantic shift \ CSI	Ecology	Material culture	Social culture	Social organizations	Gestures and habits	Total
Successful	98	162	38	58	35	391
Slight change in meaning	31	54	27	7	22	141
Significant change in meaning	4	7	7	3	3	24
Breach of target language	17	6	14	8	14	59
Distortion of meaning	27	27	24	4	11	93
Not translated	3	0	1	1	0	5
Total	180	256	111	81	85	713

While 54.8% of the CSIs maintain semantic accuracy, 45.2% experience some degree of semantic shift. The 19.8% experiencing "slight change" could represent acceptable adaptation costs, but the combined 24.7% showing significant change, distortion, or system breach indicates significant semantic compromise.

Literal translation, despite being the dominant translation procedure, shows mixed accuracy results. Although it is effective in translating concrete items, it often produces semantic distortion when it is used to translate idiomatic expressions, metaphors and cultural-specific descriptions.

VI. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This section presents an analysis of selected CSIs representing each category showing how translation procedures affected semantic accuracy. The examples are presented with the source text context, their translation, back-translation, translation procedure and semantic assessment.

A. Ecology CSIs

Ecology CSIs include references to elements of flora, fauna, winds, plains, hills, weather and geographical locations. Although many of these items are universal, their metaphoric or idiomatic use in the original caused significant translation challenges.

TABLE 3
TRANSLATION ANALYSIS OF ECOLOGY CSIS

	Source Text	Target Text	Back-Translation	Procedure	Outcome
1.	Packed tight like **a case of celery**	فقط **بشرتهم داكنة** أكثر من **الكرفس**	Only their skin is darker than celery	Shift	Distortion of meaning
2.	You got mo' nerve than **uh brass monkey**	لديك جرأة أكبر **من قرد نحاسي**	You have more nerve than a brass monkey	Literal translation	Breach of target language system
3.	Ah jus lak uh chicken. **Chicken drink water, but he don't pee-pee**"	أنا مثل الدجاجة. **الدجاجة تشرب الماء لكنها لا تتبول**	I am like a chicken. The chicken drinks water but it doesn't urinate	Literal translation	Distortion of meaning
4.	Ah sho hope you **ain't lak uh possum** —de older you gits, de less sense yuh got	أتمنى أن لا تكوني قد تسرعت – فكلما كبرت زادت حساسيتك	I wish that you hadn't rushed as you age your sensitivity increases	Reduction	Distortion of meaning
5.	Ah'll **break up dat settin' uh eggs**".	سوف **اكسر كرسي البيض**	I will **break the chair of eggs**	Literal translation	Breach of target language system
6.	they's a lost ball in **de high grass**	لقد فقدن الكرة **بين الحشائش العالية**	they have lost the ball **between the high grass**	Footnote	Distortion of meaning

In the translation of these items, the translator employed different translation procedures. Notably, these items were used metaphorically and do not actually refer to the universal items themselves. In the first example, the translator shifted the imagery describing how crowded the court was during Janie's trial from being people tightly packed one next to the other, to their skin color, darker than celery. The result of this translation distorted the meaning of the original causing a semantic error. Meanwhile, the second example, the translator used literal translation to translate an idiom which refers to someone being brave. Although literal translation maintained the item of the original. However, its idiomatic usage has not been conveyed successfully in the translation. the reference to courage iterated by "brass monkey" does not exist in the Arabic language, thus, the literal translation preserved the idiom of the source text but breached the target language system. In the third example, the translator also employed literal translation to translate the item to convey the meaning of keeping secrets. The idiom employs the name of a universal animal; chicken, but the idiom does not exist in Arabic therefore the translation distorted the meaning of the original. There are idioms in Arabic that convey a similar meaning, however, due to using literal translation, the intended meaning was not successfully conveyed into Arabic.

In the fourth example, the idiom also employs an animal; a possum. This animal is native to the American continents but not in the Arab world so maintaining it would have resulted in an unnatural idiom especially that comparing a person to a possum would not make sense. The translator deleted the name of the animal however this resulted in distortion of

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the meaning. The translator misunderstood the meaning of the idiom. The "older it gets the less sense it has" which means that possums act strangely with old age. In this example, the speaker refers to Janie's older age as she is older than Tea Cake and because of that she is not acting her age. The meaning of the idiom has not been conveyed correctly and it also affected the sentence after it. Additionally, the fifth example employed literal translation as well to render an idiomatic everyday expression which describes a winning set in a game of cards "setting of eggs" as a "كرسي البيض" (chair of eggs) which makes no sense in Arabic. The translation throws the reader into a strange linguistic construction that breaches the language structure and feels completely out of context. This contributes to readers realizing the text is a literal translation of the original. The final example, the "high grass" is used idiomatically and describes the people who lost their way as being a lost ball in the high grass; no one will be able to save them. The literal translation of the idiom was accompanied by a footnote "it refers to people who don't know what they are doing or where they are or how to do something.

This footnote explains the meaning and helps in comprehension of the idiom, however, the literal translation of the idiom, despite being explained by a footnote, makes no sense in Arabic and it caused a distortion of the intended meaning.

B. Material Culture CSIs

The material culture CSIs refer to clothing, food, transportation, housing, and towns. This category has the highest frequency of CSIs and the most varied translation procedures.

TABLE 4
TRANSLATION ANALYSIS OF MATERIAL CULTURE CSIS

	Source Text	Target Text	Back-Translation	Procedure	Outcome
1.	What she doin' coming back here in dem **overhalls**?	لم عادت إلى **أوفرهيلز**	Why did she return to Overhills?	Transference	Distortion of meaning
2.	You don't take nothin' to count but **sow-belly** and corn bread	لا تهتم بشيء سوى **مليء المعدة** وخبز الذرة	You don't care about anything but filling the stomach and corn bread	Paraphrase	Slight change in meaning
3.	Ah betcha you still craves **sugar-tits**	انا متأكد انك لا زلت تشتاقين **للهاية**	I am sure you still miss your pacifier	Functional equivalence	Successful
4.	Like she had **grapefruits in her hip pockets**	كما لو أن هناك **ثمار العنب في تجاويف وركها**	Like there are grapes in the curves of her hips	Synonymy	Distortion of meaning

In the first example, the speaker describes the appearance of Janie after returning to Eatonville. In the English text, Janie is wearing overalls; what workers in the Everglades used to wear while working. When she left the town with her new husband, she was wearing a dress, so coming back wearing dirty overalls showed the townspeople that her husband had left her without anything. The overalls in the novel are symbolic and very important as it represents the growth and change in Janie's life. The translator incorrectly transferred the name of the item into a name of a place. This caused a distortion of the meaning of the original and removed the significance of the item. In the second example, Janie is confronting her husband; Joe, about his lack of attention to her and that he only cares about food. The item "sow-belly" refers to the meat of a female pig's belly which is a stable meal in American culture. The translator opted to paraphrase the item sow-belly into "filling the stomach" which caused a slight change in meaning.

In the third example, the context is set in Janie's first husband's house when she first met her second husband, Joe. He was flirting with her by commenting on her young age. To describe her youth, he says she is too young to be married because she might still miss "sugat-tits". These "sugar tits" were pieces of clothing soaked in sugar which were given to babies as means of soothing them. The translator successfully employed the familiar modern-day functional equivalent of the item "لهاية" (pacifier). The flirtatious and condescending tone has been successfully maintained.

In the fourth example, the narrator describes Janie's body through the eyes of the men who were watching her as she came back to town. She describes her buttocks as round and firm as grapefruits; large round citrus fruit. This description conveys attractive physical features. The translator employed synonymy but confused "grapefruits" with "grapes" (عنب) causing a distortion of meaning. This error fundamentally changes the metaphor from praise to something potentially awkward or unflattering, demonstrating how selecting a synonym without considering semantic weight can completely alter intended meaning.

C. Social Culture CSIs

Social culture CSIs include work and leisure activities and cultural practices.

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TABLE 5
TRANSLATION ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL CULTURE CSIS

	Source Text	Target Text	Back-Translation	Procedure	Outcome
1.	Most of the great **flame-throwers** were there	اغلب **الحكائين** كانوا هناك	Most of the story tellers were there	Synonymy	Distortion of meaning
2.	It must be uh **recess in heben if St. Peter** is lettin' his angels out lak dis.	لا بد ان هناك **عطلة في السماء لذلك ترك القديس بطرس** ملائكته تخرج بهذا الشكل.	There must be a holiday in heaven so Saint Peter let his angels come out like this.	Literal translation	Breach of the language system
3.	Anyhow mah husband tell me say **no first class booger would have me**	على كل حال فقد اخبرني زوجي **ان ليس هناك شبح بامكانه امساكي**	Anyway my husband told me that there is no ghost that can catch me	Synonymy	Distortion of meaning
4.	whut you come in heah **wid uh face long as mah arm for.**	فلم اتيت الى هنا **عابسة بهذا الشكل؟**	So why did you come here frowning like that?	Functional equivalence	Successful

In the first example, before the hurricane workers gather at Tea Cake and Janie's house for companionship and courage. The narrator describes the scene and the people gathering there with "flamethrowers" attempting to cheer people. Flamethrowers are performers who manipulate fire for entertainment. This is a dangerous job and requires a lot of skill and courage, the author chose to emphasize that even the bravest men in the everglades sought comfort before the hurricane hit. The translator rendered it as "story-tellers" in an attempt to use a synonym which caused a distortion of meaning by eliminating the meanings associated with the original meaning such as courage and skill. In the second example, the speakers are playfully flirting with one of the women in town, Daisy, by comparing her to an angel who came down from heaven to town. This compliment draws on Christian imagery, comparing her beauty to that of an angel. The reference to Saint Peter who is traditionally depicted as the gatekeeper of heaven, functions as a hyperbole often used in African-American speech. This expression has a secular social function rather than a religious function which may have been lost in the translation. However, the overall complementary meaning is preserved making this an acceptable translation.

In the third example, Pheoby is talking to the townspeople who were eager to know all about Janie and why she came back to Eatonville. One of them wanted to go with Pheoby to see Janie and check for herself and told her that she wants to accompany her so that the "booger man" does not catch her on the way. This references a folktale used to scare children not to walk in the street alone after dark. This reference can be found in cultures around the world, depiction of a monster trying to kidnap children who do not listen to what their parents tell them. It is clear that this is an attempt from her to go with Pheoby so she can get good gossip. The reference is translated via a synonym which does sound scary "ghost" but it does not reflect the whole intended meaning of the original and there are many cultural references in Arabic that better reflect the meaning. Finally, the fourth example describes the context of Janie's first visit to her grandmother after being married to her first husband, Logan. Janie told her that her husband is good to her. The grandmother was worried because Janie had "face long as mah arm". This expression is used to reflect a person's feelings of sadness which is usually referred to as having "a long face". The translator successfully translated the item with its functional equivalent which reflects the intended meaning.

D. Social Organizations CSIs

These items include political, historical, institutional, and religious references.

TABLE 6
TRANSLATION ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS CSIS

	Source Text	Target Text	Back-Translation	Procedure	Outcome Error
1.	Look lak dey think God don't know nothin' 'bout de **Jim Crow law**.	يظنون ان الرب لا يعرف شيئا عن **قوانين جيم كرو**	They think that God doesn't know anything about Jim Crow laws.	Footnote	Successful
2.	half sobbed **a running chant prayer** over the head of the weeping girl	رأس **بترديد الصلاة على** الفتاة الباكية	By repeating prayers on the head of the crying girl.	Functional equivalent	Slight change in meaning
3.	One mornin' soon, now, **de angel wid de sword** is gointuh stop by here	خلال احدى الصباحات القريبة سوف تتوقف **الملائكة ذوات السيوف** هنا	During one morning soon the angels with swords will stop here	Shift	Major change in meaning
4.	you know **Old Uncle Sam** always do have de biggest and de best uh everything	أنت تعرفين أن **العم سام** يملك اكبر وافضل شيء بين كل الاشياء	You know that uncle Sam owns the biggest and best thing of all things	Literal translation	Successful

In the first example, after the hurricane hit the Everglades and a large number of people died and white people began digging up their dead and demanding the black men, who were forced to work, to separate the black from the white bodies so no black person is buried in a white grave yard and vice versa. Tea Cake is complaining saying that they, the white men, do not think that God knows anything about Jim Crow Laws. The Jim Crow Laws were a segregation law widely used in the American South in the states that refused to abolish slavery. These laws guaranteed white supremacy and

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ensure the continuation of slavery. They are unjust and have been abolished. The translator successfully used a footnote to explain the meaning of the item which provides the reader with a context explaining its meaning. In the second example, the narrator describes what Janie's grandmother did to comfort her. The chant prayer refers to a repetitive Christian vocalization common in African-American Christian tradition. The translator used an Islamic term "Salah" which is performed five times a day. The translator used a functional equivalent causing a slight change in meaning. Both items involve addressing God, however, the Islamic "Salah" requires performing certain movements and reciting certain verses from the Quran. Meanwhile, the Christian chant prayer involves rhythmic vocalization of words. the surface meaning of "prayer" is maintained, but the specific religious practice has been altered. A better translation for this item would have been "دعاء" (supplication). This example demonstrates the difficulty of translating religious practices across Christian-Muslim cultures. In the third example, the grandmother explains that she is getting older and might die soon. The angel of death, which is usually depicted in Christian faith as an angel with a sword, reaper, will soon come to claim her soul. Both Muslim and Christian cultures have the concept of an angel of death. The translator shifted the item from singular to plural which caused a major change in meaning. A simple Arabic translation "angel of death" (ملك الموت) would have expressed the intended meaning. The angel of death in Islamic culture is not portrayed as having a sword so the meaning has changed significantly. In the fourth example, the speaker is referencing a political item which was and is still used to refer to the American government as "Uncle Sam". It originated during the War of 1812 when a meat packer "Sam Wilson" would stamp "U.S." for United States on the boxes but the soldiers would jokingly say it came from Uncle Sam and later became to be used in military propaganda. The translator used literal translation as this is a well-known symbol for the American government.

E. Gestures and Habits CSIs

This category includes behavioral patterns and non-verbal means of communication specific to a certain community.

TABLE 7
TRANSLATION ANALYSIS OF GESTURES AND HABITS CSIS

	Source Text	Target Text	Back-Translation	Procedure	Outcome
1.	Sam Watson, **you'se mah fish**.	تعال يا سام واتسون **لتلاعبني**	Come Sam Watson play with me	Functional equivalent	Successful
2.	she **pressed her teeth together** and learned to hush	**كانت تضغط على اسنانها معا**، وتعلمت الصمت	She was pressing her teeth together and learned silence	Literal translation	Breach of target language
3.	Yo' mama **don't wear no Draws**	أمك **لا ترتدي ملابس داخلية**	Your mother doesn't wear underwear	Synonymy	Breach of target language
4.	This was a **show-off game**	فقد كانت **هذه لعبة مختلفة**	This was a different game	Functional equivalent	Slight change in meaning

In the first example, Joe and Sam are playing a form of board game. The item "my fish" means that "I want to catch you" in the game. The image is lost; however, the use of a functional equivalent explained the meaning and the translation can be said to be successful despite the loss of the image. In the second example, Janie, after being physically and verbally abused by her second husband. It shows the changes from speaking out her mind to learning to be quiet despite having an opinion about anything. The narrator tells us that she pressed her teeth, which is a sign of struggling to keep quiet which turned into a habit and not a temporary situation. The literal Arabic translation violates the target language norms as it does not employ the Arabic language structure used to express this meaning. The better alternative might have been to use an already existing idiom "عضت على اسنانها" or "عضت على لسانها". In the third example, the item is part of a taunt or verbal dueling with insults about a person's mother. This type of speech, when used in Arabic language is extremely insulting and is actually a taboo to mention a man's mother or even her underwear which caused a breach in the language system. In the fourth example, the characters were playing a card and board games and the challenge was so great that they no longer played to win money, but to show off their skills in the games. The English item "show-off" is used to show one's verbal and mental skills in a competitive atmosphere. The item already has an equivalent or synonym in Arabic which is "تباهي", however, the translator chose a functional equivalent which has caused a slight change in meaning.

The analysis of the above examples across the different categories reveals a number of patterns. First, the use of literal translation is successful in translating universal items but fails to capture the idiomatic or metaphorical expressions. Secondly, functional equivalent maintains the communicative function of the items but may alter the deeper connotations of the meaning. Using transference, with footnotes has greatly helped in handling the historically and religious references by providing an explanation or specific context. Additionally, the distance between the Christian and Muslim cultures creates challenges for translating items citing religious expressions.

VII. CONCLUSION

The results show that literal translation was the predominant procedure, used in 43.5% of CSI translations. The use of literal translation in rendering a large number of the CSIs resulted in 60.6% foreignization of the text. The results also show that the errors that occurred in the translation of the items mainly caused slight changes in meaning in 19.8% of the items. Meanwhile, those that altered the meaning through distortion, major change, or breach of the language system accounted for 24.7%. The translator's choices in many cases have affected the coherence of the translation, which alters

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or distorts the meaning of the original. Due to the foreignization of the text, the translator maintained the use of the source text's grammatical structure, which caused some hindrances to the understanding of the text. The translator plays an important role in bridging the gap, especially in texts that have different cultural backgrounds, and is responsible for the overall quality. Major literary works that depict socially and historically significant references, such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, where Hurston sought to preserve African-American folklore, require special translational attention. This research, with its analysis of semantic errors in the translation of CSIs, guides the employment of better translation procedures to convey the message of the original.

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Bridging the Gap Between Assessment Literacy and Practice: A Sociocultural Exploration of EFL Instructors' Classroom Assessment in Saudi Higher Education

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***Abstract*—This study investigates classroom assessment practices among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors in Saudi universities from a sociocultural perspective, with particular attention to the relationship between instructors' language assessment literacy (LAL) and their classroom assessment practices. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 63 EFL instructors, while qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with six instructors. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 22.0), and qualitative data were examined using hybrid thematic analysis. The findings reveal a strong reliance on traditional assessment methods, with limited integration of alternative assessment practices. No statistically significant relationship was found between teaching experience and assessment practices, suggesting that assessment behavior is shaped more by contextual and institutional factors than by professional experience alone. Qualitative results further indicate that peer assessment, portfolio-based assessment, and performance tasks are perceived as the most challenging forms of assessment, primarily due to time constraints, large class sizes, limited training, and institutional constraints. The study highlights a persistent gap between assessment literacy and classroom practice and demonstrates that this gap is strongly mediated by sociocultural and institutional conditions. The study contributes to the integration of LAL and sociocultural theory by showing that assessment literacy is a situated practice rather than a purely technical competence. Implications are offered for enhancing professional development and for aligning institutional policies with more formative and learner-centered assessment practices in Saudi higher education.**

***Index Terms*—Language Assessment Literacy (LAL), classroom assessment practices, sociocultural perspective, EFL instructors, Saudi higher education**

I. Introduction

Classroom-based assessment has become an increasingly important component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction over recent decades, reflecting a broader shift away from exclusive reliance on traditional testing toward more formative and learner-centred assessment approaches (Abbas, 2012; Ali & Al Ajmi, 2013; Aliasin & Amanlu, 2017). Within this shift, alternative assessment methods such as portfolio assessment (Abrar-ul-Hassan et al., 2021), peer assessment (Sung et al., 2005), self-assessment, and dynamic assessment have gained growing attention due to their potential to capture learners' communicative competence and ongoing language development in authentic classroom contexts (Ali El Deen & Mahmoud, 2025; Wubshet & Menuta, 2015; Yen et al., 2024).

Despite this increasing recognition, the implementation of alternative assessment remains uneven and context-dependent. Research indicates that classroom assessment practices are not determined solely by teachers' technical knowledge, but are strongly shaped by institutional demands, cultural expectations, and contextual constraints (Yusop & Firdaus, 2022; Dietel et al., 1991). From a sociocultural perspective, assessment is understood as a socially situated practice embedded within institutional systems and professional environments. In Arab educational contexts, cultural values and local educational traditions also play an important role in shaping teaching and assessment practices (Mahmoud, 2015). Tian et al. (2023), for example, argue that teachers' assessment practices and language assessment literacy (LAL) are deeply influenced by the sociocultural contexts in which teaching occurs (Shao, 2026). Similarly, Mohammadi et al. (2020) and Nazari (2024) found that although EFL instructors expressed positive attitudes toward dynamic assessment, its implementation was limited by institutional constraints, lack of training, and time pressures.

Within Saudi higher education, although interest in assessment literacy has increased, there remains limited empirical understanding of how EFL instructors translate assessment knowledge into classroom practice. Existing research has largely focused on teachers' perceptions, beliefs, or general competencies, while fewer studies have examined the relationship between language assessment literacy and actual assessment practices within specific sociocultural contexts

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(Gardner & Rea-Dickins, 2001; Mahmoud, 2013). In particular, the ways in which institutional structures and classroom realities shape instructors' assessment decisions remain underexplored.

To address this gap, the present study investigates classroom assessment practices among EFL instructors in Saudi universities and examines how these practices are shaped by language assessment literacy and sociocultural contextual factors. Specifically, the study explores how instructors interpret, negotiate, and implement assessment practices within their institutional environments. This focus is important because assessment is not merely a technical activity, but a pedagogical process embedded in social and institutional realities.

A. Aim of the Study

The main aim of this study is to investigate classroom assessment practices among EFL instructors in Saudi universities and to examine how these practices are influenced by instructors' language assessment literacy and their sociocultural contexts.

B. Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to:

1. Identify the classroom assessment practices commonly used by EFL instructors in Saudi universities.
2. Examine the relationship between instructors' teaching experience and their use of different assessment methods.
3. Explore instructors' perceptions of challenges associated with traditional and alternative assessment practices.
4. Investigate contextual factors influencing the implementation of alternative assessment methods.

C. Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing body of research on language assessment literacy by providing empirical evidence from a Saudi higher education context. It highlights how assessment literacy is enacted in real classroom settings and how sociocultural constraints shape instructors' assessment decisions. The findings may inform teacher education programmes, assessment policy development, and professional training initiatives aimed at improving classroom assessment practices.

D. Research Questions

RQ1: What classroom assessment practices are commonly used by EFL instructors in Saudi universities?
RQ2: Is there a relationship between instructors' teaching experience and their use of different classroom assessment methods?
RQ3: Which types of traditional and alternative assessment tasks are perceived as most challenging?
RQ4: What contextual factors influence instructors' implementation of alternative assessment methods?

II. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

A. Conceptualizing Language Assessment Literacy (LAL)

Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) refers to the knowledge, skills, and principles required for designing, implementing, interpreting, and evaluating language assessments. Early conceptualizations emphasized technical competence in testing and measurement; however, contemporary perspectives highlight its broader pedagogical, ethical, and sociocultural dimensions (Fulcher, 2012; Inbar-Lourie, 2008; McNamara, 2006). In this view, LAL extends beyond test construction to include classroom-based assessment practices that support learning and feedback.

Recent research has expanded LAL into a multidimensional construct that includes teachers' beliefs, identities, and contextual decision-making processes. Rahimi et al. (2021) argue that assessment literacy is dynamic and evolves through professional experience and contextual engagement. Similarly, Latif and Wasim (2022) emphasize the importance of examining teachers' assessment identities, including agency, self-efficacy, and pedagogical orientation, alongside contextual influences. Tian et al. (2023) further highlight that assessment practices are socially situated and shaped by institutional and cultural environments. Together, these studies suggest that LAL should be understood not as a fixed body of knowledge, but as an evolving competence enacted within specific sociocultural contexts.

B. Sociocultural Perspective

From a sociocultural perspective, assessment is not merely an evaluative tool but a socially mediated activity shaped by institutional, cultural, and policy contexts (Leung & Scott, 2009; Shohamy, 2001). Vygotsky's (1978) theory of mediated learning and Lantolf and Thorne's (2006) work on sociocultural theory emphasize that learning and assessment are co-constructed through interaction, tools, and social participation. Similarly, Lave and Wenger (1991) conceptualize learning as participation in communities of practice, where knowledge is constructed through engagement in social contexts.

In educational settings, assessment practices are also influenced by policy interpretation and local adaptation rather than uniform implementation (Hancock, 1994; Purpura et al., 2026; Ngo, 2025). In Saudi EFL contexts, studies suggest that institutional expectations, cultural beliefs about English learning, and educational traditions significantly shape how teachers design and interpret assessment tasks (Alharbi, 2015; Ali El Deen & Mahmoud, 2025). Therefore, assessment literacy must be understood as embedded within these sociocultural systems rather than as an individual attribute alone.

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C. Traditional and Alternative Assessment

Assessment in language education is commonly categorized into traditional and alternative approaches. Traditional assessment typically includes selected-response and standardized formats such as multiple-choice questions, short-answer tests, and essays, which emphasize objectivity and summative measurement (Bailey, 1998; Hamp-Lyons, 2016). While such methods are efficient and reliable, they often focus on product-oriented learning outcomes.

In contrast, alternative assessment includes performance-based and process-oriented approaches such as portfolios, peer assessment, self-assessment, reflective journals, and project-based tasks (Ahmad et al., 2020; Alotaibi, 2019; Oz, 2014; Phongsirikul, 2018). These approaches emphasize learner engagement, reflection, and the development of communicative competence. They are closely aligned with formative assessment principles, supporting ongoing feedback and learning-oriented evaluation. Such assessment approaches have become increasingly relevant in technology-enhanced and distance-learning environments, where continuous interaction and learner-centered evaluation are emphasized (Simonson et al., 2000).

The present study focuses on alternative assessment because of its relevance to contemporary EFL pedagogy, which emphasizes communicative competence, learner autonomy, and formative learning processes. Despite its pedagogical value, the implementation of alternative assessment remains limited in many contexts due to institutional and contextual constraints.

D. Characterizing Alternative Assessment

Research on Saudi EFL contexts indicates a continued reliance on traditional assessment practices despite increasing awareness of alternative approaches. Studies have shown that instructors often depend on standardized or exam-oriented assessment systems, particularly in centralized programs (Alaudan, 2014; Umer et al., 2018; Almossa, 2021). While teachers may hold positive perceptions of alternative assessment (Green, 2014), their actual practices are often constrained by institutional structures and assessment policies.

In addition, challenges such as limited training, time constraints, and centralized decision-making reduce teachers' autonomy in implementing innovative assessment methods (Alyami, 2022). Even when instructors use informal assessment techniques, they often have limited influence over formal assessment design and grading systems (Almossa, 2021). These constraints highlight a gap between theoretical knowledge of assessment and its practical implementation.

E. Research Gap

Although previous studies have examined teachers' assessment beliefs, practices, and competencies in Saudi Arabia, limited attention has been given to how language assessment literacy is enacted in classroom practice within sociocultural contexts. In particular, little is known about how instructors translate assessment knowledge into practice while navigating institutional constraints and professional realities. This gap highlights the need for research that integrates assessment literacy with sociocultural analysis to better understand classroom assessment decision-making in Saudi EFL contexts.

III. Methodology

A. Research Context, Participants, and Ethical Considerations

This study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell & Clark, 2017; Kostoulas & Lämmerer, 2020), which involves two consecutive phases. The first phase collected and analyzed quantitative data to identify general patterns in EFL instructors' classroom assessment practices. The second phase collected qualitative data to explain and elaborate on these patterns in greater depth. The integration of both datasets enabled a comprehensive understanding of how language assessment literacy and sociocultural factors shape assessment practices in Saudi higher education.

B. Research Context, Participants, and Sampling

The study was conducted in two public universities in Saudi Arabia within English language and preparatory-year programs, where EFL instructors are responsible for classroom instruction and assessment.

A total of 63 EFL instructors participated in the questionnaire phase, while 6 instructors participated in semi-structured interviews (three from each university). Participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting instructors actively involved in classroom assessment practices. This approach was appropriate because the study required participants with direct experience in assessment implementation and decision-making.

Participants represented a range of teaching experience, gender, and training backgrounds, ensuring diversity of perspectives.

C. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics committee prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained by removing all identifying information. Interview participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure privacy.

D. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

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Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was used in the quantitative phase and consisted of four sections:

Section 1: Demographic information (5 items)

Gender, age, teaching experience, and training in language assessment.

Section 2: Classroom assessment practices (10 Likert-scale items)

This section measured the frequency of use of traditional and alternative assessment methods using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always).

Section 3: Perceptions of assessment methods (open-ended items)

This section explored instructors' views on the advantages and limitations of different assessment types.

Section 4: Contextual influences (open-ended items)

This section examined institutional, pedagogical, and environmental factors affecting assessment practices. The questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in second language assessment to ensure content validity, clarity, and relevance. Based on their feedback, several items were revised and one item was removed.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS (N = 63)

Variable	Category	n (%)
Gender	Male	29 (46.0%)
	Female	34 (54.0%)
Age	22–55 years	63 (100%)
Teaching Experience	>10 years	40 (63.5%)
	5–9 years	16 (25.4%)
	≤4 years	7 (11.1%)
EFL Testing Training	At least once	46 (73.0%)
	None	17 (27.0%)

Interview Protocol

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the second phase to gain deeper insights into questionnaire findings. The interview protocol was informed by Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) theory (Giraldo, 2018) and focused on the following dimensions:

- Understanding of assessment concepts (traditional vs. alternative)
- Classroom implementation of assessment practices
- Experiences with peer assessment, portfolios, and performance tasks
- Perceived challenges in assessment implementation
- Training and professional development experiences
- Institutional and sociocultural influences on assessment decisions

The interview protocol was piloted with two instructors, and minor modifications were made to improve clarity and allow greater flexibility in responses.

Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, was conducted in English, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.

E. Validity and Trustworthiness

Validity of the questionnaire was ensured through expert review, which established content validity and improved item clarity and relevance. Although Cronbach's alpha was not computed, reliability was supported through careful item construction, pilot feedback, and consistent administration procedures.

For qualitative data, trustworthiness was ensured through:

- verbatim transcription of interviews,
- systematic coding procedures,
- iterative theme refinement,
- triangulation between quantitative and qualitative findings,
- use of established theoretical frameworks.

These procedures enhanced credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

F. Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 22.0). Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were used to identify patterns in assessment practices (Mertler, 2003). Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between teaching experience and assessment practices.

Although Likert-scale data are ordinal, they were treated as approximately interval data in line with common practice in educational research (Clason & Dormody, 1994; Carifio & Perla, 2008).

Qualitative Analysis

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Qualitative data from open-ended responses and interviews were analyzed using a hybrid thematic analysis approach (Swain, 2018). This involved:

- Deductive coding, guided by Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) theory (Giraldo, 2018), and
- Inductive coding, allowing new themes to emerge from the data.

Data were repeatedly reviewed, coded, and organized into broader thematic categories.

G. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The study followed an explanatory sequential integration strategy. Quantitative results were first analyzed to identify general trends in assessment practices, followed by qualitative analysis to explain and contextualize these findings. The integration of both datasets enabled a more comprehensive interpretation of how assessment literacy is enacted within sociocultural and institutional contexts.

IV. Results

A. Saudi University EFL Instructors' Classroom Assessment Practices

To answer the first research question, descriptive statistics were computed for the 10 Likert-scale items measuring the frequency of different classroom assessment practices. The scale ranged from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). The mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) values are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Classroom Assessment Tasks Used by Respondents

Items	M	SD
Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)	4.34	0.876
True/False Questions	4.22	0.903
Short Answer Questions	4.12	0.897
Essay Questions	4.06	0.872
Oral Presentations	3.96	0.953
Group Projects	3.87	0.975
Peer Assessment	3.49	0.796
Portfolio Assessment	3.46	0.864
Performance Tasks	3.43	0.965
Observations and Checklists	2.85	0.987

The results indicate a clear preference for traditional assessment methods. MCQs, true/false questions, and short-answer tests obtained the highest mean scores, indicating frequent use. In contrast, alternative assessment methods such as peer assessment, portfolio assessment, and performance tasks were less frequently implemented. Observations and checklists recorded the lowest mean score.

B. Relationship Between Teaching Experience and Assessment Practices

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between instructors' teaching experience and their use of different assessment methods. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Correlation Between Respondents' Experience and Use of Assessment Types (N = 63)

Type of Assessment	N	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)	63	0.022	0.866
True/False Questions	63	0.032	0.814
Short Answer Questions	63	-0.102	0.429
Essay Questions	63	-0.084	0.512
Oral Presentations	63	0.051	0.692
Group Projects	63	0.033	0.796
Peer Assessment	63	-0.107	0.408
Portfolio Assessment	63	-0.151	0.238
Performance Tasks	63	-0.059	0.648
Observations and Checklists	63	-0.110	0.390

Correlations ranged from –0.151 to 0.051, and none were statistically significant ($p > .05$). The findings indicate that there is no significant relationship between instructors' years of teaching experience and their reported use of any assessment type. This suggests that assessment practices are not determined by experience alone but may instead be influenced by contextual or institutional factors.

C. Assessment Tasks Perceived as Challenging

To address the third research question, qualitative responses from open-ended questionnaire items and semi-structured interviews were analyzed. Participants identified assessment tasks they considered most difficult to implement, and the frequency of these responses is summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1 illustrates that alternative assessment methods were perceived as more challenging than traditional ones. Peer assessment, portfolio assessment, and performance tasks were identified as the most difficult to implement.

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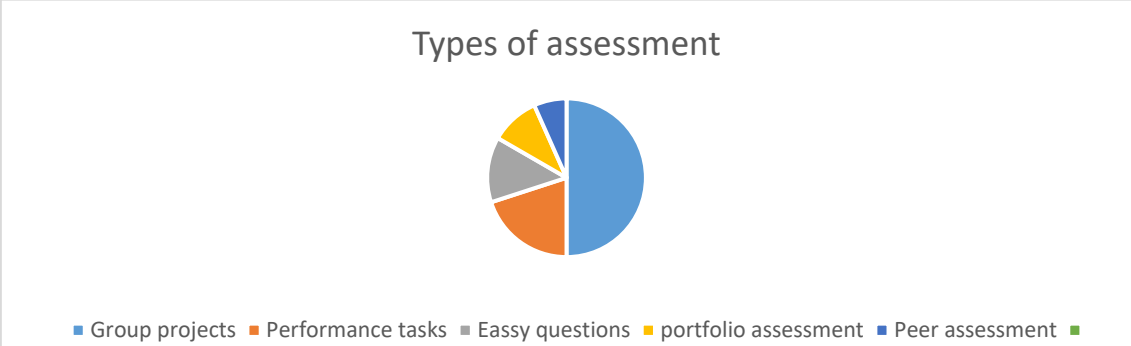


Figure 1. Assessment Tasks Perceived as Challenging by Respondents

Table 4 summarizes the main reasons provided by instructors for these challenges.

TABLE 4
REASONS FOR THE CHALLENGING NATURE OF ASSESSMENT TASKS

Type of Assessment	Illustrative Challenges
Peer Assessment	Unequal participation; perceived bias; lack of training in peer evaluation.
Performance Tasks	Time-consuming design and grading; need for advanced rubrics and clear criteria.
Essay Questions	Difficulties in ensuring objectivity and consistency in scoring.
Portfolio Assessment	Large class sizes; limited familiarity with portfolio-based evaluation.

The findings suggest that both structural and pedagogical constraints contribute to difficulties in implementing alternative assessment practices.

D. Factors Influencing the Implementation of Alternative Assessment

Figure 2 presents the main factors influencing the implementation of alternative assessment.

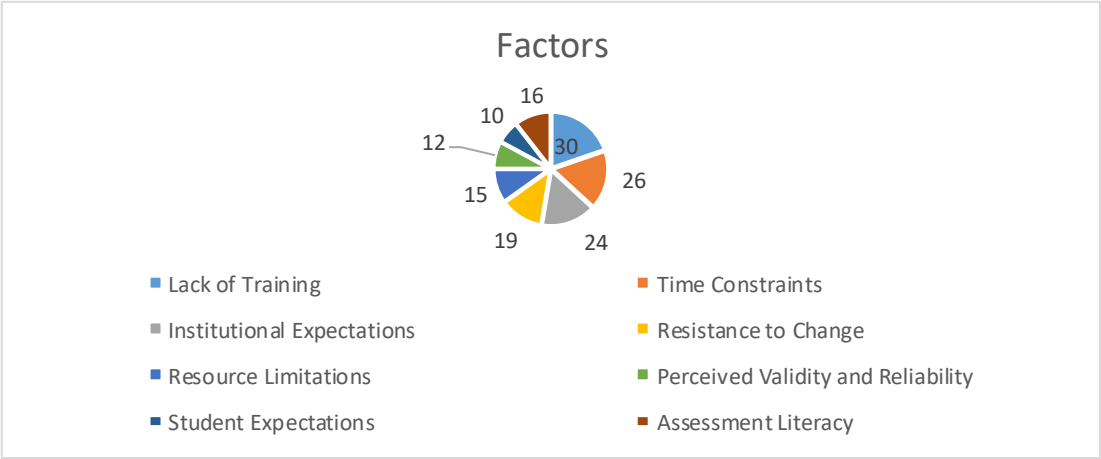


Figure 2. Factors Influencing the Implementation of Alternative Assessment

The most frequently reported barrier was time constraints, followed by limited resources, large class sizes, lack of training, and institutional resistance. Additional concerns included students' preference for traditional testing and perceived issues of validity and reliability.

V. DISCUSSION

A. Overview of Key Findings

The findings of this study reveal a consistent dominance of traditional assessment practices among Saudi EFL instructors, alongside limited but present use of alternative assessment methods. However, rather than simply reflecting methodological preference, these patterns indicate deeper structural, pedagogical, and sociocultural influences shaping assessment decision-making in higher education contexts. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data suggests that assessment practices are not solely individual choices but are embedded within institutional expectations and culturally mediated teaching environments.

B. Language Assessment Literacy as Situated Practice

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From a Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) perspective, the findings suggest that assessment literacy among instructors is partial and context-dependent rather than fully developed or standardized. While instructors demonstrate familiarity with a range of assessment types, their actual classroom practices remain largely constrained to conventional methods.

This aligns with contemporary reconceptualization of LAL that emphasize it as a situated and evolving construct rather than a fixed set of technical competencies (Inbar-Lourie, 2008; Fulcher, 2012; Sadeghi and Rahmati, 2017). In this study, LAL appears to function more as procedural familiarity than as critical pedagogical competence, particularly in relation to designing and implementing performance-based or formative assessments.

The limited use of alternative assessment methods such as portfolios, peer assessment, and performance tasks suggests a gap between theoretical awareness and classroom enactment of assessment literacy.

C. Sociocultural Mediation of Assessment Practices

The findings strongly support a sociocultural interpretation of assessment practices, where classroom assessment is shaped by institutional norms, workload demands, and culturally embedded expectations of teaching and evaluation.

Consistent with Vygotskian theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), assessment practices in this context are mediated by institutional tools such as standardized testing systems, departmental policies, and grading structures. These mediating factors limit the extent to which instructors can independently implement alternative assessment approaches.

Moreover, the findings align with sociocultural views of policy enactment, where educational policies are not implemented uniformly but are interpreted and adapted at the classroom level (Leung & Mohan, 2004; Shohamy, 2001). In this study, instructors appear to adapt assessment practices to fit institutional constraints rather than pedagogical ideals.

D. Experience as a Non-Predictive Factor

A key finding of this study is the absence of a significant relationship between teaching experience and assessment practices. This result challenges the assumption that increased professional experience naturally leads to more diversified or innovative assessment practices.

Instead, it suggests that assessment behavior is primarily shaped by systemic and institutional conditions rather than individual expertise. This supports the view that assessment literacy development is not simply a function of experience but requires structured institutional support, professional training, and opportunities for reflective practice.

E. Constraints on Alternative Assessment Implementation

The qualitative findings highlight persistent barriers to the implementation of alternative assessment, including large class sizes, limited time, lack of training, and institutional resistance. These constraints reflect both practical and epistemological tensions within EFL assessment cultures.

From an LAL perspective, these barriers indicate limitations in both knowledge and skills dimensions, particularly in designing rubrics, managing peer assessment, and implementing formative feedback strategies. However, from a sociocultural perspective, these constraints are not merely technical deficits but reflect broader systemic priorities that privilege efficiency and standardization over pedagogical innovation.

F. Teacher Beliefs and Assessment Continuity

The continued reliance on traditional assessment methods is closely linked to instructors' beliefs regarding fairness, objectivity, and manageability (Önalan & Karagül, 2018). These beliefs reinforce the persistence of standardized testing practices, even when alternative approaches are perceived as pedagogically beneficial.

This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that teacher beliefs act as strong mediators of classroom practice, often outweighing formal training or theoretical knowledge (Alharbi, 2015; Al-Seghayer, 2022). In this sense, assessment reform cannot be achieved through training alone, but requires shifts in belief systems supported by institutional change.

G. Novel Contribution of the Study

This study makes three key contributions to the field of language assessment research.

First, it extends Language Assessment Literacy research by empirically demonstrating that LAL in the Saudi EFL context is not merely a knowledge deficit issue but a contextually constrained practice, shaped by institutional structures and workload pressures.

Second, it contributes to sociocultural assessment theory by showing how assessment practices are actively mediated by institutional systems, rather than being directly determined by teacher competence or experience.

Third, it integrates LAL and sociocultural theory within a single explanatory framework, demonstrating that assessment literacy development cannot be fully understood without considering the interaction between individual agency and institutional mediation. This integrative approach provides a more holistic explanation of the gap between assessment knowledge and classroom practice.

H. Pedagogical and Institutional Implications

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The findings suggest that improving assessment practices in Saudi EFL contexts requires interventions at both pedagogical and institutional levels. Professional development programs should move beyond theoretical instruction and focus on practical training in alternative assessment design, rubric development, and formative feedback strategies (Epstein et al., 2002).

However, institutional change is equally necessary. Without adjustments to workload, class size, and assessment policies, even well-trained instructors may struggle to implement alternative assessment approaches effectively. Therefore, sustainable assessment reform requires alignment between teacher training initiatives and institutional policy frameworks.

I. Summary of the Discussion

Overall, the study demonstrates that assessment practices among Saudi EFL instructors are shaped by a complex interplay of literacy, belief systems, and institutional constraints. The findings highlight that improving assessment practice requires not only enhancing language assessment literacy but also addressing the sociocultural conditions in which assessment is enacted.

VI. Conclusion

This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study investigated classroom assessment practices, language assessment literacy (LAL), and perceptions of alternative assessment among EFL instructors in Saudi universities from a sociocultural perspective. The findings provide clear answers to the four research questions guiding the study.

Regarding RQ1, the results show that Saudi EFL instructors predominantly rely on traditional assessment methods, particularly multiple-choice questions, true/false items, and short-answer tests. Alternative assessment practices such as peer assessment, portfolios, and performance-based tasks are used less frequently, despite instructors' general awareness of their pedagogical value.

In relation to RQ2, the findings reveal no statistically significant relationship between teaching experience and assessment practices. This indicates that assessment choices are not primarily determined by professional experience but are instead shaped by contextual, institutional, and pedagogical constraints.

For RQ3, instructors identified alternative assessment methods—especially peer assessment, portfolio assessment, and performance tasks—as the most challenging to implement. The main difficulties included lack of training, time constraints, large class sizes, and concerns about fairness and consistency in grading.

Concerning RQ4, the study found that the implementation of alternative assessment is significantly influenced by institutional and sociocultural factors. The most prominent barriers include time limitations, large class sizes, limited institutional support, insufficient training opportunities, and students' preference for traditional testing formats.

Overall, the findings suggest a persistent gap between instructors' awareness of alternative assessment and its actual classroom implementation. This gap is not primarily a matter of individual competence but is largely shaped by structural and contextual constraints within Saudi higher education.

A. Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) literature by demonstrating that LAL in the Saudi EFL context is not simply a matter of knowledge or skill acquisition but is deeply situated within institutional and sociocultural realities. The findings also reinforce sociocultural perspectives on assessment by showing that classroom assessment practices are mediated by institutional expectations, workload conditions, and culturally shaped beliefs about fairness and validity.

By integrating LAL and sociocultural theory, this study provides a more holistic explanation of the gap between assessment knowledge and classroom practice, highlighting assessment as a socially situated and context-dependent activity rather than a purely technical process.

B. Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study suggest several important pedagogical implications for improving assessment practices in Saudi EFL higher education.

First, there is a need for targeted professional development programs that go beyond theoretical knowledge and focus on the practical implementation of alternative assessment methods. Training should include rubric design, performance-based assessment strategies, peer assessment techniques, and effective formative feedback practices.

Second, improving assessment literacy requires institutional support structures. Universities should provide conditions that enable the use of alternative assessment, including manageable class sizes, reduced teaching loads, and access to appropriate assessment tools (Al Ruqeishi, 2015) and resources.

Third, a balanced assessment approach is recommended. Rather than replacing traditional assessments entirely, instructors can integrate alternative methods into existing practices to gradually promote more formative and learner-centered assessment cultures.

C. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study offers the following recommendations:

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a) Higher education institutions should implement continuous professional development programs focused on practical assessment literacy.
b) Curriculum designers should incorporate alternative assessment strategies into official assessment frameworks.
c) Policy-makers should revise assessment policies to encourage formative and performance-based evaluation practices.
d) Institutions should provide structural support (e.g., reduced class sizes, workload adjustment) to facilitate effective assessment implementation.
e) Future assessment reforms should align pedagogical goals with institutional policies to ensure sustainable change.

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Clausal Comparatives and Semantic Compositionality: With a Special Reference to Jordanian Arabic

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***Abstract*—This paper documents and analyzes two syntactic structures of clausal comparatives in Jordanian Arabic (JA) which involve free relative clauses in the standard of comparison. The paper shows that the two clauses in the standard of comparison are interpreted differently as both an individual-denoting and degree-description- denoting structure. The paper also provides two compositional semantic analyses for the two forms of clausal comparatives based on two different Schönfinkelizations [1] of the comparative –er morpheme in grammar.**

***Index Terms*—individuals vs. degree descriptions, Schönfinkelization, clausal standard of comparison**

I. Introduction

The expressive power of human language allows for communicating comparison in almost all human languages (Sapir, 1941; Beck et al., 2004, 2009, 2012). English, for example, utilizes complex syntactic structures for clausal comparatives in which the 'than' particle takes as its complement a (reduced) clause of category CP or TP in structure (Kennedy, 2009; Tiemann, 2009; Bhatt & Takahashi, 2011; Bochnak, 2025).

(1) a. Fatima is taller than Omar is.
b. Fatima reads more linguistics books than Omar does.

It has been standardly assumed that clausal comparatives correspond to the degree-based mode of comparison (von Stechow, 1984; Bhatt & Takahashi, 2011). For example, the comparative sentence in (1a) has the denotation true if and only if the maximal degree of the target degree description to which *Fatima* is tall exceeds that of the standard degree description to which *Omar* is tall (See Abu Helal, 2024). As argued in Bhatt and Takahashi (2011), this denotation of the clausal comparative in (1a) follows from the fact that the degree head –er functions as a 2-place predicate which relates clauses that denote degree descriptions. This analysis is formalized using the following semantic derivation based on von Stechow (1984), Heim (2001) and Abu Helal (2024).[2]

(2) Lexical entries
a. ⟦ than Omar is ⟧=: λd∈ D_d. Op_1 than Omar is d-tall
b. ⟦ -$er_{2\text{-PLACE}}$ ⟧=: λP ∈ $D_{<d,t>}$,λQ ∈ $D_{<d,t>}$. MAX(Q) < MAX(P)
c. ⟦ tall ⟧ =: λd∈ D_d.λx∈ D_e. TALL(x) ≥ d (Abu Helal, 2024)

(3) LF: [- er than Omar is λd] [Fatima is d- tall]]] (Abu Helal, 2024)

Truth conditions: ⟦ -$er_{2\text{-PLACE}}$ ⟧ ([λd'. Omar is d'-tall]) (λd. Fatima is d- tall)]
= TRUE iff MAX (λd'. Omar is d'-tall) < MAX (λd. Fatima is d-tall) (Abu Helal, 2024)

Quite interestingly, Jordanian Arabic (JA) makes use of two different syntactic structures in expressing clausal comparatives. In this language, the comparative particle *min* 'from' takes a free (relative) clause that is either headed by

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[1] In formal semantics Schönfinkelization refers to a technique of translating predicates into functions that can be integrated in the compositional meaning of logical form.
[2] This paper assumes the following basic ontological semantic type system: D_e = E (the set of individuals); D_d = K (the set of degrees); Dt = T (the set of truth values {True, False}); and $D_{\langle\alpha,\beta\rangle} = D_\beta^{D_\alpha}$ (Abu Helal, 2024).

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complementizer *illi* or *ma*.[3] The two forms of clausal comparatives are exemplified in (4) (See Abu Helal, 2024).

(4) a. *Fatima katab-t qaasˤidh ʔablaɣ min illi katab-ha Omar*
Fatima wrote-F a poem more-eloquent from ILL wrote-it Omar
'Fatima wrote a more eloquent poem than what Omar wrote.'
b. *Fatima katab-t qaasˤidh ʔablaɣ min ma katab Omar*
Fatima wrote-F a poem more-eloquent from MA wrote Omar
'Fatima wrote a more eloquent poem than what Omar wrote.'

The two forms of clausal comparatives (henceforth, *illi*- and *ma*-comparatives) are syntactically similar; both of them involve a free relative clause of category CP or TP in the standard of comparison. Under Bhatt and Takahashi (2011), it should be the case that the two forms of comparative constructions draw on comparison based on degree descriptions along the lines of the 2-place predicate analysis in (2). Despite appearances, this paper will show that this is not the case. More specifically, the paper will argue for the fact that while the *ma*-comparative involves a 2-place predicate –er operator that relates degree descriptions, the *illi*-comparative makes use of a 3-place predicate –er operator that relates individuals. The main finding of this paper is that intra-linguistically or at least in a language like JA, the interpretation of the clausal comparative may correspond to the individual- and degree-based mode of comparison depending on the type of the free relative selected by the comparative particle in the standard of comparison (See von Stechow, 1984; Bhatt & Takahashi, 2011).

This paper is organized as follows. Section two presents and demonstrates the theoretical framework which provides the basis of the eventual analysis of the two forms of clausal comparatives in JA. Section three argues that the clausal *ma*-comparative has a denotation that is interpreted in terms of degree comparison. The argument draws on empirical evidence that supports the presence of degree operator movement and degree abstraction in the standard of comparison. For this case, we present a compositional analysis with a Schönfinkelization of the 2-place comparative operator that relates degree descriptions. Section four discusses evidence confirming the fact that clausal *illi*-comparative involves an individual-based mode of comparison, rather than a degree mode of comparison. The section presents a compositional semantic analysis for the *illi*-comparative which draws on a Schönfinkelization of the comparative operator as a 3-place predicate that relates individual- denoting objects, rather than degree descriptions (e.g., Hankamer, 1973; Heim, 1985; Kennedy, 2009). The last section concludes the paper.

II. Theoretical Framework

The standard degree-based theory analyzes comparatives as sentences which denote relations between degree descriptions (von Stechow, 1984). The analysis makes use of a language L with the semantic type d that denotes degrees along with other types such as e and t which denote entities and truth values, respectively. The expressions of L are interpreted relative to a model M= {D_d, {TRUE, FALSE}, ⟦ ⟧} which comprises mutually disjoint degree sets SD (i.e., $D_d = \cap SD$) which is related by an ordering $>_d$ that is a total, asymmetric, transitive and reflexive relation (see von Stechow, 1995), the set of truth values {TRUE, FALSE} and the interpretation function ⟦ ⟧ which is a function that assigns interpretations to the lexical elements in composition (von Stechow, 1984; Beck, 2012; Abu Helal, 2019).

This approach has two main working assumptions about gradable adjectives: first, gradable adjectives (e.g., tall) denote relations of individuals and degrees (Seuren, 1973; Cresswell, 1976; von Stechow, 1984; Heim, 1999, 2001) as represented in (5) (Abu Helal, 2022a).

(5) ⟦ tall ⟧= λd.λx. TALL(x) ≥ d (Abu Helal, 2022a)

Second, this relation is downward monotonic with the following property:

(6) ∀x∀d∀d'. [TALL(d) (x) =1 ∧ d' < d → TALL(d') (x)=1] (Abu Helal, 2022b)

Syntactically, the degree argument of the gradable adjective is represented as a DegP that is projected as sister to the gradable adjective (Abu Helal, 2022b). Gradable adjectives get their degree argument saturated in two ways: first, they

[3] The two types of argumental clauses have one major interpretative difference: while an *illi*-clause has a substance-based reading with the denotation of individuals of type e or predicates of individuals of type <et>, the *ma*-clause has an amount reading which is standardly argued to denote degrees or predicate of degrees of type d or <dt>, respectively.

(i) *a. Omar ʔakal min illi tˤabxt-u Fatima*
Omar ate from ILLI cooked Fatima
'Omar ate some object of things that Fatima cooked.'
b. *Omar ʔakal min ma tˤabxt-u Fatima*
Omar ate from MA cooked Fatima
'Omar ate some amount of things that Fatima cooked.'

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can directly combine with degree-denoting measure phrases of type d via function application as in (7). [4]

(7) Bill is taller than 5 feet.

Second, the degree argument can be quantified over by a degree operator (e.g., comparative head –er, equative as or the superlative –est) as in (8) (Abu Helal, 2022a).

(8) a. Mary is taller than Bill.
b. Bill is the tallest guy.

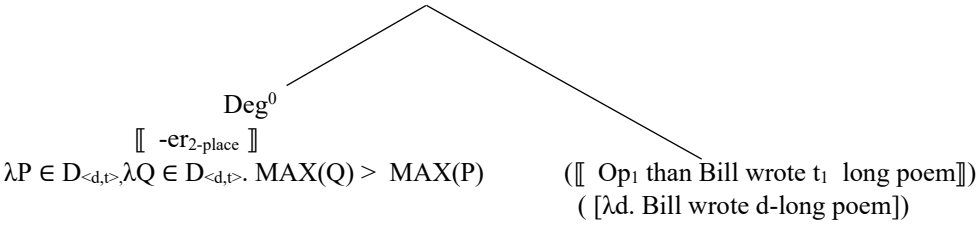
The comparative head in (8.a) can be given a 2-place or 3-place predicate analysis. The 2-place predicate analysis takes the comparative head as an operator that applies to two arguments: the derived predicate of degrees of the target of comparison and the degree abstraction structure of the standard of comparison. The output asserts that the maximal degree of the target degree description exceeds that of the standard degree description. The 2-place comparative operator has the following lexical entry (9) (Stechow, 1984; Heim, 2000; Bhatt & Takahashi, 2011; Beck, 2012).[5]

(9) $[\![\text{ -er}_{\text{2-PLACE}}]\!] =: \lambda P \in D_{<d,t>} \lambda Q \in D_{<d,t>}. \text{MAX}(Q) > \text{MAX}(P)$

On this analysis, the comparative structure in (10) has an LF with the following semantic composition. First, the comparative morpheme $[\![\text{ -er}_{\text{2-PLACE}}]\!]$ which is a quantifier of type <dt,<dt,t>> composes directly with the than-clause of type <d,t> as its first argument (Abu Helal, 2019). The resulting object is the generalized quantifier DegP of type <dt,t> (Abu Helal, 2019).[6]

(10) Mary wrote a longer poem than Bill did.

(11) $[\![\text{DegP}]\!] \quad \lambda Q [\text{MAX}(Q) > \text{MAX}(\lambda d.$ Bill wrote d-long poem)]



The LF in (11) presupposes a clausal degree abstraction structure for the standard of comparison (i.e., than clause): the than-clause has an (elided) CP complement that denotes predicates of degrees of type <d,t>. On this analysis, the than-clause CP complement necessarily involves operator movement that creates a degree binder abstracting over the degree argument of the gradable predicate (Abu Helal, 2019). This amounts to saying that the standard of comparison in English-like languages necessarily has degree abstraction (i.e., $\lambda d \in D_d$. P(d)), rather than individual abstraction (i.e., $\lambda x \in D_e$. P(x)) (Chomsky, 1977; von Stechow, 1984; Heim, 1985, 2001; Pancheva, 2006; Bhatt & Takahashi, 2011; Abu Helal, 2019). [7]

[4] We may take measure phrases as generalized quantifiers that denote predicates of predicates of degrees of type <dt,t>. Then, they can undergo Quantifier Raising and degree abstraction in such a way that the degree argument is quantified over just as other degree modifiers that function as degree quantifiers (Schwartzschild & Wilkinson, 2002; Abu Helal, 2022b).

[5] The 2-place predicate analysis has a wide range of applications: it generates attributive comparatives and sub-comparatives of degrees as well as phrasal comparatives with the standard of comparison that has a clausal source (see Beck et al., 2012).

[6] To derive the surface structure for the comparative with the LF structure in (11), we need to introduce some more assumptions about the syntax of the structure. Following Bresnan (1973), we may assume that the adjective undergoes head movement into the Degree head –er to form the suppletive form (e.g., taller). As for the surface structure, the representative literature on comparatives offers two solutions. The classical one is to assume that the than clause obligatorily extraposes in the phonology (Chomsky, 1977; Selkirk, 1970; Bresnan, 1973; Heim, 2000). Such an analysis is criticized on the grounds that rightward movement lacks motivation beyond the need to derive the surface structure. The other solution is to let the than clause merge counter-cyclically via late merge after the QR-ed -er morpheme has undergone right-adjunction into a scope position at a node of type t (Abu Helal, 2019).

[7] Beck et al. (2004, 2009) and Kennedy (2009) proposed the degree abstraction parameter which differentiates between those languages that have degree quantification in the syntax (e.g., English) and those languages that do not (e.g., Japanese).

(i) Degree abstraction parameter (DAP) (Beck et al., 2004).
A language does/does not have binding of degree variables in the syntax (Abu Helal, 2019).

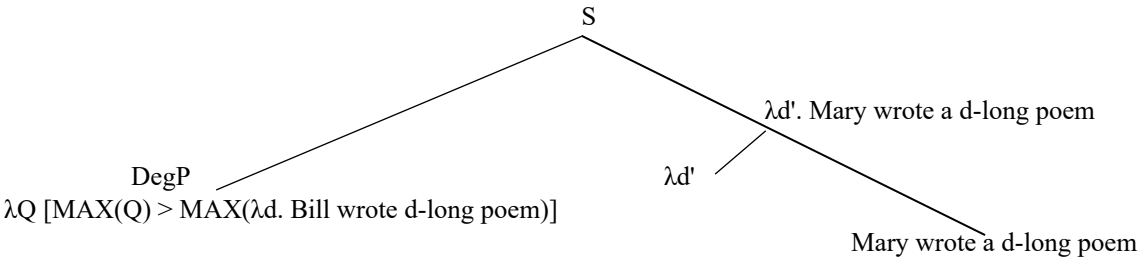
Kennedy (2009), based on previous crosslinguistic investigations, proposed the comparison type parameter which classifies languages with respect to whether or not they have degree abstraction and binding in the than-clause as defined in (ii).

(ii) Comparison type parameter (CTP) (Kennedy, 2009).

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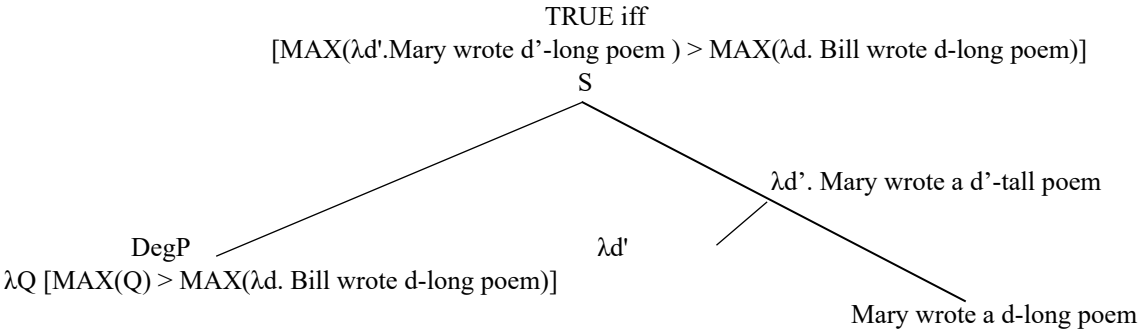
Second, since the DegP is not an element with an appropriate type to compose directly with the adjective, the generalized quantifier DegP in (10) undergoes Raising as Quantifier (QR) into a clause-level position (say Spec IP). QR leaves behind a trace of type d that saturates the degree argument of the gradable adjective and subsequently creates a degree abstraction structure in the main clause as in (12).

(12)



Finally, the generalized quantifier applies to the derived predicate of degrees in the matrix clause to yield the truth value TRUE if the maximal degree to which Mary wrote a long poem exceeds the maximal degree to which Bill wrote a long poem.

(13)



The 3-place comparative operator, on the other hand, involves a different mode of comparison: it compares individuals, rather than degrees. It takes as its arguments two individual-denoting objects and a gradable predicate and it asserts that one individual has the scalar property to a degree that exceeds that of the other individual. The postulation of 3-place operator presupposes the absence a deletion process in the standard of comparison (Hankamer, 1973; Heim, 1985; Kennedy, 2009).[8]

III. Clausal MA-Comparative

Like English clausal comparatives in (1), the *ma*-comparative should make use of a 2-place comparative operator –er which relates degree descriptions. To show this, we argue that the standard of comparison in clausal *ma*-comparatives is interpreted as a degree abstraction structure. Our argument is based on the following facts. First of all, the clausal *ma*-comparative is compatible with sub-deletion as in (14).

(14) *Fatima katab-t qasˤaaʔid ʔablaɣ min ma Omar katab riwayaat*
Fatima wrote-F poems more-eloquent from MA Omar wrote novels
'Fatima wrote more eloquent poems than Omar wrote novels.'

Second, the *ma*-comparative is sensitive to the islandhood conditions, including the negative islandhood condition. Consider the wh- and adjunct islands in (15) and the negative island condition (16).

(15) **Fatima katab-t qaasˤidh ʔablaɣ min ma saʔl l-staz*

A language either has both individual and degree comparison, or has only individual comparison (A language has both 2-place and 3-place comparative morphemes or has only the latter.) (Abu Helal, 2019).

These two parameters can be summarized in terms of the following implicational universal (iii).

(iii) A language may or may not have degree semantics in the expression of comparatives. If yes, a language has both 2-place and 3-place comparative morphemes or has only the latter.

[8] In the presence of his deletion process, a degree abstraction structure can be derived from a deleted CP in the standard of comparison and hence a 2-place comparative operator may apply with no need for the 3-place operator. There have been many suggestions for what kind of deletion it is. Lechner (2004) proposed that it is a kind of gapping or conjunction reduction. Merchant (2009), on the other hand, suggested that it is a TP-ellipsis.

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Fatima wrote-F poems more-eloquent from MA asked the-teacher
mta Omar nazzal-ha min l-net.
when Omar downloaded-it from the-net.
'Mary wrote more eloquent poems than what the teacher asked when Omar downloaded it from the net.'

(16) **qaasʿidt Fatima ʔablaɣ min ma wala waħid nazzal min l-net.*
Poem Mary more-eloquent from MA no one downloaded from the net
'Fatima's poem is more eloquent than nobody downloaded from the net.'

One more argument supporting the fact that the standard of comparison in the ma-comparative is a degree abstraction structure is the fact that the –er operator involved tends to exhibit scope interaction with other scope-bearing expressions in structure. Consider, for example, the intensionalized *ma*-comparative in (17). The sentence is ambiguous between two readings. On the surface reading in which the –er operator takes scope over the modal *lazim* 'must', the poem is exactly 15 line long in all possible worlds. On the inverted reading in which the modal *lazim* 'must' takes scope over the –er operator, the poem is exactly 15 lines where it is shortest in the accessible worlds. This fact indicates that the -er operator should be given a 2-place predicate analysis where it is expected to serve as a quantifier that raises to form a degree abstraction structure.

(17) *qaasʿidt Fatima 10 abyaat. bas lazim tkuun qaasʿidt Omar atʿwal min*
Poem Fatima 10 lines. But must be poem Omar longer from
ma katab-t Fatima bi 5 abyaat b-zaabtʿ
MA wrote-F Fatima by 5 lines exactly.
'Fatima's article is 10 pages long. But it must be the case that Omar's article is longer than that.'

(17') **a. ✓ surface scope: required > -er**
required [[5 lines -er than what Fatima wrote]1 [Omar's poem be t_1- long]]
∀w ∈Acc: max {d: $long_w$(lines, d)} = 15 lines (where Acc = the set of accessible worlds)
b. ✓ inverted scope: –er > required
[5 lines -er than Fatima wrote d-long poem]]1 [required [Omar's poem be t_1-long]]
max {d: ∀w ∈Acc: $long_w$(lines,d)} = 15 lines (See Bhatt and Pancheva, 2004)

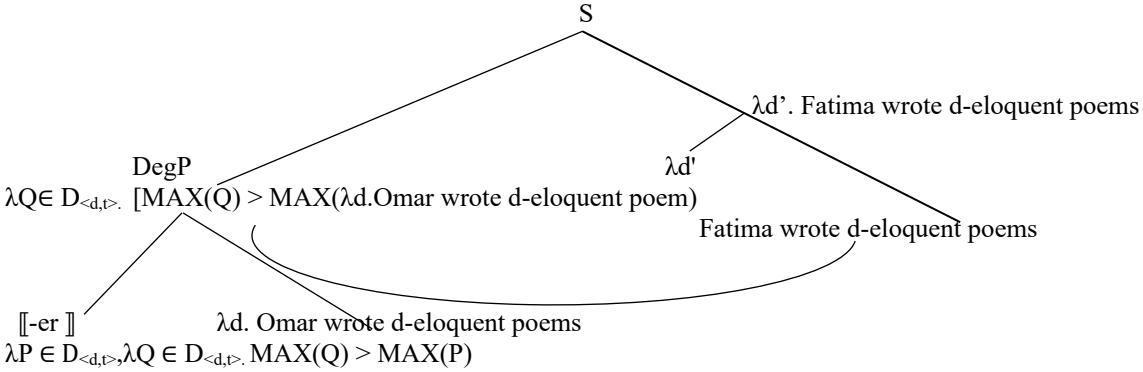
Given these facts, it should be the case that the clausal ma-comparative (e.g., 4.a), repeated as (18) is interpreted in terms of a 2-place predicate that relates degree descriptions.

(18) b. *Fatima katab-t qaasʿidh ʔablaɣ min ma katab Omar*
Fatima wrote-F a poem more-eloquent from MA wrote Omar
'Fatima wrote a more eloquent poem than what Omar wrote.

The following semantic analysis generates the truth conditions of the ma-comparative in (19) based on the 2-place predicate analysis which relates degree descriptions.

(19)

TRUE iff
[MAX(λd'. Fatima wrote d'-eloquent poems) > MAX(λd. Omar wrote d-eloquent poem)]



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IV. Clausal ILLI-Comparative

Unlike clausal ma-comparatives, the clausal illi-comparative involves an individual rather than degree mode of comparison. This section presents a set of arguments supporting the fact that the *illi*-comparative is a phrasal comparative which should be given a direct 3-place predicate analysis. More specifically, the section shows that the *illi*-clause is an individual-denoting free relative that lacks degree abstraction in the standard of comparison.

Consider first the facts in (20) and (21) (i.e., where # indicates ungrammaticality). It is found that the *illi*-comparative is insensitive to syntactic islandhood environments of adjunct and interrogative.

(20) #*Fatima katab-t qaasʿidh ʔablaɣ min illi saʔlat mta raħ tilqiha fi l-nadawah*
Fatima wrote-F a poem more-eloquent from ILLI she asked when will she recite in the seminar
'Fatima wrote a more eloquent poem than the one she asked when she will recite in the seminar.'

(21) #*Fatima katab-t qaasʿidh ʔablaɣ min illi ziʕlat. ʕaʃan Omar intaqadha*
Fatima wrote-F a poem more-eloquent from. ILLI she angry because Omar criticized it
'Fatima wrote a more eloquent poem than the one which she was angry because Omar criticized.'

With no movement in the standard, the ungrammaticality of (20) and (21) is unexpected if we assume the comparative operator to be a 2-place operator relating two (maxima of) degree predicates. Therefore, it should be the case that the standard of comparison in clausal *illi*-comparatives is based on individual-denoting rather than degree abstraction structures. Second, the *illi*-comparative is also indifferent to the negative island as shown in the grammaticality of (22).

(22) *l-qaasʿidh illi katabt-ha Fatima ʔablaɣ min illi wala waħid qaraʔha*
The-poem ILLI wrote-F Fatima more-eloquent from ILLI no one read-it
'The poem that Fatima wrote is more eloquent than the one that nobody read.'

Again, if the comparative operator ⟦ -er⟧ in (22) had a standard of comparison based on degree abstraction, it would have ruled out (22) as having an undefined standard of comparison.[9] Contrary to this, the sentence is grammatical.

Third, the *illi*-comparative does not involve sub-deletion. This also indicates that comparison does not involve degree abstraction that derives a predicate of degrees in the standard as in (23).

(23) **Fatima qaraʔ-t majalat ʔtʿwal min illi Omar qaraʔ riwyaat*
Fatima read-F magazines longer from ILLI Omar read novels
'Fatima read longer magazines than Omar read novels.'

Finally, the intensionalized *illi*-comparative in (24) does not induce scope interaction between the modal intensional operator *lazim tkuun* ' must be' and the comparative-er. The sentence in (24) is unambiguous and the only reading it has is the surface scope reading where the paper is exactly 15 page long in all possible worlds. [10] The inverted scope reading where that the paper is exactly 15 pages in the accessible worlds where it is shortest is absent.

(24) *qaasʿidt Fatima 10 abyaat. bas lazim tkuun qaasʿidt Omar atʿwal min*
Poem Fatima 10 lines. But must be poem Omar longer from that.
min illi katbt-ha Omar bi-5 abyaat b-zaabtʿ.
'Fatima's article is 10 page long. But it must be the case that Omar's article is longer than that.'
✓surface scope: required > -er
required [[5 pages -er than what Fatima wrote-it]1 [Omar's paper be t_1- long]]
∀w ∈Acc: max {d: longw(p,d)} = 15 pages
(where Acc = the set of accessible worlds)
✗inverted scope: –er > required
#[5 pages -er than Fatima wrote d-long paper]]1 [required [Omar's paper be t_1-long]]
max {d: ∀w ∈Acc: longw(p,d)} = 15 pages (See Bhatt & Pancheva, 2004)

The facts in (19-24) indicate that the *illi*-comparative does not involve a standard of comparison based on a degree abstraction structure. The clausal standard in *illi*-comparatives is then an individual-denoting object. To give a 3-place predicate analysis based on comparison of individuals, the *illi* free relative is to be analyzed as an individual-denoting

[9] As Rullmann (1995) put it, the maximality operator is incompatible with downward entailing contexts such as the negative. In (22), if nobody wrote a 10-page paper, it follows that nobody bought a 15-page paper, and so forth. We end up with no maximum degree to serve as the standard of comparison (Abu Helal, 2019).

[10] See Heim (2006), Barbiers et al. (2025), Bhatt and Pancheva (2004) and Beck et al. (2004) for examples from English.

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expression. In JA, the *illi-* relative clause in argumental position is necessarily a referential definite description. It acts as a nominal argument with the denotation of substance-based DP as exemplified in (25).[11]

(25) qara*ʔ-t* *(ya)illi* *katab-u Ali*
I read *what* *wrote Ali*
'I read what Ali wrote.'

The free relative DP has an individual-denoting unique or maximality reading. To see how this is the case, let us imagine the scenario where I read the unique book of philosophy written by Ali, for example. The answer to the question in (25); *illi katab-u Ali* ' what Ali wrote'; refers to the unique book of philosophy written by Ali. This is the 'uniqueness' reading of the *illi*-free relative in (25).

Now, let us imagine another scenario in which Ali has also written three books about physics, math and psychology. When asking the constituent interrogative question in (26) again, the constituent *illi katab-u Ali* ' what Ali wrote' would be the intuitive answer which refers to an exhaustive list of the books that Ali wrote: the list comprising four books written by Ali. This is the 'maximality' reading of the *illi*-free relative in (26).

(26) Q: *ʃu* *illi* *qaraʔt-u?*
What ILLI read. read-it?
'What did you read?'
A: *illi katab-u Ali*
ILLI wrote-it Ali
'What Ali wrote'

It follows then that an argumental *illi*-free relative may function as a referential expression of either atom or plural individual denoting objects. Abu Helal (2021, p. 15) analyzed the definite description meaning of *(ya)illi* free relative in (26) as a predicative structure interpreted as a choice function that maps each set of individuals of type <et> into singleton sets of type <et>, each of which consists of either an atom individual (i.e., uniqueness) or a plural individual (i.e., maximality) (Abu Helal, 2021).

(27) A function f of type <et,et> is a choice function CH(f) if and only if for any set of individuals E, f(E) ⊆ and f(E) ≠ ∅ (Abu Helal, 2021)

On this analysis, the definite description meaning of free *(ya)illi* relative in (27) can be analyzed as follows. First, the *illi* relative is interpreted as a choice function CH that takes the predicate 'λx. Ali wrote x.'and returns the singleton set that contains either a single atomic individual or a single plural individual (Abu Helal, 2021).

(28) CH (⟦ [λx. Ali wrote x] ⟧) ∈ $D_{<et>}$

On the assumption that the choice function in (28) gives singleton predicates with one and only one atomic /plural individual, an iota type shifting operation naturally applies (Abu Hela, 2021). This operation shifts singleton predicates of type <et> into objects of type e which refer to the unique atomic/ plural individual itself (Partee, 1987; Jacobson, 1995; Abu Helal, 2021).

(29) ⟦ *illi katab-u Ali* ⟧ =: ιCH (⟦ [λx. Ali wrote x] ⟧)∈ $D_{e.}$ (Abu Helal, 2021)

Given this analysis, the *illi*-free relative is now an individual-denoting argument. As an individual denoting standard, it should be the case that the illi-comparative involves a 3-place predicate analysis which relates individual-denoting objects rather than degree descriptions. To show this, let us calculate the truth conditions of (4.b), repeated as (30).

(30) *Fatima katab-t qaasʿidh ʔablaɣ min illi katab-ha Omar*
Fatima wrote-F a poem more-eloquent from ILLI wrote-it Omar
'Fatima wrote a more eloquent poem than what Omar wrote.'

Under the 3-place predicate analysis, the comparative –er operator may be Schönfinkelized as shown in (31) which is due to Heim (1985).

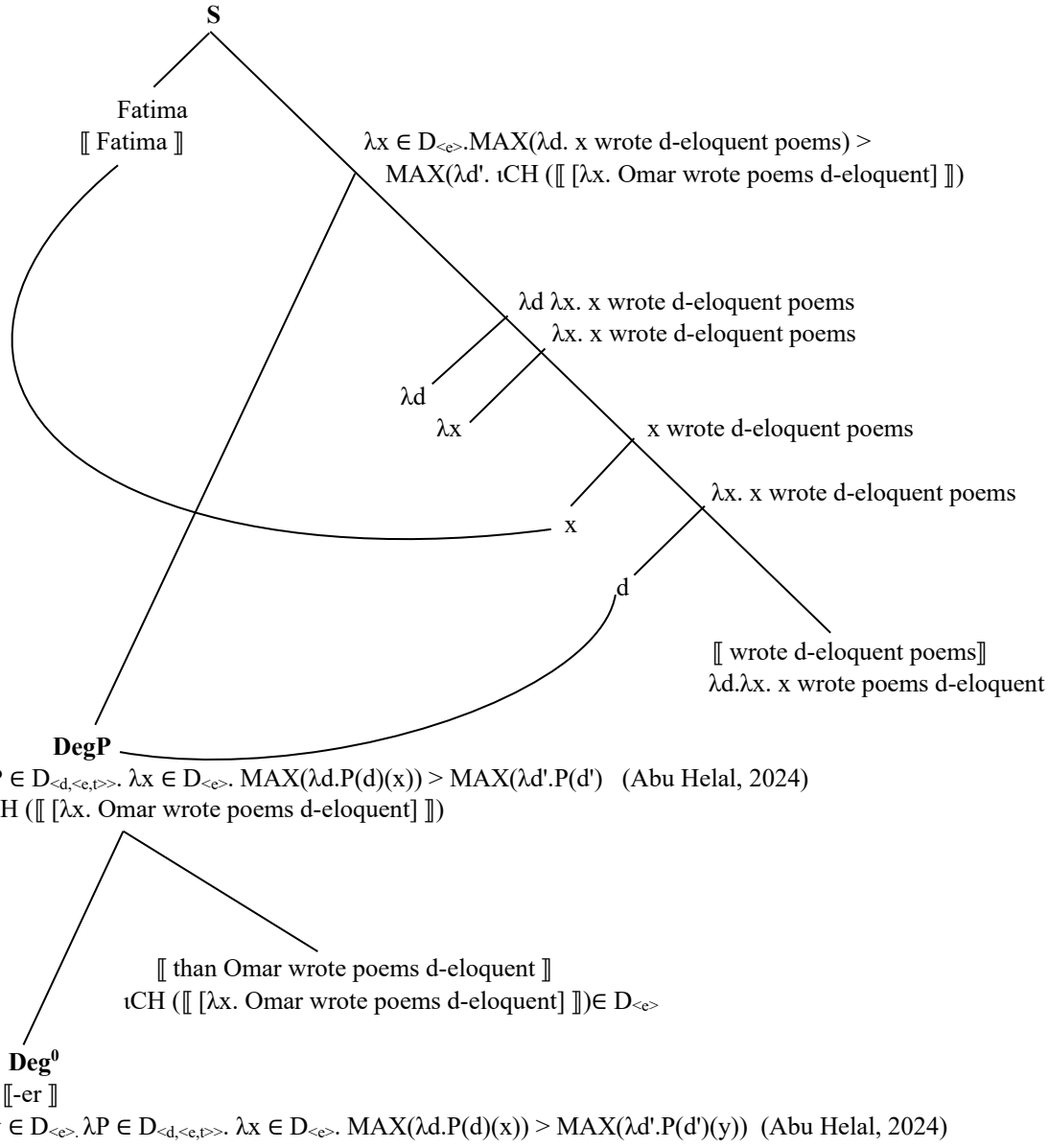
(31) ⟦$\text{-er}_{3\text{-PLACE}}$ ⟧=: λy ∈ $D_{<e>.}$ λP ∈ $D_{<d,<e,t>>}$. λx ∈ $D_{<e>}$. MAX(λd.P(d)(x)) > MAX(λd'.P(d')(y)) (Abu Helal, 2024)

[11] The complementizer *illi* consists of the definite article l 'D' which incorporates a bundle of φ- inflectional features ([+ gender], [+ person, [- number]) (Aoun & Choueiri, 1997; Aoun, 2000; Ouhalla, 2004).

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To derive the truth conditions of (31) using Heim's lexical entry, two invisible operator movements apply: first, the individual-denoting target of comparison moves and creates an individual λ-abstract. Second, the constituent [-er than phrase] undergoes Raising as Quantifier into a location that is between the individual-denoting target and its individual λ-abstract. The two covert operator movements create what is called ' Parasitic Scope' (Barker, 2007; Beck & Sauerland, 2000; Nissenbaum, 1998). Let us show how we can use this semantic analysis to derive the truth conditions of (31) based on comparison of individuals, rather than degrees or degree descriptions (Abu Helal, 2024).

(32) TRUE iff MAX(λd. Fatima wrote d-eloquent poems) >
MAX(λd'. ιCH (⟦ [λx. Omar wrote poems d-eloquent] ⟧)



V. Conclusion

This paper presented and analyzed two forms of clausal comparatives in JA with different semantic denotations, namely the *ma-* and *illi-* comparative. It discussed empirical evidence for the fact that the two forms of clausal comparative should be interpreted differently: while the *ma*-comparative involves comparison based on degree descriptions, the *illi*-comparative draws on comparison based on individual-denoting objects. The paper proceeded to provide two compositional semantic analyses for the two forms of clausal comparative with different Schönfinkelizations of the comparative –er operator. As involving a degree description standard of comparison, the *ma*-comparative is given a 2-place predicate analysis which relates degree descriptions. The *illi*-comparative, on the other hand, receives a 3-place predicate analysis in which the –er relates individual-denoting expressions. The main theoretical implication of the paper is that it contributed further evidence from Jordanian Arabic JA supporting the morphosyntactic approach to clausal

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comparatives in which language-specific morphosyntactic factors may conspire to impose the type of semantics the comparative -er head has (Bhatt & Takahashi, 2011).

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Grapheme–Morphonological Difficulties of English-Speaking Learners at the Initial Stage of Learning Kazakh: Toward Justifying an Independent Pre-A1 Level

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***Abstract*—This study is relevant because the earliest stage of Kazakh as a foreign language remains insufficiently described for English-speaking learners, whose initial acquisition involves not only elementary vocabulary and grammar, but also entry into a new script, unfamiliar sound categories, vowel harmony, and affixal allomorphy. This article aims to justify the need for an independent pre-threshold Pre-A1 stage in Kazakh instruction and to identify the grapheme-phonological and morphonological difficulties that hinder learners' transition to A1. The study is based on an eight-week intensive A1 Kazakh course at the University of Oxford, involving ten native speakers of English across three consecutive groups, and combines structured pedagogical observation, written assignments, audio-supported phonetic exercises, contrastive analysis of the 42 graphemes of the Kazakh Cyrillic alphabet, and qualitative interpretation of recurrent learner errors. The methodological contribution of the study lies in classifying Kazakh Cyrillic graphemes into familiar, deceptive, and unfamiliar groups for Latin-script users and operationalizing this classification through four coefficients: Visual Familiarity Coefficient, Direct Transfer Coefficient, Misfire Rate, and Interference Risk Coefficient. The results show that visual accessibility does not guarantee successful transfer: only 10 of 42 graphemes allow relatively safe direct transfer, while deceptive graphemes create a high risk of orthographically mediated phonological interference. The classroom evidence further shows that substitutions such as /q/ → /k/, /ʁ/ → /g/, and /ө/ → /y/ affect not only pronunciation, but also the recognition of vowel harmony and suffix selection. The findings substantiate a separate Pre-A1 module organized around script orientation, contrastive sound-letter mapping, perceptual training, vowel-harmony recognition, controlled affixal variation, and embedded correction.**

***Index Terms*—Kazakh as a foreign language, Pre-A1, grapheme-phonological interference, Kazakh Cyrillic, morphonology**

I. Introduction

Kazakh as a foreign language is gaining international relevance, but its earliest stage of acquisition remains less described than comparable stages in more widely taught languages. For English-speaking learners, the beginning of Kazakh study requires simultaneous entry into a new script, new sound categories, agglutinative word formation, vowel harmony, and affixal alternation. These domains interact: unstable decoding weakens perception, repetition, word classification, and inflection, while unstable sound categories complicate later grammatical choice. The pre-threshold stage therefore requires independent pedagogical attention rather than treatment as a shortened version of A1.

This problem is supported by intersecting research traditions. The CEFR Companion Volume recognizes Pre-A1 as a level of highly restricted but meaningful language activity before full A1 performance (Council of Europe, 2020). In Kazakh language pedagogy, recent studies show that existing resources and explanations remain insufficient for learners who enter Kazakh through English rather than Russian or another Turkic language (Zhumashova et al., 2023; Rsaliyeva & Chukayeva, 2025). Broader work on orthographic input demonstrates that writing systems shape phonological awareness, phoneme perception, and lexical encoding even when instruction seems mainly oral (Hayes-Harb & Barrios, 2021; Shepperd, 2024). L2 speech models and cross-linguistic similarity research further explain why English-speaking

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learners rely on familiar visual and acoustic categories when processing unfamiliar forms (Best & Tyler, 2007; Ringbom & Jarvis, 2011; Flege & Bohn, 2021).

Previous studies provide several foundations for the present work. Research on second language writing systems shows that orthography can affect phonological representations, lexical learning, and perception-production relations (Cook & Bassetti, 2005; Bassetti, 2006; Hayes-Harb et al., 2010). Studies of Russian Cyrillic among English-speaking learners demonstrate that the most persistent errors often arise from graphically familiar but phonologically misleading letters rather than from entirely unfamiliar symbols (Brennan & Kiskin, 2020; Showalter, 2018, 2020). L2 speech models explain non-native sound assimilation and the need for perceptual training before stable production, while Kazakh and Turkic phonological studies identify vowel harmony as a central structural principle rather than a minor pronunciation detail (Flege & Bohn, 2021; Bazarbayeva, 2012; McCollum, 2018).

A specific gap remains at the intersection of these findings. Orthographic transfer, L2 phoneme perception, pronunciation instruction, Cyrillic learning, Kazakh vowel harmony, and agglutinative morphology are usually examined separately. Yet English-speaking beginners encounter them together before they can operate at A1. Russian Cyrillic findings cannot be transferred directly to Kazakh because Kazakh Cyrillic includes graphemes such as ә, ө, ү, ұ, қ, ғ, ң, and і, which represent language-specific contrasts and participate in vowel-harmony-based morphology. The underdescribed issue is therefore not simply alphabet learning or pronunciation difficulty, but their interaction with early grammatical choice.

The novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing early difficulties as a unified pre-threshold risk zone. The article links script instruction and morphonology as sequential stages of initial Kazakh acquisition, classifies the 42 Kazakh Cyrillic graphemes by visual and phonemic similarity for Latin-script users, and operationalizes the classification through four coefficients: Visual Familiarity Coefficient, Direct Transfer Coefficient, Misfire Rate, and Interference Risk Coefficient. It also refines orthographically mediated phonological interference (OOPHI) as a mechanism in which a familiar-looking grapheme activates an L1-based sound routine before the Kazakh rule is applied. In this way, Pre-A1 is justified through observable learner behavior and measurable alphabetic risk.

The aim of the article is to justify an independent Pre-A1 stage in teaching Kazakh to English-speaking learners by identifying grapheme-phonological and morphonological difficulties that hinder the transition to A1. The study clarifies the role of orthographic input and L2 speech perception, analyzes risk zones in Kazakh Cyrillic, connects grapheme-phonological errors with vowel harmony and affixal variation, and formulates principles for a Pre-A1 module that reduces decoding load and separates perception failure from rule failure.

II. Literature Review

The literature review follows four analytical domains: Kazakh as a foreign language, orthographic input and cross-script transfer, L2 speech perception, and Kazakh morphonology. This organization reflects the learner's path from written form to sound-letter mapping, phoneme categorization, vowel-harmony recognition, and suffix selection.

Key terms are used in a narrow diagnostic sense. Pre-A1 denotes restricted language activity requiring support for decoding, perception, and elementary form-function mapping (Council of Europe, 2020). Grapheme-phonological interference refers to errors caused by mismatch between letter shape and target sound value. Orthographically mediated phonological interference is the activation of an incorrect L1-based sound by a visually familiar L2 grapheme. Morphonological difficulty arises when perception affects morphological choice, as in vowel-harmony-based suffix selection.

Table 1 summarizes the literature domains used to justify an independent Pre-A1 stage for Kazakh.

Table 1
Analytical Domains of the Literature on Pre-A1 Kazakh Instruction for English-Speaking Learners

Domain	*Core issue*	*Representative sources*	*Function in the present study*
Kazakh as a foreign language	Underdeveloped description of the English-speaking beginner's pathway	Ayapova & Thomas, 1992; Batayeva, 2012; Muhamedowa, 2016; Zhumashova et al., 2023	Defines the local and pedagogical need for a Pre-A1 module
Orthographic input and cross-script transfer	Influence of written form on phonological learning and lexical encoding	Cook & Bassetti, 2005; Hayes-Harb & Barrios, 2021; Shepperd, 2024; Showalter, 2020	Explains why visual similarity can be a source of error rather than support
L2 speech perception and pronunciation instruction	Formation of new phoneme categories and perception-production links	Best & Tyler, 2007; Flege & Bohn, 2021; Lee et al., 2015; Saito & Plonsky, 2019	Provides theoretical and instructional grounding for early phonetic diagnosis
Kazakh vowel harmony and morphonology	Interaction between phonemic perception, harmonic classes, and affixal allomorphy	Bazarbayeva, 2012; McCollum, 2018; Zhunisbek, 2018; Rsaliyeva & Chukayeva, 2025	Connects the alphabetic barrier with grammatical development

A. Kazakh as a Foreign Language and the Pre-A1 Problem

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Teaching Kazakh to non-native learners has a long tradition, but it developed unevenly across learner groups. Early and later instructional traditions mainly served Russian-speaking audiences, whose literacy background and grammatical expectations differ substantially from those of English-speaking learners. For the latter group, Kazakh is encountered not only as a new lexical and grammatical system but also as a new alphabetic, phonological, and typological system. This distinction is central because transfer from Russian-based materials cannot automatically solve problems created by English literacy and English phonology.

English-language resources have expanded through textbooks, grammars, and reference materials (Ayapova & Thomas, 1992; Batayeva, 2012; Krippes, 1996; Muhamedowa, 2016). However, these resources do not fully define the micro-stage before A1, when learners are still learning to decode script, map letters to sounds, identify harmonic classes, and understand suffix alternation. Recent studies confirm the need for adapted materials and corpus-based approaches for anglophone learners (Zhumashova et al., 2023; Rsaliyeva & Chukayeva, 2025). The English-speaking beginner therefore cannot be treated as a simple variant of the Russian-speaking beginner.

Kazakh learning also occurs within a multilingual educational ecology shaped by revitalization, trilingual education, and language policy challenges (Kucherbayeva & Smagulova, 2023; Sarmurzin et al., 2024; Yelubayeva et al., 2025). This broader context matters because foreign-language instruction in Kazakh is tied to the international visibility of the language and to the development of specialized materials. Recent studies in Theory and Practice in Language Studies further show that Kazakh material requires models combining structural, pedagogical, corpus-based, and intercultural interpretation (Bakytzhanova et al., 2025; Ormanova et al., 2025). Related work on Turkic terminology and university-level teaching also emphasizes the importance of systematic linguistic organization and technology-supported instruction in Turkic-language education (Zhanzhigitov et al., 2022).

The Pre-A1 problem is therefore both linguistic and instructional. CEFR descriptors acknowledge the stage before A1, but they do not specify the language-specific burden of Kazakh (Council of Europe, 2020). For English-speaking learners, this burden includes Cyrillic recognition, new phonemes, vowel-based suffix choice, and agglutinative compression. The form dostarymyzdykindemiz (a complex possessive-locative-predicative form built on dostar “friends”) illustrates why segmentation and morphonology must be prepared before full A1 progression.

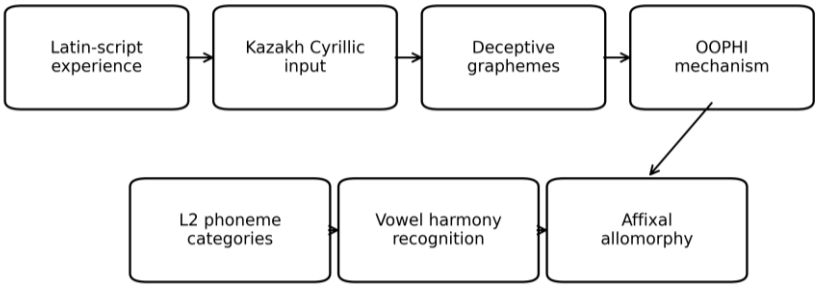


Figure 1. Conceptual Architecture of Pre-Threshold Risk in Initial Kazakh Acquisition

Figure 1 shows that learners do not move harmlessly from script to grammar. Latin-script experience shapes the perception of Kazakh Cyrillic; deceptive graphemes may trigger OOPHI; and this may affect phoneme categorization, vowel harmony, and affixal allomorphy. A Pre-A1 module must therefore address the alphabetic barrier as a morphonological risk.

B. Orthographic Input, Cross-Script Transfer, and Graphemic Interference

Research on second language writing systems rejects the view of orthography as a neutral reflection of speech. Written input can shape phonological representations, speech production, and new word learning (Cook & Bassetti, 2005; Bassetti, 2006; Erdener & Burnham, 2005; Hayes-Harb et al., 2010). In Kazakh, beginners often meet written and spoken forms together, so script can both support and mislead acquisition.

Recent reviews confirm that orthography affects phonological awareness, phoneme perception, syllable structure, and word-form learning in L2 acquisition (Hayes-Harb & Barrios, 2021; Shepperd, 2024). Learners therefore process Kazakh Cyrillic through prior literacy routines rather than as a neutral symbol set. Because Kazakh Cyrillic includes letters for phonemes absent from English, visual similarity must be treated as a measurable risk. The transferability of Cyrillic-Latin handwriting skills also indicates that script learning has sensorimotor and cognitive dimensions (Asselborn et al., 2021). For the present article, the Jaccard similarity principle supports formal comparison of overlap between grapheme sets (Jaccard, 1901).

Russian Cyrillic studies are useful but not directly transferable. Showalter (2018, 2020) and Brennan and Kiskin (2020) show that familiar-looking but misleading letters cause persistent errors in Russian. Kazakh expands this problem because қ, ғ, ң, ә, ө, ұ, ү, and і represent Kazakh-specific phonological contrasts and participate in vowel-harmony-based morphology.

The distinction between familiar, deceptive, and unfamiliar graphemes is therefore central. Familiar graphemes can support positive transfer; deceptive graphemes create a misfire effect by activating an incorrect sound value; unfamiliar

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graphemes require memorization but do not necessarily trigger misleading L1 pronunciation. Misfire Rate captures this risk among familiar-looking symbols.

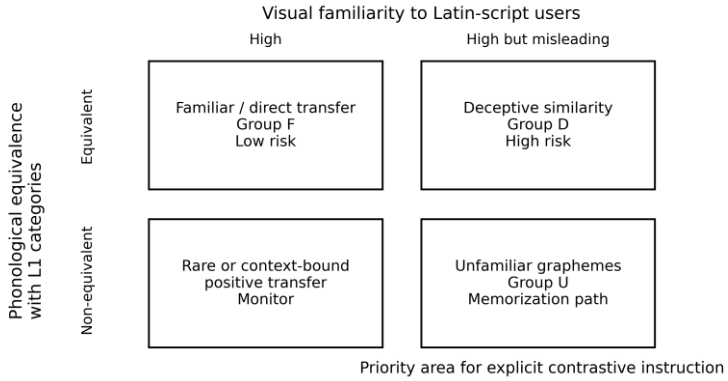


Figure 2. Cross-Script Interference Matrix for English-Speaking Learners of Kazakh Cyrillic

Figure 2 converts orthographic-transfer theory into a diagnostic matrix. The high-risk zone is not low familiarity alone, but visual familiarity without phonological equivalence. This explains why Pre-A1 instruction should include explicit contrastive pairs: how a letter looks and how it is pronounced.

C. L2 Speech Models, Pronunciation Instruction, and Diagnostic Sequencing

L2 speech models explain why some Kazakh sounds are difficult for English-speaking learners. SLM and SLM-r relate acquisition to the distance between target-language categories and L1 categories, while PAM-L2 specifies perceptual assimilation to the closest L1 category (Best & Tyler, 2007; Flege, 1995; Flege & Bohn, 2021). Kazakh /q/, /ʁ/, /ɯ/, /ø/, and /ʏ/ are therefore not peripheral pronunciation details but contrastive categories affecting lexical and morphonological development.

The present data extend these models to script-switching conditions. A deceptive Cyrillic letter can activate a Latin-script or English-based phonological routine before the target sound is processed. Thus, OOPHI functions as a written-input route into perceptual assimilation: the error may begin not only with hearing, but with the way sound is visually cued.

Pronunciation-instruction research supports early intervention. Meta-analyses show that instruction can improve L2 pronunciation, especially when perception, intelligibility, and communicative function are prioritized rather than isolated imitation (Saito, 2012; Lee et al., 2015; Saito & Plonsky, 2019; Thomson & Derwing, 2015; Derwing & Munro, 2015). Studies of orthography and non-native vowel contrasts also show that written forms can influence distinctions later used in morphology (Simon et al., 2010). Applied to Kazakh, this means that Pre-A1 phonetic work should connect sounds to graphemes and to grammatical consequences such as suffix selection.

This literature justifies the exploratory case-study design. Small-sample classroom data are analytically valuable when the aim is to identify mechanisms in context rather than estimate population frequencies. The Oxford course is treated as a high-information case in which typological distance, a new script, and intensive instruction make early difficulty visible (Yin, 2018).

The pedagogical consequence is diagnostic sequencing. If a learner selects the wrong suffix, the cause may be rule failure, incorrect perception of the root vowel, unstable grapheme recognition, or articulatory difficulty. Corrective feedback must identify the level of error before adding grammatical explanation.

D. Vowel Harmony, Morphonology, and the Design of a Pre-A1 Module

Kazakh is an agglutinative Turkic language in which grammatical meanings are expressed through suffixes attached to a stem. Unlike English, it can compress plurality, possession, case, relational meaning, and predication into one word form. This structural difference has a direct effect on early pedagogy. A learner cannot postpone morphonology until after vocabulary and grammar have been acquired, because even elementary forms require recognition of suffix variants. The example dostarymyzdykindemiz (a complex possessive-locative-predicative form built on dostar “friends”) illustrates why segmentation and harmonic recognition must be introduced carefully at the beginning.

Vowel harmony links sound perception with suffix selection. McCollum (2018) shows that Kazakh harmony is a structured phonological system, and comparative Turkic work confirms the importance of positional and phonetic factors (McCollum, 2020). Kazakh descriptions also stress front/back contrasts and language-specific vowels (Bazarbayeva, 2012; Muhamedowa, 2016; Zhunisbek, 2018). Because English lacks productive vowel harmony, the rule cannot be acquired through direct L1 analogy. It must be made visible, audible, and operational through examples and controlled practice.

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Vocabulary research reinforces this point: knowing a word includes form, meaning, use, and grammatical behavior (Nation, 2001; Webb & Nation, 2017). In Kazakh, form includes harmonic class and suffix behavior. A learner who knows only the stem has not yet learned the word as a usable unit.

A Pre-A1 module should therefore move from script orientation and warning about deceptive graphemes to contrastive sound-letter mapping, perceptual training, vowel-harmony recognition, transparent affix families, and embedded correction. This sequence reduces decoding load before grammatical complexity increases.

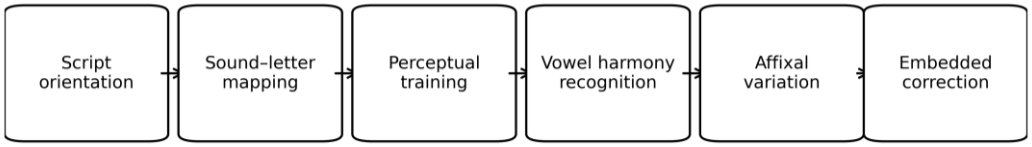


Figure 3. Literature-Based Sequencing of a Kazakh Pre-A1 Module

Figure 3 synthesizes this sequence. It begins with script orientation because written decoding is the first barrier for Latin-script users, but it does not stop there. The sequence moves to sound-letter mapping, perceptual training, vowel-harmony recognition, affixal variation, and embedded correction. This progression also explains the pedagogical usefulness of VFC, DTC, MFR, and IRC: they help determine which graphemes need brief familiarization, which require explicit warning, and which should be memorized without misleading analogy.

The reviewed literature converges on one conclusion: early Kazakh learning by English-speaking learners involves a compound difficulty. Kazakh pedagogy identifies the need for adapted materials; orthographic research explains why written input can support or distort phonological learning; L2 speech models explain category assimilation; pronunciation pedagogy supports early intervention; and Turkic phonology shows why vowel harmony and allomorphy must begin early. None of these traditions alone fully explains the transition from script to morphonology.

The present article addresses the remaining intersection: how Latin-script processing of Kazakh Cyrillic affects sound categories and morphonological decisions. By connecting classroom observation with grapheme classification, the study treats difficult letters, phonemes, and suffixes as one diagnostic chain. This chain moves from deceptive visual similarity to incorrect sound value, from unstable sound category to distorted vowel classification, and from distorted classification to allomorph-selection error. The model therefore does not merely list difficult elements of Kazakh; it explains why they become consequential at the same moment in the learner's trajectory. This is the point at which the literature review leads directly to the methodology: pre-threshold risk must be detected, measured, and transformed into course-design principles.

III. Methods

The study was designed as a qualitative-quantitative exploratory case study of pre-threshold difficulties in initial Kazakh acquisition by English-speaking learners. It combines structured pedagogical observation, written learner output, audio-supported phonetic exercises, and contrastive analysis of the 42 Kazakh Cyrillic graphemes.

The design links observable learner behavior with measurable properties of the input system. Classroom data identify recurring problems in decoding, pronunciation, and suffix selection, while grapheme-based coefficients operationalize alphabetic risk. The Oxford course is therefore used as a high-information case, not a representative population sample (Yin, 2018).

A. Materials and Participants

The empirical basis was an eight-week intensive A1 Kazakh course at the University of Oxford, four academic hours per week, across three consecutive groups. The ten participants were native speakers of English with no prior systematic Kazakh learning. They included students whose research projects concerned Kazakhstan, researchers and professionals in Central Asian studies, language enthusiasts without direct academic ties to the region, and heritage learners of Kazakh origin raised in the United Kingdom. This heterogeneity limits demographic generalization but strengthens the analytical value of the case because similar early difficulties appeared across different motivations and backgrounds.

The material included structured observation notes, written assignments, audio recordings of phonetic exercises, and the 42-grapheme Kazakh Cyrillic inventory. Observation recorded the target form in orthography and IPA transcription, learner production, linguistic context, and recurrence across the group. Written tasks traced grapheme recognition, segmentation, and suffix selection; audio recordings supported identification of recurring phonological substitutions; the grapheme inventory enabled classification by visual familiarity and phonemic correspondence for Latin-script users. Table 2 summarizes the data sources and their analytical functions.

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TABLE 2
EMPIRICAL MATERIAL AND ANALYTICAL FUNCTION OF THE STUDY

Data source	*Scope confirmed by the manuscript*	*Unit of analysis*	*Analytical function*
Structured pedagogical observation	Eight-week Oxford A1 course; three consecutive groups; ten English-speaking learners	Session-level observation record; target form; learner production; linguistic context	Identification of recurring pre-threshold difficulties in script recognition, sound-letter mapping, vowel harmony, and affixal variation
Written assignments	Learner-produced written forms collected during the course	Grapheme use, word form, suffix choice, and segmentation pattern	Detection of errors that appear in written decoding and elementary morphonological production
Audio recordings of phonetic exercises	Recordings of controlled pronunciation and repetition activities	Instructor IPA transcription of target and learner-produced forms	Support for identifying recurring phonological substitutions and perception-production mismatches
Kazakh Cyrillic grapheme inventory	42 graphemes classified into familiar, deceptive, and unfamiliar groups	Grapheme group and risk category	Calculation of VFC, DTC, MFR, and IRC as operational indicators of cross-script interference risk
Suffix and allomorph patterns	Vowel-harmony and consonant-conditioned examples from elementary Kazakh forms	Stem vowel class, final consonant type, and suffix variant	Diagnosis of the transition from phonological recognition to morphonological selection

The material demonstrates triangulation across pedagogical, written, audio-supported, and system-level evidence. Observation provided the instructional context, written assignments revealed how learners processed visible word forms, audio recordings supported interpretation of pronunciation-related errors, and the grapheme inventory translated qualitative difficulty into measurable indicators. This organization also responds to the need to connect the stated methodology with the actual analysis. Instrumental acoustic measurements were not conducted; therefore, phonological claims are limited to recurring classroom patterns documented through instructor IPA transcription and interpreted through L2 speech-learning models.

B. Methods and Instruments

The study integrates structured pedagogical observation, contrastive grapheme analysis, qualitative error analysis, and coefficient-based risk modeling. Observation documented difficulties with Cyrillic, sound-letter correspondences, Kazakh-specific phonemes, vowel harmony, and early affixal variation in instructional interaction.

Contrastive grapheme analysis compared the Latin alphabet familiar to English-speaking learners with Kazakh Cyrillic. The 42 graphemes were grouped as familiar, deceptive, or unfamiliar according to visual and phonemic correspondence. The Jaccard similarity principle made overlap expressible as a ratio rather than an impressionistic judgment and supported calculation of VFC, DTC, MFR, and IRC (Jaccard, 1901). This step was necessary because the main problem is not unfamiliarity alone, but the relation between visible similarity and sound equivalence.

Qualitative error analysis examined only recurring patterns across sessions and groups, not isolated slips. It focused on substitutions involving /q/ → /k/, /ʁ/ → /g/, and /ø/ → /y/, as well as difficulties with the back/front vowel opposition used in suffix selection. Examples were given in Latin transliteration with translations, such as qalada (“in the city”), ğalym (“scholar”), änşi (“singer”), balyqşy (“fisherman”), mektep-ke (“to the school”), and qala-ğa (“to the city”). This format preserved the Kazakh structure while making the examples accessible to international readers.

The interpretation of substitutions was guided by SLM, SLM-r, and PAM-L2, which explain the assimilation of non-native sounds to existing L1 categories (Best & Tyler, 2007; Flege & Bohn, 2021). Combined with orthographic-transfer research, these models support the concept of OOPHI as a script-triggered route into phoneme misclassification.

AI-assisted and digital tools were used only for auxiliary tasks: proofreading, academic wording, terminology consistency, bibliographic organization, transliteration checking, DOI/URL formatting, and table presentation. They were not used to fabricate data, invent learner productions, generate frequency counts, replace IPA-based analysis, or make unsupported interpretations. All classifications, calculations, examples, and conclusions remained subject to human scholarly control.

Table 3 links each method to its data source, analytical operation, and resulting output.

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TABLE 3
CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN DATA, METHODS, AND RESULTS

Methodological component	*Data source*	*Analytical operation*	*Resulting output*
Structured pedagogical observation	Session notes, written tasks, and audio-supported phonetic exercises	Recording target forms, learner productions, contexts, and recurrent difficulties	Diagnostic profile of early grapheme-phonological and morphonological difficulties
Contrastive grapheme analysis	Latin alphabet and 42 Kazakh Cyrillic graphemes	Grouping graphemes into familiar, deceptive, and unfamiliar categories	Classification of interference risk zones for Latin-script users
Coefficient-based modeling	F, D, U groups of the Kazakh Cyrillic alphabet	Calculating VFC, DTC, MFR, and IRC	Quantified indicators of visual familiarity, safe transfer, misfire risk, and overall interference risk
Qualitative error analysis	Target forms and learner productions documented during the course	Separating graphemic, phonological, vowel-harmony, and affixal sources of error	Interpretation of recurring substitutions and suffix-selection difficulties
Pedagogical modeling	Results of diagnostic analysis and Pre-A1 learning constraints	Transforming risk indicators into instructional priorities	Principles for a separate Pre-A1 block before full A1 progression

The methodological design is cumulative: classroom evidence is formalized through grapheme grouping and coefficients, interpreted through L2 speech and orthographic-transfer theory, and converted into Pre-A1 course-design principles. This sequence prevents the recommendations from appearing as general teaching advice detached from the analyzed material and makes clear how each data type contributes to the results.

The design is exploratory but controlled. It is exploratory because the sample is small and context-specific; it is controlled because the claims are tied to documented classroom evidence, a fixed grapheme inventory, explicit formulas, and a defined interpretive procedure. Broader generalization requires larger samples and instrumental acoustic validation.

IV. RESULTS

The 42 Kazakh Cyrillic graphemes were classified according to their visual and phonemic similarity to Latin-script forms (Shepperd, 2024).

The results are presented in four steps: the alphabet-level interference profile, the calculated coefficients, recurrent classroom error patterns, and vowel harmony with affixal allomorphy as the morphonological continuation of the initial grapheme-phonological barrier. This order follows the learner's movement from written input to sound categorization and then to grammatical choice.

The evidence allows quantitative documentation at the alphabet level and qualitative documentation at the classroom level. Coefficients show system-level risk; learner errors show how this risk appears in instruction. Because no acoustic measurements were conducted, the results do not claim instrumental phonetic validation, but they do document recurring patterns through observation, written work, and instructor IPA transcription. This distinction is important for interpreting the results responsibly: the study measures alphabetic risk directly and treats phonological patterns as documented pedagogical evidence rather than as acoustic data.

A. Grapheme-Level Distribution of Interference Risk

The first result concerns the writing system. For Latin-script users, Kazakh Cyrillic is uneven: some letters support direct transfer, some are deceptive, and others require memorization.

TABLE 4
CLASSIFICATION OF KAZAKH CYRILLIC GRAPHEMES BY INTERFERENCE RISK FOR LATIN-SCRIPT USERS

Group	*N*	*Graphemes*	*Description*
F - familiar	10	А, Ә, Б, Е, К, М, О, С, Т, Һ	Visually and phonemically similar to Latin counterparts. Low risk.
D - deceptive	11	В, Ө, Қ, Н, Ң, Р, У, Ұ, Ү, Х, І	Visually similar to Latin letters but different phonemic values. High risk.
U - unfamiliar	21	Г, Ғ, Д, Ж, З, И, Й, Л, П, Ф, Ш, Ы, Ю, Я, Ч, Щ, Э, Ё, Ъ, Ь, Ц	No visual equivalent in Latin. Learned through memorization.

The deceptive group represents the highest methodological risk because visual familiarity may automatically activate an incorrect L1-based sound value.

Table 4 shows that half of the alphabet is visually accessible to Latin-script users, but only 10 graphemes allow safe direct transfer. The 11 deceptive graphemes make visual analogy risky because a familiar shape does not guarantee the correct sound value. The unfamiliar group requires memorization, but it may be less misleading because it does not invite a false L1-based reading.

B. Coefficients of Visual Familiarity, Direct Transfer, and Interference Risk

Four coefficients were calculated from the classification in Table 4 to transform descriptive alphabetic difficulty into operational indicators.

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TABLE 5
QUANTITATIVE COEFFICIENTS OF GRAPHEME-PHONOLOGICAL RISK

Coefficient	*Formula*	*Calculation*	*Value*	*Interpretation for Pre-A1 instruction*
VFC Visual Familiarity Coefficient	(F + D) / N	(10 + 11) / 42	0.50	Moderate visual familiarity: half of the alphabet looks at least partly accessible to Latin-script users.
DTC Direct Transfer Coefficient	F / N	10 / 42	0.238	Low positive transfer: fewer than one quarter of the graphemes can be treated as relatively safe.
MFR Misfire Rate	D / (F + D)	11 / 21	0.524	High misidentification risk among visually familiar signs: deceptive forms slightly outnumber safe familiar forms.
IRC Interference Risk Coefficient	(2D + U) / 2N	(2 × 11 + 21) / 84	0.512	Overall high interference risk: explicit script instruction is required before full A1 progression.

TABLE 6
ROBUSTNESS AND SENSITIVITY CHECKS FOR MFR AND IRC

Scenario	**F / D / U**	**MFR**	**IRC**	**Change from baseline**	**Interpretation**
Baseline classification	10 / 11 / 21	0.524	0.512	—	High misfire and overall interference risk.
One familiar grapheme reclassified as deceptive	9 / 12 / 21	0.571	0.536	+0.048 / +0.024	The risk increases but remains in the same high-risk zone.
One deceptive grapheme reclassified as familiar	11 / 10 / 21	0.476	0.488	-0.048 / -0.024	The indices decrease slightly, but the general interpretation remains stable.
One unfamiliar grapheme reclassified as deceptive	10 / 12 / 20	0.545	0.524	+0.022 / +0.012	A small increase confirms sensitivity to deceptive visual similarity.
One deceptive grapheme reclassified as unfamiliar	10 / 10 / 22	0.500	0.500	-0.024 / -0.012	The indices remain near the baseline high-risk threshold.

Table 6 adds a robustness check for MFR and IRC by testing one-grapheme reclassification scenarios. The strongest change is limited to 0.048 for MFR and 0.024 for IRC, while all scenarios keep the interpretation within the same methodological range: visually deceptive graphemes remain the main source of alphabet-level interference. Therefore, the coefficients should be understood as stable descriptive risk indicators for Pre-A1 course design rather than as population estimates requiring inferential statistics.

The coefficients in Table 5 show moderate visual familiarity, low direct transfer, high misfire risk among familiar-looking symbols, and a substantial overall interference risk.

The key result is the gap between VFC and DTC. Visual accessibility covers half of the alphabet, but safe transfer covers only about one quarter. Thus, an analogy-based strategy is unreliable at Pre-A1 and must be replaced by explicit contrastive instruction. This also explains why the alphabet should not be presented as a short technical introduction before grammar.

C. Recurrent Grapheme-Phonological Error Patterns in Classroom Data

Structured observation showed that alphabet-level risk appeared in recurring learner productions, especially when a deceptive or unfamiliar grapheme was connected with a Kazakh-specific phoneme.

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TABLE 7
RECURRENT GRAPHEME-PHONOLOGICAL ERROR PATTERNS DOCUMENTED IN THE OXFORD COURSE

Diagnostic focus	*Target form / category*	*Typical learner production or error*	*Linguistic context*	*Evidence available in the manuscript materials*
Uvular stop	Kazakh /q/; grapheme Қ; example: qalada (“in the city”)	/q/ → /k/	Initial sound-letter mapping and basic lexical reading	Reported as one of the stable substitutions; belongs to the high-risk Kazakh-specific sound group.
Voiced uvular fricative	Kazakh /ʁ/; grapheme Ғ; example: ğalym (“scholar”)	/ʁ/ → /g/	Reading and repetition of forms containing Kazakh-specific consonants	Reported as a predictable substitution based on the closest L1 category.
Front rounded vowel	Kazakh /ø/; grapheme Ө; example: özen (“river”)	/ø/ → /y/ or another English-based vowel approximation	Perception and production of vowels absent from English	Reported as a stable substitution in the discussion of Oxford data.
Back unrounded vowel	Kazakh /ɯ/; grapheme Ы; example: balyqşy (“fisherman”)	Unstable English-based vowel approximation	Vowel classification before suffix selection	Included among the Kazakh sounds that produced stable substitution difficulty.
Control case	Kazakh /ŋ/; grapheme Ң; example: jaŋa (“new”)	No stable difficulty reported due to English ng analogy	Sound-letter mapping and syllable-final/nasal recognition	Presented as an internal control example: L1 analogue reduces the problem.

Table 7 supports the phonological claims by linking target forms, typical learner productions, linguistic context, and diagnostic interpretation. The substitutions /q/ → /k/, /ʁ/ → /g/, and /ø/ → /y/ recurred across classroom data and correspond to predictable assimilation to English-like categories. By contrast, /ŋ/ was easier because English already provides a comparable category through the English sequence ng in words such as sing and running, which functions as an internal control example. The table therefore shows not only that some sounds were difficult, but also that difficulty depended on the availability or absence of a usable L1 perceptual category. These data support a diagnostic chain: a deceptive or unfamiliar grapheme can trigger an incorrect sound value; the unstable category can affect vowel classification; and this can lead to suffix-selection errors.

D. Vowel Harmony and Suffix-Vowel Selection

After the grapheme-phonological barrier, learners faced morphonological difficulties connected with vowel harmony. The back/front distinction was learned more effectively when explained as a vowel-class system rather than through the potentially misleading hard/soft terminology.

The central result is that vowel harmony directly influenced early grammar. To choose a suffix, learners had to identify the stem vowel class before selecting a back or front variant.

TABLE 8
TWO TYPES OF SUFFIX VOWELS IN EARLY KAZAKH MORPHONOLOGY

Type	*Back-vowel variants*	*Front-vowel variants*	*Examples in Latin transliteration with translation*
a / e	-da, -ta, -lar, -dar, -ğa	-de, -te, -ler, -der, -ge	adam-da (“in/at a person”); adam-dar (“people”); äje-de (“at grandmother”); äje-ler (“grandmothers”)
y / i	-dy, -ty, -nyŋ, -dyŋ	-di, -ti, -niŋ, -diŋ	auyl-dy (“the village”, accusative); halyq-tyŋ (“of the people”); til-di (“the language”, accusative); mektep-tiŋ (“of the school”)

Table 8 shows that even elementary suffixes require the learner to connect stem vowel quality with suffix choice. This makes vowel harmony an operational grammar skill, not only a pronunciation topic. At Pre-A1, learners need repeated exposure to transparent suffix families before they are expected to manipulate more complex paradigms.

E. Consonant Assimilation and Affixal Allomorphy

Learners also encountered consonant-conditioned allomorphy, especially in the dative case and predicative endings. They often expected one invariant suffix but met variants such as -ğa/-ge/-qa/-ke, -a/-e after first- and second-person possessive markers, and -na/-ne after third-person possessives. A comparable issue appeared in *men mūğalimmın* (“I am a teacher”) versus *biz mūğalimbiz* (“we are teachers”), where the expected symmetrical form *biz mūğalimmiz* is incorrect. This shows that affix selection depends on several parameters, including vowel class, consonant type, and morphological position.

Table 9 separates vowel-driven and consonant-driven sources of morphonological error.

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TABLE 9
DIAGNOSTIC SEPARATION OF EARLY MORPHONOLOGICAL ERROR SOURCES

Error source	*Observable learner difficulty*	*Representative Kazakh example*	*Diagnostic interpretation*	*Instructional response*
Vowel-harmony source	Learner does not reliably distinguish back/front vowel class of the stem.	änşi (“singer”), not *änşy; balyqşy (“fisherman”), not *balyqşi	Suffix choice fails because harmonic class is unstable.	Perceptual training for vowel classes before paradigm expansion.
Consonant-assimilation source	Learner expects one dative suffix instead of the variants -ğa/-ge/-qa/-ke.	qala-ğa (“to the city”); mektep-ke (“to the school”)	Suffix choice fails because final consonant and voicing conditions are not yet operational.	Contrastive drills organized by stem-final consonant type.
Possessive-position source	Learner applies the general dative pattern after possessive forms.	ata-m-a (“to my father”); bala-sy-na (“to his/her child”)	Morphological position changes the allomorph set.	Teach possessive + case combinations as a separate micro-pattern.
Predicative-ending source	Learner creates a symmetrical form by analogy.	men mūğalimmın (“I am a teacher”) vs biz mūğalimbiz (“we are teachers”); not *biz mūğalimmiz	Analogy is overgeneralized from one person/number form to another.	Introduce personal endings through controlled contrasts, not as a single invariant template.

Table 9 shows that affixal variation must be treated diagnostically. The teacher should determine whether the error comes from vowel classification, consonant assimilation, possessive morphology, or false analogy between personal endings. This separation is pedagogically important because the same incorrect suffix may require different types of feedback.

F. Results-Based Justification of an Independent Pre-A1 Module

Taken together, the results justify an independent Pre-A1 stage for English-speaking learners of Kazakh. VFC, DTC, MFR, and IRC identify alphabetic risk; classroom data identify recurring substitutions; and the morphonological analysis shows that early pronunciation problems affect grammar. The evidence therefore supports a sequential model in which script, sound, vowel harmony, and allomorphy are treated as connected parts of one diagnostic zone.

The initial course should therefore not move directly from alphabet presentation to ordinary A1 grammar. A separate Pre-A1 module should establish script recognition, sound-letter mapping, perceptual contrasts, vowel-harmony recognition, controlled suffix variation, and embedded correction before grammatical complexity increases. The results support a sequence in which the learner first stabilizes the graphic and phonological basis of the word, then uses it for controlled morphonological choice.

V. DISCUSSION

The study aimed to justify an independent Pre-A1 stage for English-speaking learners of Kazakh by identifying grapheme-phonological and morphonological difficulties. The results show that early difficulty is not limited to alphabet memorization or isolated pronunciation, but forms a chain from script recognition to phoneme categorization, vowel-harmony recognition, and suffix selection. The combination of structured observation, written assignments, audio-supported exercises, and coefficient-based modeling makes this chain visible and pedagogically interpretable.

These findings confirm research showing that orthographic input influences L2 phonological acquisition and word learning (Bassetti, 2006; Hayes-Harb & Barrios, 2021). They also extend work on Russian Cyrillic, where familiar-looking letters create phono-lexical errors, by showing that Kazakh-specific graphemes add morphonological consequences (Showalter, 2020; Shepperd, 2024). The contrast between visual familiarity and safe transfer supports the diagnostic value of MFR and IRC, because the most dangerous cases are not necessarily the most visually unfamiliar ones. In this respect, the study refines the general idea of cross-script difficulty: error risk depends on the relationship between visual familiarity, phonological equivalence, and the grammatical role of the sound involved.

The phonological results align with SLM-r and PAM-L2: sounds without stable English equivalents, including /q/, /ʁ/, /ɯ/, /ø/, and /ʏ/, tend to be assimilated to existing L1 categories (Best & Tyler, 2007; Flege & Bohn, 2021). The data add that a written symbol may trigger this assimilation before auditory processing is stabilized. Vowel-harmony errors further show that perception failure and rule failure must be separated in feedback: a wrong suffix may indicate a misunderstood rule, but it may also indicate an unstable vowel category. This distinction is important because repeating a grammatical explanation will not solve an error caused by inaccurate perception of the stem vowel.

The scientific contribution is the integration of orthographic transfer, L2 phoneme perception, and Kazakh morphonology into one Pre-A1 diagnostic model. Practically, the study supports a short but systematic module with script orientation, contrastive sound-letter mapping, perceptual training, vowel-harmony recognition, controlled affixal variation, and embedded correction. Such sequencing can reduce decoding load and make later A1 instruction more stable. It also helps teachers decide whether a learner’s error requires phonetic training, grapheme contrast, or morphonological rule practice. The proposed model is especially relevant for intensive courses, where the pressure to move quickly to vocabulary and grammar can hide unresolved pre-threshold difficulties.

Future research should move from exploratory diagnosis to broader validation. The proposed model should be tested with larger samples, in other institutions, and with learners from different L1 backgrounds. Instrumental acoustic analysis,

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including formant measurements for vowel contrasts and spectral or temporal parameters for place contrasts, would strengthen the validation of instructor IPA transcription. Comparative work with other Turkic languages would show whether VFC, DTC, MFR, and IRC can function as broader tools for diagnosing cross-script and morphonological risk. Longitudinal studies could also determine whether explicit Pre-A1 instruction reduces later A1 errors in suffix selection and pronunciation. Such research would help refine the boundary between language-specific beginner difficulty and transferable principles of cross-script pedagogy.

VI. Conclusion

The study achieved its aim by showing that English-speaking learners face a systematic pre-threshold difficulty in Kazakh. Structured observation, written assignments, audio-supported phonetic exercises, and grapheme classification demonstrated that Cyrillic recognition, sound-letter mapping, phoneme perception, vowel harmony, and affixal allomorphy form an interdependent learning chain rather than separate beginner topics. This confirms the need to treat Pre-A1 as a diagnostic stage with its own content and sequence.

The main contribution is the integration of classroom observation with a formalized model of grapheme-phonological risk. By distinguishing familiar, deceptive, and unfamiliar graphemes and calculating VFC, DTC, MFR, and IRC, the article makes the Pre-A1 stage diagnostically visible and methodologically justified. It also specifies OOPHI as a mechanism through which written input can trigger sound-category misclassification. The practical outcome is a structured basis for designing a Kazakh Pre-A1 module before full A1 progression.

The limitations are the small sample, the single-instructor observation format, and the absence of acoustic measurements. Nevertheless, the Oxford case reveals stable mechanisms that can inform course design. Further studies should test the model on larger cohorts, add instrumental phonetic validation, and compare Kazakh with other Turkic languages and non-Latin writing systems. Such work would clarify which elements of the model are language-specific and which can be transferred to broader cross-script language pedagogy.

Declaration of the Use of AI

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Technology Anxiety and Class Size as Boundary of Instructional Effects in L2 Pronunciation: A Moderated Mediation Model

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***Abstract*—Although pronunciation instruction has been shown to improve L2 learners' pronunciation performance, the indirect and moderating effects of learner differences, class size, and technology anxiety on this relationship remain underexplored. Previous studies have primarily focused on direct instructional effects, while anxiety has been an underexplored mediator, and the moderating roles of technology anxiety and class size have received limited attention. Therefore, this study investigates whether learner anxiety mediates the relationship between pronunciation instruction and learner performance, and technology anxiety and class size moderate the relationships among instruction, anxiety, and performance. A moderated mediation model was tested by employing structural equation modeling with data from 349 English learners at a public university. The results show that learner anxiety does not mediate the relationship between pronunciation instruction and pronunciation performance. Technology anxiety does not significantly moderate any relationship in the model. Class size significantly moderates only the relationship between learner anxiety and pronunciation performance. This study contributes to the literature by showing how psychological and contextual factors shape pronunciation performance. It also offers pedagogical implications for optimizing environments for pronunciation learning.**

***Index Terms*—class size, pronunciation instruction, learner anxiety, moderated mediation, technology anxiety**

I. Introduction

Pronunciation plays a crucial role in second-language (L2) learning because mispronouncing a word in the second language can not only undermine motivation to learn but also, more seriously, lead to errors in other language-learning skills (Hodgetts, 2020). Therefore, Lorch (2016) argued that the first stage of L2 learning should focus on accurate pronunciation. As a result, teaching pronunciation to enable L2 learners to pronounce accurately has received considerable attention from researchers. Effective pronunciation instruction includes helping learners distinguish similar sounds through minimal-pair drills (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010) and developing the habit of accurately pronouncing target sounds through listening (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). In addition, providing feedback on learners' pronunciation and reinforcing it through verbal or non-verbal praise are crucial (Saville-Troike, 2006). The pronunciation instruction highlights the potential value of systematically teaching pronunciation in L2 classrooms.

Despite this consensus, empirical findings regarding the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction remain inconsistent. Some studies report improvements in learners after segmental pronunciation training (Rogers & Dalby, 2005; Bent et al., 2007; Collins & Mees, 2013). Other studies show only significant progress when learners are taught with suprasegmentals (Tanner & Landon, 2009; Derwing et al., 2014; Saito & Saito, 2017). Besides, integrating technology into pronunciation learning leads to learner progress in segmentals and suprasegmentals (Rogerson-Revell, 2021). These discrepancies suggest that teaching pronunciation input may not fully explain the outcomes of L2 learners' pronunciation learning since it can influence learners through mediated learner differences and under specific contextual conditions (Pawlak, 2023).

However, most studies in this field are correlational, mainly examining the direct relationships between factors such as beliefs (Jarosz, 2023), anxiety (Szyszka, 2011), motivation (Nagle, 2018), willingness to communicate (Baran-Łucarz, 2014), aptitude (Saito et al., 2019), and working memory (Simard et al., 2020). Although these studies have examined how mediating factors—learner differences—can strengthen, weaken, or even reverse the effects of pronunciation instruction on learner performance, elements such as technology anxiety and class size can serve as modifiers, altering the effectiveness of teaching strategies across different learning contexts. By overlooking both mediating relationships and moderating conditions, current studies risk oversimplifying the complexity of teaching impacts. In addition, these studies might have provided an incomplete picture of how teaching and learning processes work in today's real classrooms.

From a theoretical standpoint, the complexity of pronunciation learning cannot be fully explained by a single

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framework; it can involve the interplay of multiple dimensions. One important perspective comes from some social psychologists who have considered language anxiety as a "personality trait" (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993, p. 5). They suggest that emotional factors can interfere with language acquisition by restricting learners' ability to process input and participate actively in communication (MacIntyre, 2017). However, emotional factors alone do not account for all variations in learning outcomes. It can depend on several different factors such as cognitive load. It highlights the balance between instructional demands and learners' cognitive capacity. This can either support or hinder performance, especially in environments where technology is involved (Mitchell et al., 2019). In addition, interactional and sociocultural perspectives also emphasize classroom conditions that include active classroom participation, opportunities for interaction, and engagement (Ellis & Sheen, 2006). All of these factors shape how learners experience and develop their pronunciation skills (Mitchell et al., 2019). When considered together, these perspectives suggest that L2 pronunciation learning unfolds through a complex interaction of internal and external factors, rather than following a simple instruction.

Therefore, most previous studies have primarily focused on examining the direct impact of pronunciation instruction on pronunciation outcomes or considering learner-related factors individually, such as anxiety, motivation, and working memory. However, it remains underexplored whether pronunciation instruction can influence pronunciation ability through psychological mechanisms, particularly pronunciation anxiety. At the same time, the role of classroom contextual factors, such as technology anxiety and class size, in moderating the relationships among pronunciation instruction, anxiety, and pronunciation performance has received limited attention. In particular, it is still unclear whether these effects are positive or negative, strong or weak, in specific teaching contexts. Methodologically, most previous studies have examined isolated relationships or have focused mainly on direct effects. Few have considered multiple variables simultaneously within an integrated research design. Consequently, there is a need for studies that use linear structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships among pronunciation teaching, pronunciation anxiety, pronunciation ability, technology anxiety, and class size.

To address these limitations, the present study proposes an integrated moderated mediation model. This model integrates instructional, psychological, and contextual factors in pronunciation learning. This model allows researchers to test multiple effects simultaneously. This study provides a clearer understanding of whether and to what extent pronunciation instruction influences pronunciation performance.

II. Literature Review

A. The Direct Effect of Pronunciation Instruction on Pronunciation Performance

Pronunciation instruction (PI) has long been regarded as an important part of L2 learning because mispronunciation can do more than reduce speech clarity (Sardegna & Jarosz, 2023). Simultaneously, it helps learners gradually improve their pronunciation in terms of intelligibility and accuracy. PI contributes to improving pronunciation awareness in L2 learners and leads to better Pronunciation performance (PP). In many classes, L2 learners need clear guidance from the teachers. This helps learners improve their awareness of the vocal organs and become familiar with the English phonological system, including segmentals and suprasegmentals (Jarosz, 2023). All these elements will help learners develop comprehensively in accuracy and fluency, as Waniek-Klimczak (2003) asserts. For that reason, pronunciation might be treated as an early instructional priority in L2 classrooms, particularly when learners need support in producing target-language sounds more accurately.

In practice, PI support can take different forms. Some techniques help the learners, such as teacher gestures and actions (Howatt, 1984), a series of listening and repetition exercises (Larsen-Freeman, 2000), habit formation in learners (Richards & Rogers, 2001), and minimal pair exercises (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). In addition, teacher feedback is also an important part of the pronunciation teaching process, helping L2 learners pronounce effectively. Thanks to teacher feedback, learners can improve their pronunciation skills and enhance their L2 awareness (Zhang & Yuan, 2020). Teacher feedback can also foster the development of production and cognitive skills (Kennedy et al., 2014). Teachers' feedback remains central to the instructional process because learners often need explicit guidance to notice errors and adjust their pronunciation. Hence, pronunciation instruction is not limited to presenting phonological content. It also organizes how learners practice, how learners manage, and how learners refine their output through the teacher's feedback in the pronunciation classroom.

From the complexity given, pronunciation learning does not appear to follow a simple one-way path from teaching to performance. Effects of the pronunciation learning process may unfold through learner-related processes and under specific contextual conditions. Besides, PI consistently offers learners opportunities to notice phonological features, practice them repeatedly, and receive the teacher's feedback. In doing so, it may improve not only accuracy in segmental and suprasegmental production but also intelligibility in communication. On that basis, it remains reasonable to expect that PI will contribute positively to pronunciation performance and to what extent. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3. Pronunciation instruction is expected to positively affect pronunciation performance.

B. Pronunciation Anxiety as a Mediating Mechanism

In addition to directly affecting pronunciation performance, pronunciation instruction may indirectly influence it through pronunciation anxiety (AN) as a learner-related factor (Pawlak, 2023). AN arises from specific language-learning

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contexts rather than general personality traits (Ellis, 2015). Consequently, high levels of anxiety tend to hinder language learning effectiveness and achievement. Common anxiety in learning pronunciation includes peer comparison (Bailey, 1983), spontaneous communication, fear of negative judgment, and language exams (Horwitz et al., 1986). Furthermore, high anxiety can limit working memory processing, reducing learners' ability to process input and absorb feedback (Sheen, 2008). Hence, anxiety does not affect all learners in the same way, as learners vary greatly in what they perceive: a task that is stressful for one learner may be comfortable for another (Horwitz, 2001). Pronunciation is an easily detectable aspect of L2 use because learners' errors are audible to teachers and peers; as a result, many learners feel stressed, embarrassed, or afraid of negative judgment when pronouncing in the target language.

This emotional dimension matters because it can affect how learners respond to pronunciation instruction. High AN may reduce processing efficiency, particularly in low working memory. It also makes the learning process more difficult for learners to absorb corrective input. As Horwitz (2001) notes that learners differ in how they interpret classroom demands. In pronunciation learning, such variation is important because it helps explain the reason: the same instructional input may lead to different outcomes across learners. Pronunciation instruction may partly influence pronunciation performance by reducing learners' AN during the pronunciation process. Explicit instruction and supportive teacher feedback may make pronunciation practice less stressful and more relaxed. This argument also aligns with Pawlak's discussion of learner differences, which includes anxiety among the variables that may help explain how pronunciation instruction affects learning outcomes.

At present, however, much of the relevant research remains correlational and gives greater attention to direct relationships than to explanatory mechanisms embedded within an integrated model (Pawlak, 2023). As a result, there is still limited evidence on whether pronunciation instruction affects pronunciation performance indirectly through changes in learners' AN, particularly in the same or different directions and their degree of impact. This gap provides a comprehensive rationale for treating AN as a mediator in the present study, and the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Pronunciation instruction is expected to negatively influence pronunciation anxiety.

H2: Pronunciation anxiety is expected to negatively influence pronunciation performance.

H4: Pronunciation anxiety is expected to mediate the relationship between pronunciation instruction and pronunciation performance.

C. The Moderating Role of Technology Anxiety and Class Size in L2 Pronunciation Learning

In addition to the psychological factor, contextual conditions may influence how instructional effects unfold. Technology Anxiety and Class Size are two important contextual conditions in contemporary language learning environments.

Technology may provide opportunities to reduce anxiety and strengthen pronunciation learning. During the process of L2 pronunciation, learners often experience anxiety due to fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, or a lack of confidence when speaking in front of others (Ellis, 2015). However, technological developments in pronunciation have created many opportunities to alleviate anxiety. Technological developments effectively support pronunciation in the teaching-learning process, such as voice recognition software, pronunciation practice apps, and online learning platforms (Bueno-Alastuey & Gómez-Lacabex, 2022). Moreover, learners can be corrected for pronunciation errors without fear of being judged (Strik et al., 2008). In addition, technology also helps learners control their learning pace (Flege, 2009). These benefits suggest that when technology is used effectively, pronunciation instruction may be more effective at reducing pronunciation anxiety.

However, when learners experience technology anxiety (TECH), these benefits may be weakened. This may happen because learners who are not proficient in computers experience discomfort when using them (Chakim et al., 2023). This can negatively affect their learning, and lead to psychological pressure around the use of computers in their studies. Psychological pressure, considered a cognitive load, has been identified as a key mechanism linking TECH to learner anxiety (Puri et al., 2025). TECH is an individual's emotional fear of using or interacting with computers. Therefore, TECH is a significant barrier affecting computer use, learning, and ultimately the learning activities and academic achievement of students. Hence, further research is needed to examine the negative moderating effects of TECH on the relationships among pronunciation instruction and pronunciation anxiety, pronunciation anxiety and pronunciation performance, and pronunciation instruction and pronunciation performance. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5a: Technology anxiety is expected to weaken the negative relationship between pronunciation instruction and pronunciation anxiety.

H5b: Technology anxiety is expected to strengthen the negative relationship between pronunciation anxiety and pronunciation performance.

H5c: Technology anxiety is expected to weaken the positive relationship between pronunciation instruction and pronunciation performance.

In addition, class size (CS) represents an important contextual condition in pronunciation learning. It may influence how pronunciation instruction affects pronunciation anxiety, how pronunciation anxiety influences pronunciation performance, and how pronunciation instruction directly affects pronunciation performance. Aoumeur (2017) indicated that CS can affect learners' learning and performance, as well as teachers' instructional practices. In smaller classes, they tend to create a more supportive learning environment and pronunciation instruction is perceived as more effective (Finn

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et al., 2003). Learners are more engaged in practice actively and receive specific feedback. Consequently, although they are more likely to achieve better learning outcome, increased participation and exposure may also raise their anxiety levels due to more frequent performance in front of others (Raja, 2017). In contrast, in larger classes, learners typically have fewer opportunities to speak, limited chances to practice, and receive less individualized feedback from teachers. As a result, their anxiety may not necessarily increase, and CS may not be significantly associated with learners' anxiety (Moneva et al., 2020). When the level of pronunciation instruction remains constant, its impact on reducing anxiety and improving performance may vary across CSs. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6a: Large class size is expected to weaken the negative relationship between pronunciation instruction and pronunciation anxiety.

H6b: Large class size is expected to weaken the negative relationship between pronunciation anxiety and pronunciation performance.

H6c: Large class size is expected to weaken the positive relationship between pronunciation instruction and pronunciation performance.

To sum up, this study views pronunciation learning as a process shaped by both internal factors and external conditions. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research question:

How does pronunciation instruction influence learners' pronunciation performance through anxiety, and how do technology anxiety and class size moderate these relationships?

To answer this question, a conceptual model is developed to illustrate the proposed relationships among five constructs: pronunciation instruction (PI), anxiety (AN), pronunciation performance (PP), class size (CS), and technology anxiety (TECH), as presented in Figure 1:

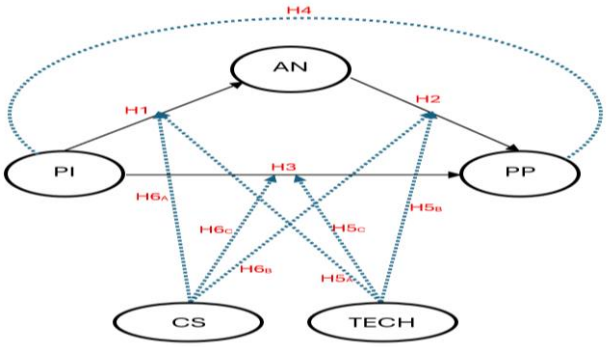


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Relationships of PI, AN, PP, CS, TECH

III. Research Method

This study used a quantitative research design with survey data to simultaneously examine the relationships among pronunciation instruction (PI), pronunciation anxiety (AN), pronunciation performance (PP), class size (CS), and technology anxiety (TECH). In addition, the PLS-SEM method was chosen because of its predictive ability. The objective is to explain pronunciation anxiety and pronunciation performance in terms of pronunciation instruction and contextual moderating factors. PLS-SEM focuses on maximizing the explained variance (R^2) of these two dependent variables. Therefore, PLS-SEM is well-suited to handle such complexity because it can estimate all relationships simultaneously without strict distribution assumptions (Hair et al., 2014).

A. Sample

A total of 354 non-specialized first-year students from one public university completed the questionnaire. A convenience sampling technique was used. Then, students who had participated in specialized pronunciation courses or possessed certificates from standardized tests were excluded from the sample. This removal helps to avoid bias caused by prior learning experience. After this screening process, the final sample comprised 349 students in the main phase of the research. The sample number was determined based on the sample-size calculation guidelines proposed by Hair et al. (2014). This sample also included a relatively balanced number of male and female participants, which helped improve the representativeness of the data and minimize possible bias related to gender distribution and contextual factors across the university.

B. Instruments

Researchers used online questionnaires via Google Forms as a data collection tool to test mediating and moderating relationships in the proposed model. The survey included five constructs:

Pronunciation instruction was developed from studies by Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) and Bryfonski and Ma (2020), focusing on measuring the level of instruction explicitness and teacher feedback. It included 14 items, with some typical statements such as: "The teacher explains how English sounds are formed (e.g., mouth or tongue position)".

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Pronunciation anxiety was developed based on Ellis (2015), reflecting anxiety aspects such as trait, state, and situation-specific anxiety. It consisted of 7 items, for example: "I feel nervous before I have to pronounce English sounds in class".

Pronunciation performance, developed from Jarosz (2023), included 16 items to assess segmental, suprasegmental, and intelligibility accuracy. Some illustrations are: "I can pronounce English consonant sounds accurately".

Class size consisted of 5 items, developed from Blatchford and Russell (2020), reflecting learners' perceptions of large class size, with typical statements such as: "My class is too large for the teacher to give individual attention".

Technology Anxiety also includes 5 items, developed from Langerock et al. (2025), to measure learners' challenging experiences and feelings with technology in pronunciation learning. A typical example is: "I feel anxious about using technology-based tools to evaluate my pronunciation".

C. Instrument Development and Validation

The survey questionnaire consists of 47 items to measure PI, AN, PP, CS, and TECH. Each question is measured on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questions were initially designed in English and then translated into Vietnamese. To ensure accurate measurement, the questionnaire was reviewed and commented on by two pronunciation instructors. Next, the questionnaire was tested with two non-specialized first-year students to evaluate the comprehensibility of each statement.

A pilot study was conducted with 50 students, after adjustments based on feedback from pronunciation instructors and students. The pilot outcomes were tested with SPSS (V27) using Cronbach's Alpha and EFA. The results showed that all Cronbach's Alpha values were above 0.70 (Aldrich, 2018). This means that the scales had good reliability. All corrected item-total correlation values were higher than 0.30. Therefore, all items were acceptable and were kept for further analysis. The EFA results were also satisfactory. The KMO values were above 0.80, and Bartlett's test was significant at $p < 0.001$ (Aldrich, 2018). These results show that the data were suitable for factor analysis and the measurement scales were reliable.

D. Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS, following a two-stage procedure (Hair et al., 2019). In the first stage, the measurement model was assessed to ensure the reliability and validity of the five constructs. They are indicator reliability (outer loadings), internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability), convergent validity (AVE), multicollinearity (VIF), and discriminant validity (the Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio). In the second stage, the structural model, after bootstrapping, was evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships by examining path coefficients (β), their statistical significance (p-values), explanatory power (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and predictive power (Q^2).

IV. Results

In this section, the researchers present the results of the conceptual model's analysis, which includes two main parts: the measurement model and the structural model in PLS-SEM analysis.

A. The Measurement Model

The measurement model was first assessed to ensure the quality of the constructs. All indicators showed that outer loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019), indicating satisfactory indicator reliability. In terms of internal consistency, both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values for all constructs (PI, AN, PP, CS, TECH) were above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). At the same time, all average variances extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019). This confirms adequate reliability, and Convergent validity was also established. Discriminant validity was verified using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio to lower than 0.85 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Specifically, the collinearity assessment is with VIF < 3.0 (Hair et al., 2019). Taken together, these results indicated that the measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity, supporting its suitability for subsequent structural model analysis with bootstrapping.

B. The Structural Model

After Bootstrapping, the structural model was initially evaluated using path coefficients (β), significance levels (p-values), and effect sizes (f^2). Then, coefficients of determination (R^2) and predictive power (Q^2) were also evaluated.

(a). Direct Effects

The results of the direct effects in the structural model are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Structural Model Results: Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	f^2	p-value	Result
H1	PI → AN	-0.093	0.004	0.254	Not supported
H2	AN → PP	-0.206	0.045	0.000	Supported
H3	PI → PP	0.305	0.040	0.001	Supported

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The direct effects show clear patterns in the relationships among pronunciation instruction, learner anxiety, and pronunciation performance in Table 1 as follows:

PI shows a negative coefficient with learner anxiety (β = −0.093). Although this indicates that increased PI input is associated with a slight reduction in anxiety, this relationship is not statistically significant (p = 0.254), with the effect size being negligible (f^2 = 0.004) (Cohen, 1988). This suggests that PI does not have a statistically significant effect on AN. Therefore, H1 is not supported.

In contrast, AN negatively affects pronunciation performance (β = −0.206, p < 0.001). These figures indicate that a high AN level is associated with poorer performance. Although this relationship is significant, the effect size remains small (f^2 = 0.045) (Cohen, 1988), being still stronger than the relationship between PI and AN. This suggests that AN is a stronger predictor of PP than PI is of AN. Thus, H2 is supported.

PI, on the other hand, demonstrates a positive and significant effect on PP (β = 0.305, p = 0.001). This indicates that PI directly enhances PP. Nevertheless, the effect size is also small (f^2 = 0.040) (Cohen, 1988) and slightly lower than the relationship between AN and PP, implying that while PI is beneficial, its influence is relatively limited. Therefore, H3 is supported.

(b). Mediating Effects

The results of the mediating effects in the structural model are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
STRUCTURAL MODEL RESULTS: MEDIATING EFFECTS

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	p-value	Result
H4	PI → AN → PP	0.019	0.302	Not supported

The mediation result in Table 2 reveals that the indirect effect of PI on PP through AN is very small and not statistically significant (β = 0.019, p = 0.302). This means that PI does not significantly improve PP by reducing AN. Therefore, AN does not mediate the relationship between PI and PP. Thus, H4 is not supported.

(c). Moderating Effects

The results of the moderating effects in the structural model are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
STRUCTURAL MODEL RESULTS: MODERATING EFFECTS

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	f^2	p-value	Result
H5a	TECH x PI -> AN	-0.057	0.008	0.121	Not supported
H5b	TECH x AN -> PP	-0.032	0.001	0.607	Not supported
H5c	TECH x PI -> PP	-0.023	0.003	0.630	Not Supported
H6a	CS x PI -> AN	0.013	0.000	0.780	Not supported
H6b	CS x AN -> PP	0.164	0.035	0.005	Supported
H6c	CS x PI -> PP	0.078	0.008	0.121	Not supported

Regarding the moderating effects in Table 3, TECH does not significantly moderate any of the proposed relationships. The moderation of TECH between PI and AN is negative but non-significant (β = −0.057, p = 0.121) with a negligible effect size (f^2 = 0.008) (Cohen, 1988). These results indicate that a negative aspect of TECH can not change the effect of PI on AN. Similarly, the moderation of TECH between AN and PP is not significant (β = −0.032, p = 0.607) and shows no effect (f^2 = 0.001) (Cohen, 1988). The interaction between TECH and PI on PP is also non-significant (β = −0.023, p = 0.630), with a negligible effect size (f^2 = 0.003). These findings suggest that TECH does not alter the model's relationships, and its negative aspect does not moderate them. Therefore, H5a, H5b, and H5c are not supported.

CS presents a different pattern compared to TECH. The interaction between CS and PI on AN is negligible and non-significant (β = 0.013, p = 0.780, f^2 = 0.000), indicating no moderating effect. Similarly, CS does not significantly moderate the relationship between PI and PP (β = 0.078, p = 0.121), with the effect size being small (f^2 = 0.008). However, CS significantly moderates the relationship between AN and PP (β = 0.164, p = 0.005) with the effect size being small (f^2 = 0.035). The positive and significant interaction effect indicates that a large class size weakens the negative effect of pronunciation anxiety on pronunciation performance. This suggests that classroom context shapes how emotional factors affect learning outcomes. Hence, H6a and H6c are not supported, and H6b is supported. The most notable finding of this study is that CS significantly moderates the relationship between AN and PP, highlighting the critical role of learning context in shaping how emotional factors influence language outcomes.

(d). Model Explanatory Power and Predictive Relevance

This study examines two important indicators: R^2 and Q^2, to assess the quality of this model. R^2 indicates the proportion of variance in the endogenous constructs, like AN and PP. Q^2 simultaneously reflects its out-of-sample predictive relevance. These indicators provide additional evidence of the explanatory power and predictive capability of this model in this study (Hair et al., 2023):

As for Explanatory Power**,** the model explains 22.4% of the variance in pronunciation anxiety and 29.5% of the variance in pronunciation performance. These proportions indicate a moderate level of explanatory power. Additionally,

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the higher proportion of relatively higher R^2 values for PP indicates that the model is more effective at capturing performance-related outcomes than emotional factors, as shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4
MODEL EXPLANATORY POWER (R^2)

Construct	R-square	R-square adjusted
AN	0.235	0.224
PP	0.311	0.295

As for Predictive Power, the Q^2 values indicate moderate predictive relevance for both AN ($Q^2 = 0.153$) and PP ($Q^2 = 0.254$). According to Hair et al. (2023), Q^2 values above zero confirm the model's predictive relevance; values around 0.15 indicate a low level, and values around 0.25 indicate a moderate level. These results suggest that the model demonstrates adequate predictive capability, particularly for PP, as shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5
PREDICTIVE POWER (Q^2)

Construct	Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)
AN	0.153
PP	0.254

To sum up, the results indicate that the model achieves from small to moderate explanatory and predictive power. Particularly, this model predicts PP more strongly than AN. Although most relationships exhibit only small effects, CS emerges as the most influential factor, exerting a moderate impact on both AN and PP. This suggests that the model's predictive strength for performance outcome is driven more by contextual conditions, particularly class size, rather than by technology, as presented in Figure 2:

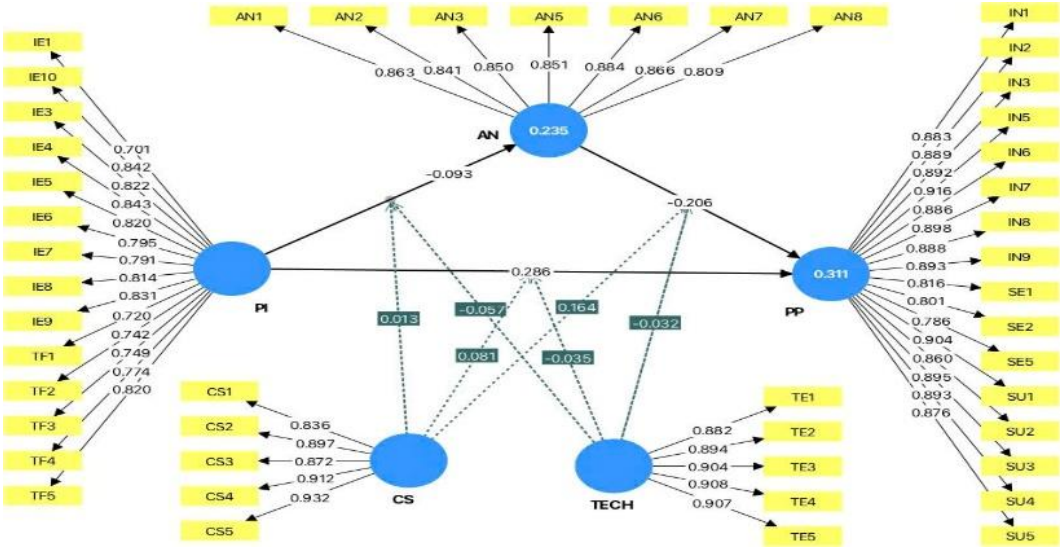


Figure 2. Structural Equation Model of the Relationships of PI, AN, PP, CS, TECH

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide several important insights into the relationships between PI, AN, and PP. The results show that PI did not directly reduce AN levels. This suggests that AN in pronunciation learning is not primarily shaped by PI but is influenced by a wider range of individual and contextual factors. AN can change depending on learners' emotions at different times, in different situations, and in different ways to interact with their surroundings, as Ellis (2015) stated. In addition, learner differences such as working memory, self-confidence, prior learning experiences, and aptitude (Edwards, 2017) may play a more substantial role in shaping AN than instructional input itself. This is also consistent with previous studies, which emphasize the roles of motivation (Nagle, 2018), communicative readiness (Baran-Łucarz, 2014), linguistic aptitude (Saito et al., 2019), and working memory (Simard et al., 2020) in L2 learning and performance. Overall, the effectiveness of PI appears to depend more on learner differences, of which AN is only one component. Therefore, AN should be understood as a relatively independent psychological construct that cannot be easily altered through instruction alone. AN was found to have a significant impact on PP. This finding is consistent with a large body of second-language acquisition research to emphasize the role of affective factors in language production (Ellis, 2015) because high levels of anxiety can disrupt cognitive processing, reduce attentional control, and discourage active participation. These elements ultimately limit learners' opportunities to practice and refine their pronunciation. As noted by fear of negative judgment (Horwitz et al., 1986), it intensifies anxiety and directly affects performance. PI also makes

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a strong direct contribution to PP, highlighting the central role of pronunciation instruction in developing accurate and intelligible pronunciation (Waniek-Klimczak, 2003). These findings also align with previous research, such as Szyszka (2011) and Gómez-Lacabex and Gallardo-del-Puerto (2023).

Notably, the absence of a mediating role suggests that AN is not the primary mechanism through which PI influences PP. As discussed above, AN is only one factor among many learner differences, alongside working memory, self-confidence, prior learning experiences, and aptitude (Edwards, 2017). Therefore, AN is not strong enough to act as a bridge between PI and PP. In other words, although AN influences PP, it is not the main pathway through which teaching impacts learning outcomes. Consequently, the mediating role of AN in this model is considered negligible. Therefore, the findings further suggest that the model demonstrates stronger explanatory and predictive capacity for PP than for AN. This implies that performance outcomes are more directly driven by instructional input and contextual factors, whereas learners' emotions remain influenced by broader individual differences beyond the model. In addition, this model's predictive relevance is more effective at forecasting learning outcomes than at forecasting emotional states. Hence, this reinforces the view that PI plays a more stable role and a measurable role in shaping PP. At the same time, AN is more variable and context-dependent.

A key contribution of this study lies in the moderating role of CS. The results show that CS does not play the same moderating role across all relationships in the model; rather, it moderates differently and selectively. Specifically, CS modulates how AN influences PP, consistent with previous literature emphasizing the contextual role of CS in shaping learning conditions (Aoumeur, 2017). CS can influence learner learning performance and teacher teaching practices. However, the findings in this study suggest that its role may be more modal and situational than previous results. CS becomes significant when considering how AN influences PP. Although CS is significant in the moderating relationship of AN on PP, it does not strongly impact learner anxiety levels. This supports the argument that AN is not strongly determined solely by class size (Moneva et al., 2020). Instead, AN appears to be a psychological factor influenced by many other classroom factors. Although learners may have fewer opportunities to practice and interact, the pressure to perform is often less immediate and less individualized. This may explain the results of this model because when the class is large, as in public universities, it can reduce the extent to which anxiety directly affects performance. Learners are less frequently placed in situations where their performance is closely observed or evaluated.

The TECH does not moderate the proposed hypotheses. This indicates that these negative influences may not be strong enough to alter the relationships among PI, AN, and PP. One possible explanation is that learners today are increasingly familiar with digital tools. They may reduce the anxiety typically associated with TECH. As a result, TECH may function as a neutral rather than disruptive factor in the learning process. Therefore, several studies emphasize its benefits to supportive functions in reducing anxiety through private practice and immediate feedback dominantly (Flege, 2009). This finding shows that TECH is not the influencing factor in the pronunciation teaching-learning process.

VI. Conclusions

This study investigates the moderated mediation model with 349 students, using the PLS-SEM method, which suggests that pronunciation learning is shaped by more than instruction alone. The model explains pronunciation performance more clearly than learner anxiety, indicating that learning outcomes are easier to capture than emotional processes within this framework, with class size as the moderating factor. These empirical findings contribute to our understanding of the pronunciation-teaching and learning process. Particularly, technological anxiety is not a barrier to technology-assisted pronunciation learning, so teachers should maximize the benefits of technology in teaching pronunciation. Educational institutions should design pronunciation classes with appropriate learning conditions, as a reasonable class size can create a better environment for pronunciation practice. This study also has limitations in the data collected through self-reports, the cross-sectional design, and the measurement of variables at a single time point. Therefore, future studies should collect data at multiple time points to improve the generalizability of the findings. Future models could incorporate additional learner differences to provide a more comprehensive understanding of pronunciation development in second-language acquisition.

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APPENDIX. QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

Construct	Item	Questions
PI	IE1	The teacher explains how English sounds are formed (e.g., mouth or tongue position).
	IE3	My teacher explicitly teaches pronunciation using minimal pairs (e.g., ship–sheep).
	IE4	The teacher practices contrasting sounds within the same sentence.
	IE5	The teacher practices contrasting sounds across different sentences.
	IE6	The teacher regularly uses listen-and-repeat drills to practice pronunciation.
	IE7	The teacher explicitly points out which syllable in a word should be stressed.
	IE8	The teacher explicitly teaches the rhythm of English.
	IE9	The teacher explicitly explains rising and falling intonation patterns.
	IE10	The teacher explicitly explains features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation.
	TF1	When my teacher corrects my pronunciation, I notice it.
	TF2	Hearing my teacher repeat my words with correct pronunciation helps me improve.
	TF3	I learn pronunciation better when my teacher clearly tells me what is wrong.
	TF4	My teacher gives frequent feedback on individual sounds.
	TF5	I receive pronunciation feedback to focus on word-level accuracy.
AN	AN1	I feel nervous before I have to pronounce English sounds in class.
	AN2	Before a pronunciation activity begins, I worry about how I will perform the pronunciation.
	AN3	I am afraid that others will think poorly of my pronunciation ability when I make mistakes.
	AN5	I avoid pronouncing English sounds because it makes me feel uncomfortable in class.
	AN6	I feel anxious during pronunciation drills or oral correction.
	AN7	I feel tense when the teacher evaluates my pronunciation.
	AN8	I feel anxious when I know others will evaluate my language performance.
CS	CS1	My class is too large for the teacher to give individual attention to each student.
	CS2	The number of students in my class limits my opportunities to practice.
	CS3	In my class, it is difficult for the teacher to correct everyone's pronunciation.
	CS4	Class size affects the quality of feedback I receive.
	CS5	Because of class size, I receive little pronunciation feedback.
TECH	TE1	I feel stressed when I have to rely on technology to practice pronunciation.
	TE2	I feel uncomfortable using pronunciation-learning technologies.
	TE3	I feel anxious about using technology-based tools to evaluate my pronunciation.
	TE4	It takes a lot of effort to use pronunciation technologies effectively.
	TE5	The features of pronunciation technologies are too complex for me.
PP	SE1	I can accurately pronounce English consonant sounds.
	SE2	I can accurately pronounce English vowel sounds.
	SE5	I can distinguish and produce similar English sounds.
	SU1	I use correct word stress when speaking English.
	SU2	I use sentence stress accurately to highlight important information.
	SU3	My speech rhythm sounds natural in English.
	SU4	I use intonation patterns that match my intended meaning.
	SU5	My speech flows smoothly without unnatural pauses or breaks.
	IN1	I pronounced individual sounds clearly during my speech.
	IN2	My consonant and vowel pronunciation helped others understand my words.
	IN3	My pronunciation at the word level and sentence level is accurate enough for others to understand.
	IN5	I used word stress clearly enough for others to understand my meaning.
	IN6	My sentence stress highlighted important information.
	IN7	My intonation helped convey my intended message.
	IN8	My speech rhythm and pausing made my speech easy to follow.
	IN9	The overall flow of my speech supported understanding.

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Pragmatic Dynamics and Genealogical Legitimacy: An Analysis of Directive Speech Acts in the Batak Toba's *Marria Raja* Forum

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***Abstract*—As the sociolinguistic bedrock of Batak Toba society, the *Dalihan Na Tolu* (DNT) kinship system dictates speech authority and politeness strategies. This study examines how DNT's relational structure shapes illocutionary legitimacy within the *Marria Raja* forum—a customary pre-funeral deliberation. Using an exploratory qualitative approach and an embedded case study of 236 directive utterances, the research integrates Searle and Vanderveken's speech act theory with Brown and Levinson's politeness framework. The findings reveal that illocutionary force is strictly a byproduct of genealogical position rather than individual verbal frequency. The *Dongan Tubu* group (specifically the Suhut Spokesperson) dominated directive production (56.8%) as the discursive architects of consensus. Meanwhile, the *Hulahula* exercised normative authorization through permit functions, while the Boru utilized high-mitigation strategies (beg, supplicate) to uphold the *Somba marhulahula* ethos. The prevalence of tell, permit, and ask sub-acts indicates that customary decision-making relies on information coordination and collective consensus (*Manat*) rather than imperative commands. This research contributes a "Kinship-Based Politeness Model" to cultural pragmatics, asserting that directivity in communal societies is a dynamic, relationally-situated practice defined by situational role rotation.**

***Index Terms*—directive speech acts, *Dalihan Na Tolu*, *Marria Raja*, hierarchical politeness, cultural pragmatics**

I. Introduction

As the sociolinguistic bedrock of the Batak Toba community, the *Dalihan Na Tolu* (DNT) kinship system regulates interactional patterns through three relational pillars: *Hulahula* (wife-givers), *Dongan Tubu* (lineage mates), and *Boru* (wife-takers). Governed by the ethical benchmarks of *Somba* (veneration), *Manat* (caution), and *Elek* (persuasion), DNT functions as a pragmatic value system that determines speech legitimacy and maintains relational equilibrium (Marpaung, 2023). Beyond mere cultural identity, DNT serves as a social mechanism reinforcing moral obligations, where the choice of utterance and degree of directivity are strictly determined by the underlying genealogical configuration (Siahaan et al., 2023).

In the Batak Toba life cycle, the funeral ceremony (*ulaon na gok*) is a sacred juncture involving all DNT elements. However, its social legitimacy is forged within the *Marria Raja*—a deliberative forum where the extended family negotiates customary decisions, task allocations, and technicalities (Aini & Akmal, 2022; Habeahan & Prayitno, 2022). Interactions within *Marria Raja* are complex and argumentative, fraught with interest negotiations and potential face-threatening acts (FTAs) that demand meticulous politeness management (Sitanggang et al., 2024).

While scholarship on DNT has evolved through social and educational lenses (Defa et al., 2020; Harahap et al., 2024), linguistic research on funeral rituals remains dominated by procedural and symbolic analyses (Hutasoit & Siagian, 2025). This focus leaves a significant research gap regarding the pragmatic dynamics of the pre-ritual stage. *Marria Raja* functions as an essential argumentative arena, yet how politeness is operationalized to mitigate kinship conflicts during this stage remains under-examined.

To navigate this high-stakes environment, participants utilize figurative language—specifically *Umpasa* (ritual poetry) and *Umpama* (proverbs)—as pragmatic softening mechanisms. These metaphorical expressions transcend aesthetics, serving as instruments to negotiate directivity and bolster social legitimacy without disrupting communal harmony (Artariah et al., 2024).

Accordingly, this study aims to map the distribution and typology of directive speech acts within the *Marria Raja* forum of the Sari Matua custom. It elucidates how the DNT structure shapes illocutionary legitimacy and politeness

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strategies. The novelty of this research lies in its positioning of *Marria Raja* as the primary locus of pragmatic analysis, offering a conceptual contribution through kinship-based politeness modeling in ritual communication.

II. Literature Review

A. Pragmatics and Language as Social Action in Batak Toba Customary Forums

Pragmatics situates language as a social practice where meaning is context-dependent, constructed through the interplay between participants, communicative objectives, and power dynamics (Carston, 2016; Gibbs & Van Orden, 2012; Situmorang, 2026). Within this framework, language transcends simple information delivery, serving as a primary mechanism for managing social relationships and navigating the complex solidarity dynamics of a society (Carston, 2016; Gibbs & Van Orden, 2012; Korovai, 2025).

This approach is vital for analyzing the *Marria Raja* forum—a locus for customary decision-making regarding Batak Toba funeral rituals. Utterances in this arena carry a performative dimension, functioning to propose, authorize, and affirm collective agreements (Manurung et al., 2023). Bound to the Dalihan Na Tolu kinship structure, communication in *Marria Raja* serves as a pivotal instrument for negotiating and solidifying customary legitimacy within the community (Lumbanraja et al., 2024; Napitupulu et al., 2023).

B. Directive Speech Acts as Instruments for Managing Batak Toba Customary Obligations

Pragmatically, language in customary forums functions as social action where utterances influence behavior and ratify decisions through illocutionary intent (Kyono, 2017; Jin, 2024). In *Marria Raja*, directives act as the primary mechanism for task allocation. Their illocutionary force varies from consultative requests to authoritative mandates, strictly determined by the speaker's genealogical authority within the Dalihan Na Tolu (DNT) framework (Vanderveken, 2004). Typically, negotiations transition from consultative sub-acts during consensus-building among Dongan Tubu to specific instructions during technical execution (Manurung et al., 2023).

Furthermore, DNT's asymmetrical hierarchy dictates the degree of mitigation. The Boru (wife-takers) employ highly mitigated forms (beg, pray) toward the Hulahula (wife-givers), reflecting the Somba marhulahula ethos (Taguchi, 2015). Conversely, high-pressure directives only emerge after genealogical validation, signaling the transition from negotiation to mandatory execution (Yang, 2023). Ultimately, directive sub-acts serve as structural tools that distribute customary duties while institutionalizing the relational order of Batak Toba society.

C. The Concept of Death in Batak Toba Culture

In Batak Toba philosophy, death is a sacred transition known as *Monding (Modom Onding)*, symbolizing an eternal rest rather than a mere physiological end (Sari et al., 2022; Sihotang, 2020). Customary rites are heavily dictated by the deceased's socio-cultural fulfillment. The community recognizes a strict hierarchy of death classifications, tiered from tragic premature deaths—such as *mate di bortian* (in the womb) or *mate bulung* (adolescence)—to the pinnacle of spiritual achievement: *mate saur matua mauli bulung*. This "ideal death" is celebrated as a life victory, occurring only when the deceased passes at an advanced age with all descendants having achieved customary independence (Tobing, 2020; Sihotang, 2020). This status ultimately determines the complexity of the *Marria Raja* forum and the specific directive strategies employed by the *Dalihan Na Tolu* elements.

D. Dalihan Na Tolu: The Socio-Cultural Foundation of Batak Toba Society

Dalihan Na Tolu (DNT), etymologically meaning a "three-legged hearth," provides the structural equilibrium for Batak Toba social interaction (Sihaloho, 2023). This triad defines three complementary roles: *Hulahula* (wife-givers/spiritual protectors), *Dongan Tubu* (agnates/solidarity mates), and *Boru* (wife-takers/facilitators) (Nasution & Hasibuan, 2023; Siahaan & Barus, 2024).

Interaction is governed by three sociolinguistic "golden laws": *Somba marhulahula* (veneration), *Manat mardongan tubu* (caution), and *Elek marboru* (persuasion) (Marpaung, 2023). Adherence to these laws is essential for achieving the cultural missions of *Hagabeon* (procreation), *Hamoraon* (prosperity), and *Hasangapon* (honor) (Simanjuntak et al., 2022). In the *Marria Raja* forum, this kinship triangle dictates the direction and politeness levels of all communication, ensuring that even technical facilitators (*parhobas*) maintain dignity through refined, relationally-authorized discourse (Table 1).

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TABLE 1
ELEMENT OF THE BATAK TOBA *DALIHAN NA TOLU* KINSHIP SYSTEM

No.	*Dalihan Na Tolu* Category	Scope	Description
1.	*Hulahula* / Wife-Givers (Including all families belonging to the same clan as the wife-giver group)	*Tulang*	Maternal uncle (Mother's biological brother)
		Tunggane	Brother-in-law (Wife's biological brother)
		Tulang na poso	Young maternal uncle (Wife's brother's son)
		Hulahula na poso	Daughter-in-law's parents or brothers
		Hulahula na marhaha anggi	Brother-in-law's brothers
		Tulang Rorobot	Maternal granduncle (Mother's mother's brother)
		Bona Tulang	Paternal granduncle (Father's mother's brother)
		Tulang Pangabis (Bona ni ari)	Great-paternal granduncle (Three generations above father's lineage)
2	*Dongan Tubu* / Agnates (Including all relatives belonging to the same paternal clan)	*Dongan sa-ama ni suhut*	Biological brothers (Male)
		Paidua ni suhut	First male cousins (Sharing the same paternal grandparents)
		Hahanggi ni suhut	Male lineage mates (Descending from the same paternal great-grandparents)
		Dongan samarga ni suhut	Clan-mates sharing the same surname (*Marga*)
		Dongan saina ni suhut	Male relatives whose mothers are biological sisters
		Dongan sapadan ni marga	Relatives from different clans bound by an ancestral oath of brotherhood (*Padan*)
		Dongan Sahuta	Fellow villagers or members of the Mutual Aid Association (STM)
3.	Boru / Wife-Takers (Including all families that have married women from the ego's clan)	*Iboto sa-ama ni suhut*	Biological sister and her husband
		Boru tubu ni suhut	Biological daughter and son-in-law
		Namboru dan Amangboru	Paternal aunt and her husband
		Pariban	Mother's brother's daughter and wife's female lineage mates (including their husbands)
		Bere	Nephew (Sister's son)
		Ibebere	Niece's husband (Sister's daughter's husband)

E. The Marria Raja Forum and the Use of Figurative Language

Marria Raja is the requisite deliberative assembly for Batak Toba funeral rituals *(ulaon na gok*), functioning as an argumentative arena saturated with directive speech acts (Ana & Chotimah, 2020). Because directives inherently threaten an interlocutor's "negative face"—the desire for autonomy—participants utilize cultural idioms, specifically *Umpasa* (ritual poetry) and *Umpama* (proverbs), to mitigate intrusive communication (Kayode-Iyasere & Ogidan, 2023).

This figurative strategy operates as a systematic politeness mechanism within the *Dalihan Na Tolu* hierarchy. By embedding directives in metaphorical phrases, speakers articulate sensitive messages indirectly, preserving the interlocutor's honor while upholding the norms of *Somba* (veneration) and *Manat* (caution) (Hisham & Hashim, 2022).

Ultimately, *Marria Raja* exemplifies how figurative language facilitates the navigation of complex directives to ensure social harmony. This practice affirms language as a sociopragmatic tool that reinforces cultural values, ensuring negotiation remains cohesive rather than adversarial (Abuya, 2012).

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a naturalistic qualitative approach, positioning the researcher as the primary instrument for interpreting communication practices within their cultural context (Creswell, 2015). An embedded multiple-case design was utilized to trace both repetitive and variant politeness patterns across several *Marria Raja* events, ensuring that the findings reflect systematic communicative tendencies rather than incidental occurrences.

The research was conducted in Medan, North Sumatra, in November 2025. Medan provides a representative urban-traditional ecosystem where the Batak Toba community maintains customary practices through institutions like the HKBP church and *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (STM) organizations. The primary subjects included the *Raja Parhata* (spokesperson) and representatives of the *Dalihan Na Tolu* elements: *Hulahula* (wife-givers), *Dongan Tubu* (agnates), and *Boru* (wife-takers).

The *Marria Raja* forum is a discursive locus characterized by a high density of directive speech acts, providing a critical environment for observing linguistic mitigation of "negative face" threats (McConalogue, 2019). Participants employ *Umpasa* and *Umpama* as relational tools to maintain DNT normative balance (Danelciuc-Colodrovschi, 2024). This study utilizes an embedded case design, focusing on the *Sari Matua* funeral rites of the late S.H.H. (Table 2), selected for the complex directive interactions inherent in this specific death status.

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TABLE 2
RESEARCH OBJECT DATA: *MARRIA RAJA* FORUM IN THE SARI MATUA FUNERAL CUSTOM

Variable	Research Data Description
Name of Deceased	S.H.H (Ompu ni Si Dapa Doli)
Life Span	1964–2025 (61 Years Old)
Type of Death Status	*Sari Matua (4 Children; 3 married, 1 unmarried)*
Residence / Address	Jl. Bunga Rampai IV, Gg. Kenanga, Simalingkar B, Medan Tuntungan
Data Collection Details	Recorded on Wednesday, March 26, 2025 / Duration: 01:26:45

To ensure a comprehensive representation of the speech hierarchy, participants were selected from all Dalihan Na Tolu (DNT) elements involved in the Sari Matua deliberations (Table 3). This cross-sectional involvement allows for a granular analysis of illocutionary force across diverse genealogical positions.

TABLE 3
CONFIGURATION OF PARTICIPANTS BASED ON *DALIHAN NA TOLU* RELATIONS

No.	*Dalihan Na Tolu* Category	Participant	Description
1.	*Dongan Tubu* (Agnates)		
	a. *Suhut* (JBS) b. *Dongan Sahuta* (DSH) 1) STM 2) STM *hombar balok*	a. Hutagalung b. Local Residents *1)STM Dame* *2)STM Martabe, Dostahi, Oikumene, Kasih, PAS, Horas*	a. Host / Event Owner (Main Spokesperson) b. Local community members 1) Community mutual aid organization 2) Adjoining neighborhood organizations (attending as local witnesses and supporters)
2.	*Hulahula* (Wife-Givers)		
	a. *Hulahula* (HH) b. *Tulang* (Tlng) c. *Bona Tulang* (BT) d. *Bona Ni Ari* (BNA) e. *Tulang Rorobot* (TR) f. *Hulahula Na Marhaha Anggi* (HNA) g. *Hulahula Na Poso* (HNP)	a. Sitanggang b. Sitompul c. Sitompul d. Pandiangan e. Pakpahan f. Sitompul g. None	a. Wife's biological brother b. Maternal uncle (Mother's brother) c. Father's maternal uncle (Grand-uncle) d. Grandfather's maternal uncle (Great-grand-uncle) e. Mother's maternal uncle f. Brother-in-law of elder or younger brother g. Daughter-in-law's parents
3	Boru (Wife-Takers)	Sidabutar, Sidauruk, Sitorus, Pakpahan	Sister's side / Son-in-law's group

To provide a more specific overview of the key informants in this study, the detailed profiles of the participants who contributed to the production of directive speech act data are presented in the table below:

TABLE 4
PROFILE OF KEY INFORMANTS AND PRIMARY PARTICIPANTS

No	Source Code	Role / Explanation	Gender	Occupation / Expertise	Interview Date
1.	JBS	Host's Main Spokesperson	Male	*Raja Adat* (Customary Expert)	March 26, 2025
2.	DTS	Lineage Mate	Male	Advisor	March 26, 2025
3.	DSH	Local Resident	Male	*Raja Huta* (Community Leader)	March 26, 2025
4.	HH	Brother-in-law (Wife's Brother)	Male	*Raja Hata* (Customary Orator)	March 26, 2025
5.	Tlng	Maternal Uncle	Male	*Raja Hata* (Customary Orator)	March 26, 2025
6.	BT	Paternal Granduncle	Male	*Raja Hata* (Customary Orator)	March 26, 2025
7.	BNA	Great-Paternal Granduncle	Male	*Raja Hata* (Customary Orator)	March 26, 2025
8.	TR	Maternal Granduncle (Mother's Side)	Male	*Raja Hata* (Customary Orator)	March 26, 2025
9.	HNA	Brother-in-law of Siblings	Male	*Raja Hata* (Customary Orator)	March 26, 2025
10.	HNP	Daughter-in-law's Father	-	-	-
11.	*Boru*	Son-in-law	Male	*Raja Hata* (Customary Orator)	March 26, 2025

Participants function as sociolinguistic instruments, where their genealogical mandates—*Hulahula* (authorizing), *Dongan Tubu* (managing), and *Boru* (implementing)—construct a negotiation space saturated with directive speech acts. Primary lingual data, comprising Batak Toba and Indonesian utterances, were gathered through four synchronized techniques: (1) passive participant observation to capture naturalistic communication; (2) in-depth interviews to extract cultural motives; (3) orthographically transcribed audio-visual documentation; and (4) Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with academics and Batak cultural experts to validate the pedagogical integration of the findings.

Data validity was secured through dual triangulation. Source triangulation involved cross-referencing data from customary leaders, cultural experts, and field observations. Theoretical triangulation applied a dual analytical framework: Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies and Searle and Vanderveken's (1985) directive speech act theory. This integrative perspective ensures a comprehensive interpretation of the sociopragmatic dynamics within the DNT framework.

Analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, encompassing three iterative stages. Data reduction involved classifying utterances based on directive types and politeness strategies. Data display utilized

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thematic grouping to map relational patterns among the DNT elements. Finally, conclusion drawing was performed incrementally through an iterative verification process to ensure the stability and cultural accuracy of the findings.

IV. Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are derived from the analysis of directive utterances produced within the *Marria Raja* forum during the *Sari Matua* funeral rites of the Batak Toba community in Medan. The analysis was conducted on utterances generated by the three primary elements of *Dalihan Na Tolu*, involving diverse genealogical participants. These participants include the *Suhut* Spokesperson (JBS), the *Suhut* Lineage Mates (DTS), the Local Residents/Mutual Aid Association (DSH/STM), the *Hulahula* (HH), the Maternal Uncle (*Tulang*), the Paternal Granduncle (*Bona Tulang*), the Great-Paternal Granduncle (*Bona ni Ari*), the Maternal Granduncle (*Tulang Rorobot*), the Wife's Brother's Lineage Mates (HNA), the Young Maternal Uncle (HNP), as well as the *Boru*, *Bere* (nephews), and *Simatua Boru* (son-in-law's parents).

The comprehensive data set yielded 236 directive utterances, the distribution of which is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5
Distribution of *Dalihan Na Tolu* Directive Strategies in the *Marria Raja Forum* (*Sari Matua*)

DNT Element	Participant	Number of Utterances	Percentage (%)
Agnates *(Dongan Tubu)*	JBS	134	56,8
	DTS	2	0,8
	DSH/STM	42	17,8
	Subtotal	**178**	**75,4**
Hulahula (Wife-Givers)	HH	16	6,8
	Tlng	18	7,6
	BT	1	0,4
	TR	5	2,1
	HNA	8	3,4
	HNP	1	0,4
	Subtotal	**49**	**20,8**
Boru	*Boru*	5	2,1
	Bere	3	1,3
	Simatua Boru	1	0,4
	Subtotal	**9**	**3,8**
TOTAL		**236**	**100**

The distribution of utterances in Table 5 reveals the dominance of the *Suhut* Spokesperson (56.8%) compared to other elements. This imbalance indicates that discursive authority within the *Marria Raja* forum is centralized in the representation of the *Hasuhutan* as the host. Within the framework of speech acts, the legitimacy to produce directives is determined not only by linguistic form but also by the speaker's social position (Dunin-Kęplicz et al., 2015; Eisenchlas, 2011). This position provides the genealogical legitimacy required to regulate the flow of conversation, formulate consensus, and coordinate intergroup relations (Putra & Tressyalina, 2024; Wisesa, 2018). Consequently, the intensity of directive production is directly correlated with the *Dalihan Na Tolu* kinship structure rather than mere verbal participation frequency.

The contribution of the *Dongan Sahuta/STM* (17.8%) demonstrates their pivotal role in ensuring the customary process, primarily through directive utterances that regulate technical coordination and the distribution of labor for the event. From a speech act perspective, this high intensity is linked to the social legitimacy to provide guidance for the smooth execution of customary rituals (Dunin-Kęplicz et al., 2015; Eisenchlas, 2011). The position of the STM within the *Dalihan Na Tolu* structure provides a genealogical basis for such authority (Sahrul et al., 2024). Conversely, the low frequency of the Suhut Lineage Mates (Dongan Tubu Suhut) (0.8%) does not imply weak solidarity; rather, it suggests that their support is manifested through structural roles rather than verbal quantity, as explained in studies of customary kinship governance (Daar & Jemadi, 2023). Thus, the number of directives in a customary forum is determined more by role function and legitimacy than by the mere act of speaking.

Within the *Hulahula* group, the maternal uncles (*Tulang*) and core *Hulahula* appear to play an essential role in ensuring that the ritual adheres to customary rules. The directive utterances they deliver function to direct and correct the execution of the ceremony, preventing deviations from kinship norms. In speech act theory, this authority arises from the genealogical position they hold, not from the volume of their speech (Dunin-Kęplicz et al., 2015; Villarroel Ordenes et al., 2019). Similarly, the low frequency of the *Boru* (3.8%) does not indicate marginalization. Instead, it reflects the strong internalization of politeness principles within *Dalihan Na Tolu*. The Boru tend to utilize more refined and respectful speech forms, aligning with the concept of face management in hierarchical relations (Brown & Levinson, 1987). However, in the *Marria Raja* forum, such politeness is not merely a strategic choice but an integral part of deep-seated kinship regulations (Daar & Jemadi, 2023; Sahrul et al., 2024). Thus, the disparity in utterance quantity reflects the division of labor and customary legitimacy rather than mere talkativeness.

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These findings affirm that the distribution of directives follows a hierarchy of social legitimacy. The higher the kinship position, the greater the illocutionary mandate possessed. This pattern demonstrates that in *Marria Raja*, directivity is a relationally authorized social practice rather than a mere individual linguistic act.

The distribution of discourse strategies in directive speech acts cannot be understood solely through participant frequency but must also be examined through the genealogical relations underlying the production of utterances. Every directive form is produced within the framework of *Dalihan Na Tolu* positions; thus, the level of directivity, the choice of speech sub-acts, and the illocutionary force are influenced by the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor. To map this configuration, the data is classified into three primary relations: *Dongan Tubu to Dongan Tubu/ Dongan Sahuta/Pariban; Hulahula* to *Boru;* and *Boru* to *Hulahula*. The complete distribution is presented in Table 6 below.

TABLE 6
DIRECTIVE STRATEGIES BASED ON *DALIHAN NA TOLU* RELATIONS IN THE *MARRIA RAJA FORUM* (*SARI MATUA*)

No	Directive Speech Sub-acts	*Dongan Tubu → Dongan Tubu / STM / Pariban*	*Hulahula → Boru*	*Boru → Hulahula*	*Total*
1.	Direct	3	6	-	9
2.	Request	3	1	3	7
3.	Ask	15	5	11	31
4.	Urge	-	-	-	-
5.	Tell	27	27	22	76
6.	Require / Demand	10	2	1	13
7.	Command / Order	1	1	-	2
8.	Forbid / Prohibit	3	1	-	4
9.	Enjoin	3	1	-	4
10.	Permit	8	11	23	42
11.	Suggest	6	1	-	7
12.	Insist	1	-	-	1
13.	Warn	1	2	1	4
14.	Advise	4	3	-	7
15.	Recommend	-	-	-	-
16.	Beg	5	-	3	8
17.	Supplicate	2	-	4	6
18.	Entreat / Beseech / Implore	5	1	5	11
19.	Pray	9	2	6	17
TOTAL		105	63	79	247

Table 6 presents 247 directive sub-acts, the distribution of which follows the structure of genealogical legitimacy within *Dalihan Na Tolu* (DNT), rather than mere linguistic variation. In this system, the right to provide direction is determined by kinship position; thus, the form of the directive is directly correlated with the speaker's social status penutur (Jufri & Wargadinata, 2022; Septi & Nurhayati, 2020). The *Dongan Tubu → Dongan Tubu/STM/Pariban* relation (105 utterances) emerged as the most frequent and diverse, encompassing require/demand (10), suggest (6), advise (4), and pray (9). This indicates that the horizontal space functions as a stage for internal formulation and coordination before decisions are elevated to more hierarchical domains. This finding aligns with pragmatic studies stating that egalitarian relations allow for a wider variation of directives, both direct and indirect (Mawadah & Jazeri, 2024; Widodo et al., 2022). The diversity of functions—ranging from firm instructions to prayers—demonstrates that directives in this forum do not only regulate actions but also carry social and religious dimensions. Thus, the dominance of the Dongan Tubu relation reflects a kinship-based coordinative role in structuring actions before obtaining hierarchical legitimacy (Prayogi et al., 2024; Rahmawati et al., 2023).

The *Hulahula → Boru* relation (63 utterances) exhibits a strong normative function in customary management. Forms such as direct (6), require (2), warn (2), and forbid (1) are employed to maintain the accuracy of ritual procedures, particularly when deviations occur. However, the most dominant forms are tell (27) and permit (11), affirming the *Hulahula*'s role as the provider of authorization and customary legitimacy. This pattern is consistent with findings that in Indonesian culture, established authorities tend to use concise yet illocutionarily effective speech forms (Rahmawati et al., 2023; Septi E.R & Nurhayati, 2020; Widodo et al., 2022). The low frequency of command/order (1) indicates that the Hulahula's power does not rely on harsh commands but on the customary legitimacy inherent in their position. In hierarchical kinship relations, illocutionary force often originates from social norms rather than verbal pressure (Jufri & Wargadinata, 2022; Rudi & Widodo, 2021). Thus, authority is exercised through normative authorization and guidance rather than discursive dominance.

The *Boru → Hulahula* relation (79 utterances) is predominantly filled by "soft" forms, such as permit (23), ask (11), entreat (5), beg (3), supplicate (4), and pray (6). These data show that the *Boru* remain active in conveying customary interests but do so in a manner that respects the *Hulahula*'s status. This implies that participation is not diminished; rather, the mode of delivery is adapted to the relational structure. This aligns with the concept of facework, which views politeness as an effort to maintain social relationships in hierarchical situations rather than merely avoiding conflict (Ali

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& Salih, 2020; Dudley & Cortina, 2008; Ho, 2017). In this kinship system, requesting permission, entreating, and praying serve as acknowledgments of the *Hulahula*'s authority while ensuring the *Boru* remain involved in decision-making. Studies indicate that in tiered relations, subordinate groups tend to utilize indirect strategies to maintain harmony (Daly & Sætre, 2023; Yafi & Maris, 2025). Thus, mitigation in this relation is not merely a linguistic style but an integral part of the etiquette embedded within the DNT structure.

Overall, tell (76) emerged as the most frequently used form. In the *Marria Raja* forum, tell does not merely convey information; it also functions to direct actions subtly without the impression of commanding. This finding resonates with pragmatic research showing that in deliberative forums, directions are often conveyed through more neutral and cooperative forms rather than direct orders (Ananta, 2023; Indarti, 2022). The frequency of permit (42) and ask (31) further emphasizes the consultative nature of the forum. Customary decisions are built through permissions and inquiries leading to collective agreement rather than unilateral pressure. Institutional discourse research also suggests that permissive and interrogative strategies effectively maintain legitimacy while preserving social bonds (Lestari & Mutiaraningrum, 2023; Bom & Mills, 2015).

Conversely, more assertive forms such as command/order (2), forbid (4), and enjoin (4) are rare, while urge and recommend were absent. This pattern indicates that communication in *Marria Raja* prioritizes mutual understanding and harmony over forceful commands. In social contexts emphasizing togetherness, legitimacy is more robustly constructed through consensus than through verbal dominance (Donaghue, 2022; Sönmez & Akbas, 2023).

The discrepancy between the totals in Table 5 (236) and Table 6 (247) is not an error but stems from the situational nature of roles within Dalihan Na Tolu. In the *Marria Raja* forum, an individual may speak as a hulahula when providing direction, and later transition to the Boru position when seeking approval. Because positions shift based on context, a single utterance may be recorded in more than one relation. Furthermore, some utterances involve collective addressing, where a single speech act may have multiple illocutionary targets (Ananta, 2023; Indarti, 2022). These findings confirm that the force of an utterance in *Marria Raja* depends not only on sentence structure but on the kinship position active during the Sari Matua ritual. Pragmatic studies confirm that illocutionary force is heavily influenced by the speaker's social legitimacy (Donaghue, 2022; Ho, 2017). Therefore, directivity in this forum is dynamic and relational, following the active kinship structure.

This study confirms that the distribution of directive speech acts within the *Marria Raja* forum is entirely determined by the *Dalihan Na Tolu* kinship structure. Out of 236 utterances, the *Dongan Tubu*, particularly the *Suhu*t Spokesperson, emerged as the primary producer of directives due to the genealogical legitimacy required to manage deliberations, formulate agreements, and coordinate inter-kinship relations. This finding aligns with kinship anthropology studies suggesting that genealogical position governs speech rights and ritual authority (Bloch, 2010; Liu et al., 2010). However, this research provides concrete empirical evidence of how such legitimacy is realized through measurable and quantitatively distributed directive forms within a specific customary forum.

The role of the *Hulahula*, while not dominant in frequency, remains normatively powerful, consistent with literature that positions senior groups or wife-givers as guardians of ritual validity (Guindi, 2010; Jones, 2010). Distinctively, this study demonstrates that such authority is not always exercised through direct commands but through functions of authorization and procedural correction. Thus, ritual power appears more symbolic and legitimative than coercive. Meanwhile, the low frequency of Boru participation does not imply marginalization. These results enrich previous findings showing that in hierarchical kinship systems, the participation of subordinate groups remains significant even when expressed through mitigative and respectful forms (Daly & Sætre, 2023; Ho, 2017). This study asserts that speech frequency is not always proportional to social influence; rather, relational ethics and position are the primary determinants of illocutionary force.

Overall, the dominance of tell, followed by permit and ask, indicates that customary decisions are built through information coordination, permission requests, and negotiation rather than direct orders. This pattern aligns with kinship and ritual studies emphasizing that decision-making in kinship-based forums relies on consensus and collective legitimacy (Bloch, 2010; Guindi, 2010; Jones, 2010). In this framework, conveying information and seeking approval are the primary mechanisms for building mutual understanding before a decision is ratified.

The findings are also consistent with the view that kinship systems shape communication practices and the distribution of speech authority (Hogeweg et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2010). The choice of directive forms does not stand alone grammatically but follows the active social relation configuration. Unlike modern organizational contexts that frame consensus within formal procedural structures, in *Marria Raja*, the mechanism is rooted in genealogical legitimacy and ritual roles within the *Dalihan Na Tolu* structure. Consequently, consensus is not merely a communication strategy but a consequence of a kinship order that regulates who is authorized to direct, validate, and approve customary actions.

Theoretically, these findings assert that illocutionary force in customary forums is not primarily determined by linguistic form but by genealogical position. Therefore, speech act analysis in kinship-based societies must integrate social anthropology as a determining variable for speech authority distribution. This study also shows that ritual authority is often realized through symbolic legitimacy and normative authorization rather than explicit commands. Consequently, power in ritual communication should be understood as relational and institutionalized rather than solely

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coercive. Practically, these findings provide a conceptual basis for preserving Batak Toba customary practices, particularly in understanding language as an instrument for coordination and ritual legitimacy.

This study has several limitations. The data is derived from a single *Sari Matua* event in one location; thus, the findings cannot yet be generalized to all *Marria Raja* practices or Batak Toba customary variations in other regions. The analysis is limited to transcribed verbal utterances, without examining paralinguistic elements such as intonation, gestures, seating positions, and ritual symbols that may influence illocutionary force. Furthermore, the study focuses on the classification and distribution of directive sub-acts without examining perlocutionary impacts, such as participant responses or the effectiveness of directives in shaping decisions.

Future research could be developed through comparative studies across different rituals and regions to test the stability of these patterns in diverse social contexts. A multimodal approach is essential to include non-verbal aspects accompanying speech. Studies on participant responses and consensus-building processes should also be expanded to understand the concrete impact of directives in customary forums. Integrating pragmatics, anthropology, and traditional communication studies will enrich the analysis, particularly in observing kinship role dynamics amidst social changes like modernization and digitalization.

V. Conslusion

This research confirms that communication within the *Marria Raja* forum is a pragmatic practice strictly governed by the *Dalihan Na Tolu* (DNT) structure, where illocutionary force originates from genealogical legitimacy rather than individual rhetoric. Analysis of 236 directive utterances reveals that discursive control resides primarily with the *Dongan Tubu* (56.8%) as the architects of consensus. Conversely, the *Hulahula* exercise "symbolic power" through normative authorization (permit), while the *Boru* group employs high-mitigation strategies as a manifestation of the *Somba marhulahula* value.

Theoretically, this study proposes a Kinship-Based Politeness Model, asserting that in hierarchical-communal societies, linguistic mitigation is a genealogical moral obligation rather than a mere face-saving tactic. The prevalence of tell, permit, and ask sub-acts proves that Batak Toba conflict resolution prioritizes information synchronization and socio-cultural harmony (Manat) over coercive instructions. Practically, the *Marria Raja* model demonstrates how figurative language (*Umpasa and Umpama*) can bridge conflicting interests while maintaining social cohesion.

While this study is limited to an urban *Sari Matua* event, future research should adopt a multimodal lens—analyzing paralinguistics, kinetics, and proxemics—and conduct comparative rural-urban studies to track the evolution of Batak Toba directivity amidst digital transformation.

Declaration of the Use of AI

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT (version 4o) solely for the purpose of translation from Indonesian to English and checking basic language elements (grammar, spelling, and punctuation). In accordance with the journal's AI policy, the author(s) confirm that thorough human checking and editing were performed after the use of this tool. The author(s) take full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

Furthermore, the author(s) confirm that no AI tools were used in reviewing the literature, generating research hypotheses, collecting or analysing data, generating figures or charts, writing discussions, or generating references.

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Cultural-Semantic Structure of Traditional Kazakh Clothing Names: Evidence From the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus of the Kazakh Language

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***Abstract*—Traditional Kazakh clothing names constitute an important component of national culture and serve as indicators of social relations, cultural values, and the worldview of the Kazakh people. This study examines the frequency structure, taxonomic organization, cultural-semantic functions, and gender-related characteristics of traditional clothing names based on data from the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus of the Kazakh Language. A total of 26 traditional clothing names were selected for analysis. Each item was examined according to its frequency of occurrence and further analyzed through a cultural-semantic coding procedure. The analysis employed several cultural parameters, including gender association, ritual function, social status, protective function, seasonal use, everyday use, and connection with nomadic life. The frequency analysis revealed that *oramal* (scarf), *ton* (fur coat), *shapan* (robe), *borik* (fur cap), and *ishik* (fur garment) are among the most frequently occurring clothing names in the corpus. Taxonomic analysis demonstrated the predominance of outerwear and headwear categories within the traditional Kazakh clothing system. Hierarchical cluster analysis identified three major cultural groups of clothing names: everyday-social clothing, protective-climatic clothing, and ritual-gender-specific clothing. Furthermore, the gender analysis showed that all clothing items associated with ritual functions are linked exclusively to female social identity and life-cycle transitions. The findings demonstrate that traditional clothing names represent a significant system of cultural signs reflecting the social organization, cultural experience, and national worldview of the Kazakh people. The study contributes to research in ethnolinguistics, corpus linguistics, and digital humanities while highlighting the scientific potential of the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus as a resource for investigating ethnocultural knowledge and cultural semantics.**

***Index Terms*—traditional clothing names, Cultural-Representative Subcorpus, National Corpus of the Kazakh Language, ethnolinguistics, linguocultural studies**

I. Introduction

The intensification of globalization has made the preservation, systematization, and transmission of national cultural heritage one of the major concerns of contemporary humanities research. Since the historical memory, worldview, and cultural experience of a people are preserved through language, the study of linguistic representations of national culture has become an important scholarly task. Ethnocultural information encoded in language reflects social structures, everyday practices, value systems, and human interaction with the surrounding environment. In this regard, traditional

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clothing names constitute an important group of ethnocultural units that represent not only the material culture of the Kazakh people but also their national worldview.

In Kazakh culture, clothing is not viewed merely as a practical object used to satisfy everyday needs. Traditional garments function as a system of cultural symbols indicating a person's age, gender, social status, family position, and place within society. For example, *saukele* signifies the social status of a bride, whereas *kimishek* is associated with the cultural image of motherhood. Likewise, such clothing names as *tymaq*, *borik*, *shapan*, and *ishik* reflect social relations and characteristics of the traditional nomadic way of life. Consequently, the study of traditional clothing terminology provides an important means of understanding national cultural codes and cultural identity.

In recent years, increasing attention has been devoted to the digitization of ethnocultural heritage and the preservation of cultural knowledge in digital formats. International experience demonstrates that national corpora have become important tools for collecting, organizing, and analyzing linguistic data. Corpus technologies make it possible to investigate frequency patterns, contextual usage, and cultural characteristics of linguistic units based on empirical evidence. In Kazakhstan, the National Corpus of the Kazakh Language, developed by the A. Baitursynuly Institute of Linguistics, has emerged as a significant scientific resource in this field.

The Cultural-Representative Subcorpus, which forms part of the National Corpus of the Kazakh Language, is a specialized electronic database designed to describe the cultural semantics of ethnocultural units. The subcorpus includes millions of word tokens derived from historical-literary, ethnographic, and academic texts. Its distinctive feature lies in providing cultural-semantic descriptions for each ethnocultural unit. In addition, photographs, illustrations, and video materials are integrated into the database, allowing linguistic and cultural information to be presented in a comprehensive manner.

Numerous studies have addressed ethnocultural units in Kazakh linguistics. The works of A. Kaidar, N. Uali, Zh. Mankeeva, R. Shoibekov, E. Zhanpeisov, and other scholars have explored the ethnolinguistic and linguocultural characteristics of traditional cultural vocabulary. However, traditional clothing names have primarily been examined from descriptive, ethnographic, or lexicographic perspectives. Their frequency structure, cultural-semantic functions, taxonomic organization, and gender-related characteristics have not yet been comprehensively investigated using data from the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to identify the frequency structure, cultural-semantic functions, and gender-related characteristics of traditional Kazakh clothing names based on the materials of the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus. The study examines the taxonomic organization of traditional clothing terminology, systematizes its cultural functions through cultural-semantic coding, and identifies major cultural groupings through cluster analysis.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in the fact that traditional Kazakh clothing names are examined for the first time through an integrated approach combining frequency analysis, cultural-semantic coding, taxonomic classification, and cluster modeling based on corpus data. The findings reveal new possibilities for investigating traditional Kazakh clothing culture through the methods of corpus linguistics, ethnolinguistics, and digital humanities.

II. Literature Review

The development of modern linguistics and information technologies has transformed national corpora into important scientific tools for collecting, storing, and analyzing linguistic data. A corpus enables researchers to process large volumes of texts using computer technologies and to investigate the structure, semantics, frequency patterns, and contextual usage of linguistic units based on empirical evidence (Baranov, 2026; Rykov, 2002). Consequently, corpus linguistics has become one of the most rapidly developing fields in contemporary language studies.

Internationally, such resources as the British National Corpus, Russian National Corpus, Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), Czech National Corpus, and Deutsches Textarchiv serve as major scientific databases for linguistic research. These corpora allow scholars to examine not only structural, stylistic, and genre-related characteristics of language but also the linguistic representation of social and cultural phenomena. The theoretical foundations of corpus linguistics were largely established through the work of John Sinclair, who regarded corpora as empirical tools for describing linguistic norms. Later, McEnery (2019) expanded corpus-based approaches to the investigation of social and cultural phenomena. Davies (2009) and Hajič (1998) further contributed to the development of corpus annotation and digital analytical tools, thereby advancing contemporary corpus linguistics.

In recent years, cultural and multimedia components have become increasingly important in corpus development. Researchers emphasize the need to examine linguistic units not only within textual environments but also within broader cultural contexts (Przepiórkowski et al., 2024). This tendency facilitates the integration of linguistic data with national culture and collective knowledge. As a result, modern corpora increasingly incorporate cultural annotation, visual materials, and structured cultural information.

The relationship between language and culture constitutes one of the central concerns of linguocultural studies and ethnolinguistics. Teliya (1987) defines the primary objective of linguocultural studies as the investigation of the interaction between language and culture from the perspective of national consciousness. According to her, language functions as a mechanism for preserving and transmitting cultural experience across generations. Similarly, Willems (2006) argues that linguistic meaning should be examined in relation to human cognitive experience and systems of world knowledge.

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Among linguocultural approaches, Karasik's work occupies a prominent position. He argues that cultural concepts are organized as multilayered structures within linguistic consciousness and are manifested through lexical, phraseological, and textual means (Karasik, 2002). This perspective allows ethnocultural units to be viewed not merely as names but as carriers of cultural information. Likewise, Wierzbicka proposed a model for describing national cultural semantics through a universal semantic metalanguage, thereby providing new ways of interpreting culture-specific meanings.

In Kazakh linguistics, ethnocultural units have been extensively investigated within ethnolinguistic and linguocultural frameworks. The works of Kaidar (2013) established the theoretical foundations of Kazakh ethnolinguistics. His studies explored the relationship between language and culture and identified the cultural meanings and origins of numerous ethnocultural units. N. Uali focused on the linguistic representation of cultural information and developed principles for linguocultural interpretation. Zh. Mankeeva investigated the linguistic manifestation of national worldview and cultural concepts, identifying the cognitive foundations of ethnocultural vocabulary.

The study of traditional material culture terms occupies a special place in Kazakh ethnolinguistics. Shoibekov (2022) systematically examined the vocabulary associated with traditional crafts, jewelry, and clothing, describing their ethnocultural characteristics. His research provides valuable insights into the social functions, cultural significance, and historical development of traditional clothing terminology. Similarly, E. Zhanpeisov explored the ethnolinguistic features of material culture vocabulary in the Kazakh language.

The establishment and development of the National Corpus of the Kazakh Language marked a new stage in the digital preservation of national cultural heritage. In this context, Zhubanov (2016) proposed the theoretical foundations for introducing cultural-semantic annotation into the national corpus. According to the author, ethnocultural information can only be adequately represented through the inclusion of cultural explanations for linguistic units. Fazylzhanova (2016) emphasized the importance of incorporating culturally significant texts into the corpus and highlighted the role of digital resources in preserving national cultural codes.

Recent studies have further contributed to the theoretical and methodological development of the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus. Amirbekova et al. (2013) examined the linguistic and cognitive mechanisms underlying the formation of the Kazakh national worldview. Otebayeva et al. (2023) investigated cultural-semantic annotation and proposed principles for coding ethnocultural units. Mankeeva et al. (2023) analyzed the annotation of cultural units and suggested ways to improve the structure of the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus. Ashimbayeva and Zhanabekova (2023) demonstrated the importance of integrating archaic vocabulary into the national corpus.

In recent years, a number of studies based on the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus have focused on specific ethnocultural units. Talgatqyzy et al. (2024) examined the cultural representation of the camel concept in the Kazakh worldview through corpus data. Tlegenova et al. (2024) analyzed the representativeness of mythonyms and theonyms in language corpora. Zhumabayeva and Amanbayeva (2024) investigated the cultural semantics of religious vocabulary. Furthermore, the *Cultural-Cognitive Dictionary of the Kazakh Language* (Shoibekov et al., 2023) and the *Linguocultural Dictionary* (Uali et al., 2024), both developed on the basis of the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus, represent important achievements in the systematization of cultural information in Kazakh.

Although these studies have established solid theoretical and practical foundations for the analysis of ethnocultural units, traditional clothing names have not yet been comprehensively investigated using corpus-based methods. Existing studies primarily approach clothing terminology from descriptive, ethnographic, or lexicographic perspectives. Their frequency structure, taxonomic organization, cultural-semantic functions, and gender-related characteristics have not been systematically examined through corpus data.

Therefore, the present study investigates traditional Kazakh clothing names using materials from the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus. By combining frequency analysis, cultural-semantic coding, cluster analysis, and gender-based interpretation, the study seeks to reveal the linguistic representation of traditional clothing as an important component of the Kazakh worldview. This approach contributes to the intersection of ethnolinguistics, corpus linguistics, and digital humanities while offering a comprehensive model for the analysis of ethnocultural vocabulary.

III. Materials and Methods

A. Research Material

The present study is based on the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus of the Kazakh Language, a specialized electronic database designed to document and describe the cultural semantics of ethnocultural units. The subcorpus contains approximately 15 million word tokens and includes folklore texts, oral literary heritage, ethnographic works, academic publications, and journalistic materials. The diversity of textual sources makes it possible to investigate the use of culturally marked lexical units from multiple perspectives and within different discourse types.

The research focuses on traditional Kazakh clothing names included in the thematic category "Clothing and Apparel" of the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus. A total of 26 ethnocultural clothing terms were identified and selected for analysis. These units include headwear (*saukele, borik, tymaq, taqiya, kimishek, zhaulyq*), outerwear (*shapan, ishik, shekpen, kebenek, beshpent*), footwear (*baipaq*), and coverings (*oramal*).

For each clothing item, information regarding frequency of occurrence, cultural-semantic description, taxonomic classification, and ethnographic interpretation was collected. These data formed the basis of the analytical dataset used in the study.

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B. Data Collection and Processing

The research was conducted in several stages.

At the first stage, the thematic category "Clothing and Apparel" within the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus was examined, and all traditional clothing names were identified. Frequency data provided by the corpus were recorded for each lexical unit.

At the second stage, the identified clothing names were classified according to their taxonomic categories. Based on the corpus classification, five microgroups were established:

- Headwear;
- Outerwear;
- General clothing;
- Footwear;
- Coverings.

At the third stage, the cultural-semantic information associated with each clothing item was analyzed in order to identify its functional and cultural characteristics.

C. Cultural-Semantic Coding

To systematize the cultural functions of traditional clothing names, a cultural-semantic coding procedure was employed. Each clothing item was assigned values according to the presence (1) or absence (0) of specific cultural features.

The following cultural codes were used in the analysis:

Code	Description
Female	Associated with female culture
Male	Associated with male culture
Ritual	Performs a ritual function
Status	Indicates social status
Protection	Performs a protective function
Winter	Associated with winter use
Everyday	Used in everyday life
Nomadic	Associated with nomadic lifestyle

The coding procedure was based on cultural-semantic descriptions and ethnographic interpretations provided in the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus.

For example, *saukele* was coded as Female, Ritual, and Status because it is described as a ceremonial bridal headdress. Similarly, *tymaq* was coded as Male, Protection, Winter, and Nomadic because it functions as a winter protective hat associated with traditional nomadic life.

As a result, a cultural-semantic matrix consisting of 26 clothing names and 8 cultural variables was created.

To increase coding reliability, all coding decisions were independently reviewed by the research team based on the cultural-semantic descriptions provided in the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus and available ethnographic sources. Any ambiguous cases were discussed until consensus was reached. Since the coding scheme was based on predefined corpus annotations, disagreements were minimal.

D. Quantitative and Visual Analysis

Both quantitative and visual analytical methods were applied in the study.

The quantitative analysis included:

- calculation of frequency values;
- identification of the distribution of cultural codes;
- description of the taxonomic structure of clothing names.

Data processing and visualization were conducted using the R statistical environment.

The following visualization techniques were employed:

- frequency distribution bar charts;
- taxonomic structure diagrams;
- cultural-semantic dendrograms;
- heatmaps of cultural functions;
- gender and life-cycle models.

To identify similarities among clothing names, hierarchical cluster analysis was performed. This procedure enabled the identification of groups of clothing items sharing similar cultural-semantic characteristics.

E. Theoretical Framework

The study is situated at the intersection of corpus linguistics, ethnolinguistics, and Digital Humanities.

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Corpus linguistics provided the methodological framework for analyzing the frequency and distribution of traditional clothing names. Ethnolinguistic approaches facilitated the interpretation of their cultural meanings, symbolic functions, and roles within the Kazakh worldview.

The cultural-semantic coding procedure allowed traditional clothing items to be examined through cultural parameters such as social status, gender identity, ritual function, and nomadic lifestyle. This integrated framework made it possible to analyze clothing terminology not only as lexical units but also as carriers of cultural knowledge.

F. Research Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the study is limited to clothing names recorded in the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus. Consequently, not all clothing terms used in contemporary Kazakh may be represented.

Second, cultural-semantic coding inevitably involves a degree of researcher interpretation. Although coding decisions were based on corpus descriptions and ethnographic evidence, the classification of certain cultural features remains partly dependent on expert judgment.

Third, while the identified 26 clothing names represent the core of traditional Kazakh clothing terminology, regional variants and dialectal forms were not comprehensively included in the analysis.

Fourth, because the study relies on corpus materials, frequency values may be influenced by the composition of the corpus, including the proportion of historical, ethnographic, and literary texts.

Despite these limitations, the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus provides a reliable basis for describing the cultural-semantic structure of traditional Kazakh clothing names and for investigating their role within the Kazakh linguistic worldview.

IV. Results

A. Frequency Structure and Taxonomic Organization of Traditional Kazakh Clothing Names

Traditional clothing names preserved in the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus of the Kazakh Language constitute an important component of the material culture and national worldview of the Kazakh people. Clothing terminology represents ethnocultural units that reflect everyday life, social relations, adaptation to environmental conditions, and cultural values. Therefore, analyzing the frequency structure of clothing names makes it possible to determine their position within the cultural system, their level of usage, and their significance in national culture.

A total of 26 traditional clothing names were identified and selected from the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus. These lexical units include names of headwear, outerwear, footwear, and coverings. The frequency distribution of the clothing names is presented in Table 1.

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TABLE 1
FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF TRADITIONAL KAZAKH CLOTHING NAMES

No.	Clothing Name	Frequency
1	Oramal	2265
2	Ton	1053
3	Shapan	963
4	Borik	770
5	Ishik	543
6	Tymaq	331
7	Shekpen	326
8	Saukele	281
9	Taqiya	231
10	Zhaulyq	229
11	Sharshy	227
12	Qarqara	161
13	Kebenek	106
14	Beshpent	95
15	Kimishek	83
16	Baipaq	79
17	Kupi	74
18	Zhadağai	63
19	Kamzol	61
20	Shäli	44
21	Syrma	36
22	Keudeshe	29
23	Zhelen	22
24	Qulaqshyn	15
25	Saqsyr	10
26	Kume	2

The results presented in Table 1 demonstrate considerable variation in the frequency of traditional clothing names. The most frequent lexical item is *oramal* (2,265 occurrences). This high frequency can be explained by the multifunctional role of the oramal in Kazakh culture. It is not merely an item of everyday clothing but also serves as a cultural marker of female identity, modesty, social etiquette, and interpersonal relations. Consequently, its frequent occurrence in the corpus reflects its importance in Kazakh cultural practice.

Other highly frequent clothing names include *ton* (1,053), *shapan* (963), *borik* (770), and *ishik* (543). These items constitute the core layer of the traditional Kazakh clothing system. While *ton* and *ishik* emerged as adaptations to climatic conditions, *shapan* acquired special cultural significance as a symbol of social status, honor, and respect. Similarly, *borik* became one of the most widespread forms of everyday headwear used by both men and women.

The group of moderately frequent clothing names includes *tymaq* (331), *shekpen* (326), *saukele* (281), *taqiya* (231), *zhaulyq* (229), and *sharshy* (227). These items perform more specialized cultural functions. For instance, *saukele* is associated with bridal rituals, whereas *tymaq* is regarded as a traditional and symbolically important male headdress. Likewise, *zhaulyq* and *sharshy* function as markers of the social status of married women.

The least frequent items include *qarqara* (161), *kebenek* (106), *beshpent* (95), *kimishek* (83), *baipaq* (79), *kupi* (74), *zhadağai* (63), *kamzol* (61), *shäli* (44), *syrma* (36), *keudeshe* (29), *zhelen* (22), *qulaqshyn* (15), *saqsyr* (10), and *kume* (2). Despite their relatively low frequencies, these terms possess considerable ethnocultural value. In particular, *saqsyr* and *kume* preserve historical and ethnographic information and therefore remain important elements of traditional cultural knowledge.

The overall frequency distribution of traditional clothing names is illustrated in Figure 1.

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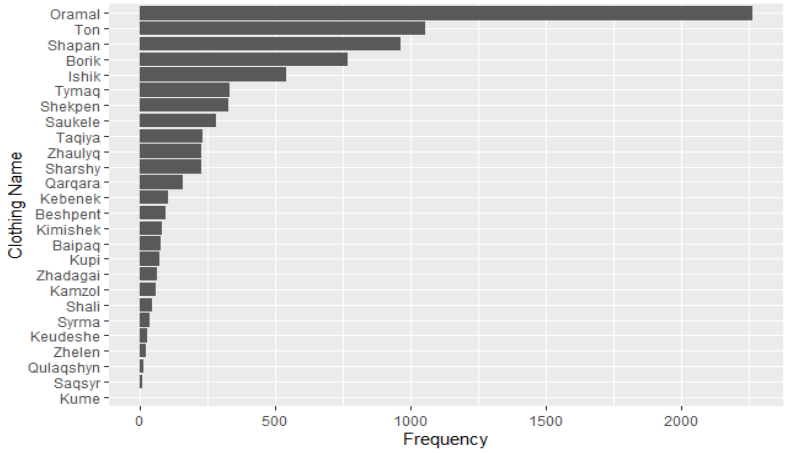


Figure 1. Frequency Distribution of Traditional Kazakh Clothing Names

The results shown in Figure 1 reveal an uneven distribution of clothing names across the corpus. A clear distinction can be observed between highly frequent and low-frequency items. While *oramal*, *ton*, *shapan*, *borik*, and *ishik* occur most frequently, items such as *kume*, *saqsyr*, *qulaqshyn*, and *zhelen* appear only occasionally. This pattern reflects differences in the cultural domains in which these items function. Widely distributed clothing names are closely associated with everyday life, whereas less frequent items tend to perform specialized historical, social, or ethnographic functions.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the structure of traditional clothing terminology, the identified items were further classified into taxonomic categories. The results of this classification are presented in Figure 2.

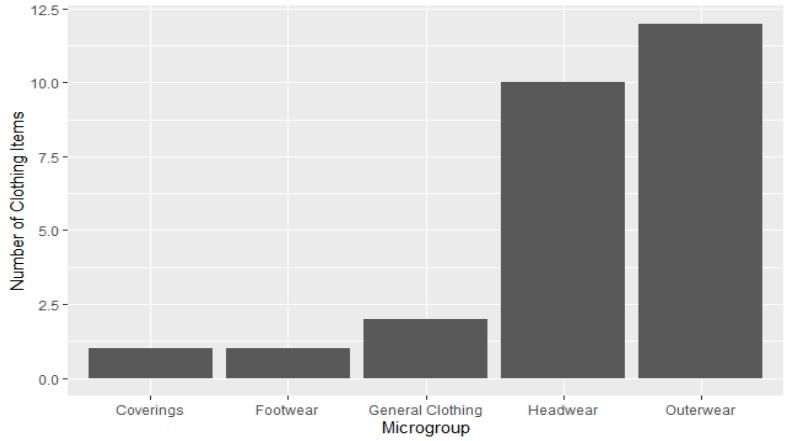


Figure 2. Taxonomic Structure of Traditional Kazakh Clothing Names

As shown in Figure 2, the largest category consists of outerwear items (n = 12). This group includes *shapan, ishik, shekpen, kebenek, beshpent, kupi, zhadağai, kamzol, syrma, keudeshe, zhelen,* and *kume*. The predominance of outerwear reflects the nomadic lifestyle of the Kazakh people and their adaptation to environmental and climatic conditions. These garments primarily served to protect individuals from harsh weather and natural elements.

The second largest category is headwear (n = 10). This group includes *borik, tymaq, taqiya, saukele, zhaulyq, sharshy, qarqara, kimishek, shäli,* and *qulaqshyn*. In addition to their protective function, headwear items served as cultural markers indicating gender, age, social status, and family position.

The category of general clothing consists of *ton* and *saqsyr*, whereas the footwear category is represented solely by *baipaq*. The item *oramal* was classified separately as a covering due to its unique cultural functions and symbolic significance.

Overall, the frequency structure and taxonomic organization demonstrate that traditional Kazakh clothing names form an interconnected cultural system. Highly frequent items represent cultural concepts closely associated with everyday life and social interaction, whereas low-frequency items preserve historical and ethnographic knowledge. Furthermore, the taxonomic classification highlights the interrelationship between the protective, social, and symbolic functions of traditional Kazakh clothing. These findings provide the foundation for the subsequent analysis of the cultural-semantic functions of traditional clothing names.

B. Cultural-Semantic Functions and Cluster Structure of Traditional Kazakh Clothing Names

Traditional Kazakh clothing names are not merely elements of material culture but also constitute a system of cultural signs reflecting the national worldview, social relations, gender distinctions, and historical experience of the Kazakh

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people. Therefore, at the next stage of the study, the cultural-semantic functions of clothing names were analyzed through a special coding procedure. Each clothing item was assigned a set of cultural codes, including gender association (Female, Male), ritual function (Ritual), social status (Status), protective function (Protection), association with winter use (Winter), everyday use (Everyday), and connection with the nomadic lifestyle (Nomadic). Such an approach makes it possible to identify not only the lexical characteristics of clothing names but also their broader cultural and functional significance.

The frequency distribution of cultural codes revealed the major functions performed by traditional clothing items. The highest values were observed for the categories Everyday and Female (N = 21 each). This finding indicates that a considerable number of traditional clothing names were associated with everyday use and that a substantial proportion of them were connected with female culture. At the same time, male-associated clothing items also demonstrated a relatively high frequency (N = 18), reflecting the clear distinction between male and female clothing in traditional Kazakh society.

A total of fourteen clothing items were associated with protective functions. This result reflects the adaptation of the Kazakh people to their natural and climatic environment. Clothing items such as *tymaq, qulaqshyn, ishik, shekpen, kebenek, kupi,* and *ton* were specifically designed to protect the human body from cold weather, wind, and precipitation. Consequently, the protective function represents one of the most important components of traditional Kazakh clothing culture. The relatively high number of clothing items associated with winter use (N = 11) further supports this interpretation.

Nine clothing items were identified as markers of social status. This group includes *saukele, qarqara, shapan, ton, ishik,* and *kimishek*. These garments functioned as cultural indicators of an individual's social position, prestige, or family status. For instance, *saukele* symbolized the special status of a bride, whereas *shapan* served as a marker of honor and social respect.

Five clothing names were associated with the nomadic way of life. This category primarily includes *tymaq, kebenek, shekpen, saqsyr,* and *qulaqshyn*. All of these items are related to pastoral life, long-distance travel, livestock breeding, and adaptation to environmental conditions. Thus, the nomadic lifestyle formed an important semantic layer within the traditional Kazakh clothing system.

Although only four clothing items were identified as having ritual functions, their cultural significance is particularly high. This group consists of *saukele, qarqara, zhaulyq,* and *kimishek*. These garments function as cultural markers associated with important stages in an individual's life cycle. Therefore, despite their relatively low frequency, they possess exceptional symbolic value.

To identify similarities among the cultural functions of clothing names, hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted. The results revealed that traditional Kazakh clothing names can be classified into three major cultural-semantic clusters.

TABLE 2
CLUSTER CLASSIFICATION OF TRADITIONAL KAZAKH CLOTHING NAMES

Cluster	Clothing Names	Dominant Cultural Function
Cluster 1	Borik, Taqiya, Sharshy, Shapan, Beshpent, Zhadagai, Kamzol, Keudeshe, Zhelen, Oramal	Everyday and social functions
Cluster 2	Tymaq, Shali, Qulaqshyn, Ishik, Shekpen, Kebenek, Kupi, Syrma, Kume, Ton, Saqsyr, Baipaq	Protective and winter functions
Cluster 3	Saukele, Zhaulyq, Qarqara, Kimishek	Ritual and gender-related functions

The results of the cluster analysis are presented in Figure 3.

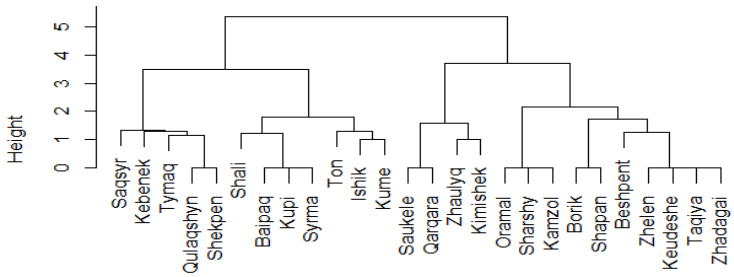


Figure 3. Cultural-Semantic Cluster Structure of Traditional Kazakh Clothing Names

As shown in Figure 3, the first cluster consists of clothing items widely used in everyday life. This group includes *borik, taqiya, sharshy, shapan, beshpent, zhadagai, kamzol, keudeshe, zhelen,* and *oramal*. Their common characteristic is their frequent use in daily activities and their close association with social life. Ritual functions are generally absent in this cluster, while practical and social functions predominate.

The second cluster combines clothing items that perform protective and climatic functions. This group includes *tymaq, qulaqshyn, ishik, shekpen, kebenek, kupi, syrma, kume, ton, saqsyr,* and *baipaq*. The common feature of these garments is their role in protecting the human body from environmental conditions. In addition, most items in this cluster are associated with winter use. Therefore, this cluster may be interpreted as representing the adaptation of the Kazakh people to their natural environment.

The third cluster is composed of the most culturally distinctive clothing items. It includes *saukele, zhaulyq, qarqara,*

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and *kimishek*. All of these garments are associated with female social status and significant stages of the life cycle. *Saukele* functions as a ceremonial bridal headdress, whereas *zhaulyq* and *kimishek* symbolize the status of married women. *Qarqara* is distinguished as a decorative headdress associated with ceremonial occasions. The grouping of these items within a single cluster demonstrates their shared cultural function.

The distribution of cultural-semantic features across traditional clothing names is further illustrated in Figure 4.

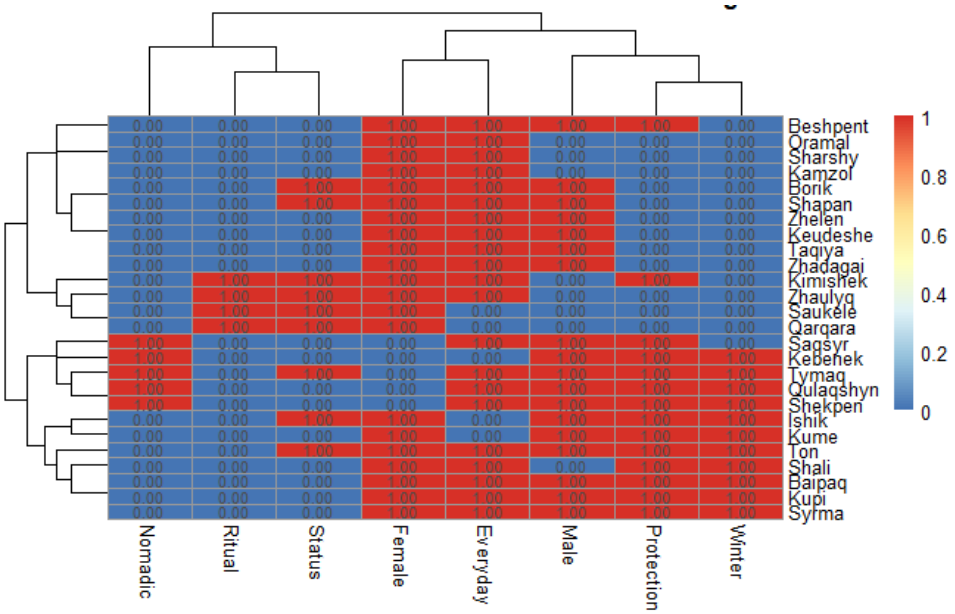


Figure 4. Heatmap of Cultural-Semantic Features of Traditional Kazakh Clothing Names

Figure 4 visualizes the relationship between traditional clothing names and the cultural codes assigned during the coding procedure. The heatmap demonstrates that the categories *Female* and *Everyday* are the most widely represented cultural features, confirming the predominance of everyday and gender-related functions within the traditional clothing system. Ritual garments such as *Saukele, Qarqara, Zhaulyq,* and *Kimishek* exhibit a distinctive pattern characterized by the simultaneous presence of the *Female, Ritual,* and *Status* features. In contrast, clothing items such as *Tymaq, Qulaqshyn, Shekpen,* and *Kebenek* are strongly associated with the *Protection, Winter,* and *Nomadic* categories.

The heatmap also confirms the results of the hierarchical clustering analysis. Clothing items grouped within the same cluster demonstrate similar cultural-semantic profiles. Everyday garments are concentrated around the *Everyday* and *Female/Male* dimensions, whereas protective garments are associated with *Winter* and *Protection*. Ritual clothing items form a clearly distinguishable group due to their unique combination of *Female, Ritual,* and *Status* features. These patterns indicate that traditional Kazakh clothing names are organized according to shared cultural functions rather than physical appearance or manufacturing materials.

Overall, the cluster analysis demonstrates that traditional Kazakh clothing names are naturally organized according to their cultural functions. Rather than being grouped according to physical appearance or manufacturing materials, clothing items are primarily united by the cultural roles they perform. The findings indicate that three major functional domains dominate the structure of traditional Kazakh clothing culture: everyday-social functions, protective-climatic functions, and ritual-gender functions. These results confirm that traditional clothing constitutes an important system of cultural signs reflecting social relations, cultural values, and the national worldview of the Kazakh people.

C. Gender and Life-Cycle Markers of Traditional Clothing in Kazakh Culture

Traditional Kazakh clothing culture represents not merely a collection of material objects designed to protect the human body from environmental conditions but also a system of cultural signs reflecting social relations, gender distinctions, and status changes throughout the human life cycle. In traditional Kazakh society, clothing functioned as an important cultural marker indicating age, gender, marital status, and social position. Therefore, the analysis of traditional clothing names from gender and life-cycle perspectives provides valuable insights into the social organization embedded in the Kazakh worldview.

The results of the cultural-semantic coding revealed that 21 clothing items were associated with female culture, whereas 18 items were linked to male culture.

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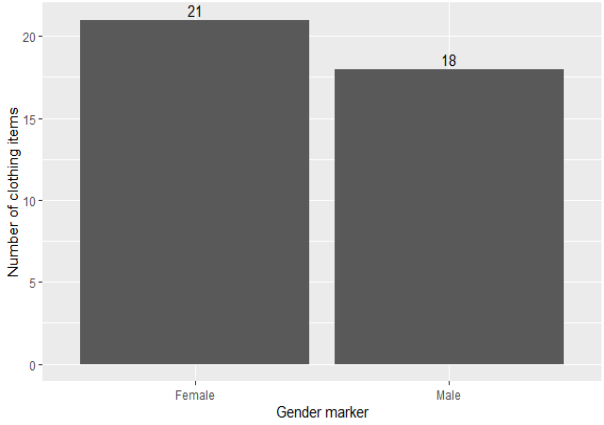


Figure 5. Gender Distribution of Traditional Kazakh Clothing Names

Figure 5 demonstrates that female-associated clothing names (n = 21) slightly outnumber male-associated clothing names (n = 18). This finding indicates that traditional Kazakh clothing terminology contains a substantial number of garments functioning as markers of female social identity, marital status, and life-cycle transitions.

The predominance of female-associated clothing items suggests that the traditional clothing system contained a larger number of garments specifically designed to indicate the social status of women. This finding reflects the fact that female social roles and family status were explicitly marked through clothing in traditional Kazakh society.

The cultural image of women in traditional society was often identified through specific clothing items. In particular, the statuses of girl, bride, young wife, and mother were represented by distinctive garments. This demonstrates that clothing performed not only practical functions but also important social and communicative roles within Kazakh culture.

One of the primary clothing items associated with the stage of girlhood is the *taqiya*. Corpus data indicate that the taqiya was widely worn by girls and young women. Its decorative function was particularly important, and its design was closely associated with age and aesthetic preferences. Consequently, the taqiya can be regarded as a cultural marker of maidenhood.

The most significant social transition in a woman's life was marriage. The principal cultural symbol of this stage is the *saukele*. Corpus materials describe the saukele as a ritual headdress signifying the special status of a bride. It functioned not merely as an item of clothing but as a cultural symbol marking a woman’s transition into a new social role. Its elevated cultural status is reflected in its association with valuable materials, elaborate ornaments, and ceremonial practices.

Alongside the saukele, the *qarqara* also formed part of the ceremonial attire of women. Corpus evidence suggests that the qarqara primarily performed decorative and ritual functions. The fact that qarqara and saukele were grouped together in the cluster analysis confirms the similarity of their cultural roles. Both items function as cultural markers associated with significant stages in a woman’s life cycle.

Following marriage, a woman’s social status changed, and this transformation was symbolized through the *zhaulyq*. In Kazakh culture, the zhaulyq served as one of the principal indicators of married status. Its role extended beyond the practical function of covering the head, becoming a marker of social identity. Corpus data demonstrate that the zhaulyq frequently appears in contexts associated with family life, marital status, and the social position of women.

The next stage in a woman’s life cycle is associated with motherhood. The principal cultural marker of this stage is the *kimishek*. Corpus evidence indicates that the kimishek was commonly worn by married women and mothers. It represented not only age-related distinctions but also a woman’s role within the family and society. In traditional Kazakh culture, wearing a kimishek symbolized a transition to a higher level of social responsibility and cultural respect.

The *shäli* also functions as an important marker of female age and status. It was particularly widespread among elderly women and symbolized life experience, social prestige, and respected family position. Thus, the progression of women’s clothing follows a socially structured pattern closely linked to life-cycle transitions.

The model of clothing transformation throughout the female life cycle is presented in Figure 6.



Figure 6. Life-Cycle Model of Traditional Female Clothing in Kazakh Culture

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Figure 6 demonstrates that traditional Kazakh clothing was oriented primarily toward expressing social status rather than biological age. Transitions from girlhood to bridehood, from marriage to motherhood, were represented through specific clothing items. This highlights the communicative function of clothing as a visible marker of social identity.

The clothing system of men also exhibits certain age-related distinctions. Among young men, *qulaqshyn* and *taqiya* were commonly used. The qulaqshyn is frequently described as a headdress associated with youth. In contrast, the cultural image of mature men is represented by *tymaq* and *borik*. The tymaq occupied a particularly important position within Kazakh culture. Corpus materials indicate that it possessed not only a protective function but also symbolic and sacred significance.

The *borik* appears as one of the most widespread forms of everyday male headwear. In addition, it served as a marker of social status. In certain contexts, the borik functioned as an indicator of age, prestige, and social standing.

At the same time, several clothing items demonstrate a relatively neutral gender profile. Garments such as *shapan, ton, ishik, shekpen,* and *kebenek* were used by both men and women. Their primary functions involved protection from environmental conditions and the expression of social status rather than gender differentiation. Consequently, these items possessed broader social applicability.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that traditional Kazakh clothing names constitute an important system of cultural markers expressing gender, age, and social status. In particular, changes in a woman's social position throughout the life cycle were clearly represented through specific clothing items. Transitions from maidenhood to bridehood, from marriage to motherhood, were accompanied by corresponding changes in attire. These findings confirm that clothing in traditional Kazakh culture functioned not only as an element of material culture but also as a significant instrument of social identification and cultural communication.

V. Discussion

The findings of the present study demonstrate that traditional Kazakh clothing names constitute a complex cultural-semantic system reflecting social relations, environmental adaptation, gender roles, and life-cycle transitions within Kazakh culture. While previous ethnolinguistic and linguocultural studies have described the cultural meanings of individual clothing items, the current research provides a corpus-based perspective on their frequency distribution, taxonomic organization, cultural functions, and semantic clustering.

The frequency analysis revealed that *oramal, ton, shapan, borik,* and *ishik* occupy a central position within the traditional clothing lexicon. This result supports earlier observations by Kaidar, Uali, Mankeeva, and Shoibekov, who emphasized the importance of clothing terminology as a reflection of everyday life and cultural values. However, unlike previous descriptive studies, the corpus data make it possible to demonstrate quantitatively which clothing items occupy the most prominent position in the linguistic representation of traditional culture. The predominance of *oramal* suggests that women's clothing and head coverings hold a particularly important place within the cultural memory reflected in the corpus.

The taxonomic analysis further revealed that outerwear and headwear constitute the largest categories of traditional clothing names. This finding reflects the historical realities of Kazakh nomadic life. In a society characterized by seasonal migration and close interaction with the natural environment, clothing served not only aesthetic purposes but also essential protective functions. The dominance of outerwear confirms the significance of environmental adaptation as a key component of traditional material culture.

The cultural-semantic coding procedure demonstrated that everyday use, female association, and protective function represent the most widespread cultural features among traditional clothing names. These results indicate that traditional clothing primarily functioned as an instrument of everyday life while simultaneously serving as a marker of social and gender identity. The relatively high frequency of the protection and winter categories further confirms the importance of climatic adaptation in shaping the traditional clothing system.

One of the most significant findings of the study is the identification of three major cultural-semantic clusters. The first cluster consists of everyday and socially oriented garments, the second cluster includes protective and winter clothing, and the third cluster is composed of ritual and gender-related items. The existence of these clusters suggests that traditional clothing names are organized according to shared cultural functions rather than physical characteristics or manufacturing materials. This result supports Karasik's concept of cultural categorization, according to which cultural meanings are structured through socially significant functions and symbolic associations.

The ritual cluster deserves particular attention. The grouping of *saukele, zhaulyq, qarqara,* and *kimishek* into a separate cluster demonstrates their shared role as markers of female social status and life-cycle transitions. These items are connected with marriage, motherhood, and social recognition within the traditional community. The cluster analysis therefore confirms that ritual clothing occupies a distinct position within the cultural system of Kazakh dress.

The gender analysis also produced important results. Female-associated clothing names outnumber male-associated items, and all ritual garments identified in the study belong to the female cultural sphere. This finding indicates that women's clothing played a particularly important role in expressing social identity and family status. Traditional Kazakh culture appears to have relied heavily on clothing as a visible means of communicating female social roles and transitions throughout the life cycle.

The life-cycle model developed in this study further demonstrates that clothing functioned as a cultural mechanism for

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marking social change. The sequence from *taqiya* to *saukele*, *zhaulyq*, *kimishek*, and *shäli* reflects the transformation of a woman's social status from girlhood to marriage, motherhood, and old age. This confirms that clothing served not merely as a material object but as a symbolic representation of social identity.

From a methodological perspective, the study demonstrates the potential of the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus for ethnolinguistic and linguocultural research. The integration of corpus analysis, cultural-semantic coding, and cluster analysis provides a systematic approach to the investigation of ethnocultural vocabulary. Unlike traditional descriptive methods, this approach enables the identification of statistically observable patterns and relationships within cultural data.

Overall, the findings suggest that traditional Kazakh clothing names preserve a substantial amount of cultural knowledge concerning social structure, gender relations, ritual practices, and environmental adaptation. The corpus-based approach adopted in this study contributes to the growing field of digital humanities by demonstrating how ethnocultural knowledge can be analyzed through quantitative and computational methods while retaining its cultural and historical significance.

Future studies may investigate diachronic changes in the frequency and cultural functions of traditional clothing names across different historical periods using chronologically balanced corpus data.

VI. Conclusion

This study examined the frequency structure, taxonomic organization, cultural-semantic functions, and gender-related characteristics of traditional Kazakh clothing names based on data from the Cultural-Representative Subcorpus of the Kazakh Language. The use of corpus materials made it possible to investigate traditional clothing terminology not only from descriptive and ethnographic perspectives but also through quantitative and cultural-semantic approaches.

The frequency analysis demonstrated that the use of traditional clothing names is highly uneven. The highest frequency values were observed for *oramal, ton, shapan, borik,* and *ishik*. These items constitute the core lexical layer of traditional Kazakh clothing terminology and represent cultural units that were widely used in everyday life. In contrast, low-frequency items such as *kume, saqsyr,* and *qulaqshyn* were identified as peripheral units associated primarily with historical and ethnographic contexts.

The taxonomic analysis revealed that traditional clothing names are distributed across several microgroups. Outerwear (n = 12) and headwear (n = 10) emerged as the largest categories. This result reflects the adaptation of the Kazakh people to a nomadic lifestyle and challenging climatic conditions. While outerwear primarily performed protective functions, headwear served as cultural markers indicating age, gender, and social status.

The cultural-semantic coding procedure showed that the dominant functions of traditional clothing names are associated with everyday use, gender identity, and protection. The categories *Everyday* (n = 21) and *Female* (n = 21) demonstrated the highest frequencies among the cultural codes. Furthermore, the relatively high number of clothing items associated with protection (n = 14) confirms the importance of environmental adaptation within traditional Kazakh clothing culture.

Cluster analysis revealed three major groups of clothing names according to their cultural functions. The first cluster consists of clothing items associated with everyday and social functions, the second cluster comprises protective and winter garments, and the third cluster includes ritual and gender-related clothing. The separate clustering of *saukele, zhaulyq, qarqara,* and *kimishek* highlights their distinctive symbolic role within Kazakh culture.

The gender analysis demonstrated that clothing items associated with female culture outnumber those associated with male culture. In addition, all garments identified as ritual clothing were connected exclusively with female cultural practices. This finding suggests that women's social status and life-cycle transitions were clearly represented through clothing. The cultural categories of girlhood, bridehood, marriage, and motherhood were symbolically expressed through such garments as *saukele, zhaulyq, kimishek,* and *shäli*.

The results of the study indicate that traditional Kazakh clothing names represent not merely elements of material culture but also reflections of national worldview, social relations, and cultural values. The Cultural-Representative Subcorpus proved to be a reliable source for investigating traditional clothing terminology and enabled both quantitative and qualitative analysis of its cultural content.

In conclusion, the corpus-based analysis provided valuable insights into the internal organization, cultural functions, and social significance of traditional Kazakh clothing culture. The findings contribute to the fields of ethnolinguistics, linguocultural studies, corpus linguistics, and digital humanities, while also providing a foundation for future research on ethnocultural vocabulary and cultural knowledge representation in digital resources.

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Agreement Mismatches in Arabic Existential Constructions

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***Abstract*—This paper provides a syntactic analysis of agreement mismatches in Classical Arabic existential constructions. Such constructions display notable mismatches in agreement among the expletive, associate and T. The agreement mismatches raise significant challenges for standard assumptions regarding Case and ϕ-features checking and valuation. The paper proposes that these agreement issues can be resolved by assuming that the associate is assigned Partitive Case by the verb, and that the associate bears interpretable ϕ-features which do not require checking. Furthermore, it is argued that T lacks a Case feature, but carries default third person singular masculine ϕ-features. These features are checked, though not valued, by the expletives, which themselves bear uninterpretable valued ϕ-features. The present proposal is not directly applicable to agreement mismatches in non-existential constructions due to differences in the ϕ-features realized on the verb, although future research may extend the analysis to account for both construction types within a unified framework.**

***Index Terms*—agreement mismatches, expletive, associate, ϕ-features, Classical Arabic**

I. Introduction

Although numerous syntactic universal theories have been proposed to minimize language-specific rules, deviations from their predictions continue to emerge. Ongoing and systematic revisions of these theories to account for such anomalies are what sustain and advance the field.

Arabic[1], among other languages, is known for agreement mismatches between the verb and the subject in VS word order (Aoun et al., 1994; AlShammiry, 2016; Alshammari, 2023; Althawab & Alsanadi, 2024; Ellafi, 2024; Fakih, 2016, 2022; Fehri, 1993; Mohammad, 1990, 2000; Soltan, 2007). Classical Arabic (henceforth Arabic) also exhibits anti-agreement in existential constructions. In existential sentences, the verb, expletive and associate can be in disagreement relationship. Unless stated otherwise, all the Arabic data in this paper is collected by the author. The occurrence and eligibility of the data have been verified and established through an acceptability judgment task, which will be discussed in detail in the next section.

(1)	kana	θamma-ta	rijalun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	man.3Pl.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were men in the garden"				
(2)	kana	θamma-ta	rajulun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	man.3SG.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a man in the garden"				
(3)	kana	θamma-ta	nisaʔun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	women.3Pl.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were women in the garden"				
(4)	kana	θamma-ta	imraʔatun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	woman.3SG.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a woman in the garden"				

Such agreement mismatches pose problems to Case and ϕ-features checking and valuation. In recent minimalist framework[2] (Chomsky, 1998; Chomsky, 1999; Chomsky, 2004; Radford, 2009), Case assignment and *T* agreement go hand in hand. The *T* probe is unable to assign Case to a goal that fails to enter into an Agree relation with it. Put differently, assigning a Case is a reflex of probe/ goal agreement.

The present paper touches briefly on agreement facts in declarative non-existential constructions in Arabic and focuses primarily on agreement mismatches in existential constructions. Due to agreement differences between non-existential and existential constructions, the proposed account in this paper only works for existential constructions. Shedding light on non-existential constructions will also help illustrate how previous accounts on agreement facts in non-existential constructions fail to account for agreement mismatches in existential constructions.

This paper is organized as follows: section two explains the Arabic existential data collection and establishes the eligibility of the data, section three describes agreement facts in Arabic non-existential constructions, section four tackles

[1] The paper is concerned with Classical Arabic.
[2] A theoretical framework that aims to explain syntactic structure using the most economical "minimal" set of principles and operations possible.

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agreement mismatches in Arabic existential constructions and demonstrates how they are different from those in non-existential constructions. This section also states the questions that should be addressed. Section five reviews previous accounts on agreement facts in Arabic non-existential constructions and explains why they cannot be adopted to account for agreement facts in existential constructions. Section six reviews preexisting analyses on existential constructions in general and explains why they cannot be extended to account for agreement facts in Arabic existential constructions. Section seven puts forward the proposal, and section eight concludes.

II. The Arabic Existential Data

This section examines the occurrence of Arabic existential sentences and evaluates their eligibility through an acceptability judgment task, which forms the basis of the proposed analysis. The following eight sentences were selected for the judgment task and underpin the analysis, as they provide comprehensive coverage and capture the range of disagreement patterns observed in Arabic existential constructions, enabling the development of a precise and well-defined account.

(5)	kana	θamma-ta	rijalun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	man.3Pl.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were men in the garden"				
(6)	kana	θamma-ta	rajulun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	man.3SG.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a man in the garden"				
(7)	kana	θamma	rijalun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-MAS	man.3Pl.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were men in the garden"				
(8)	kana	θamma	rajulun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-MAS	man.3SG.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a man in the garden"				
(9)	kana	θamma-ta	nisaʔun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	women.3Pl.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were women in the garden"				
(10)	kana	θamma-ta	imraʔatun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	woman.3SG.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a woman in the garden"				
(11)	kana	θamma	nisaʔun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-MAS	women.3Pl.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were women in the garden"				
(12)	kana	θamma	imraʔatun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-MAS	woman.3SG.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a woman in the garden"				

The eight target sentences were presented individually in Arabic within A Qualtrics-based judgment task survey. Participants were instructed to rate each sentence on a seven-point Likert scale, where a rating of 1 indicated that the sentence was fully acceptable in Arabic, and a rating of 7 indicated that the sentence was unacceptable or disallowed. The survey was structured into two blocks. The first block presented a yes/no informed consent question, only participants who consented to take part were directed to the second block, which contained the rating items.

A. Participants

All participants were undergraduate students enrolled in level 7 or level 8 of the Arabic Language and Literature program at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University. This particular population was selected on the basis of their advanced proficiency in the Arabic language, which they had developed through rigorous academic training through the course of their studies.

A total of 53 individuals completed the survey. The responses of eleven participants were subsequently excluded from the analysis based on the following screening criteria:

1- Participants who did not provide ratings for all eight target sentences were removed from the dataset.

2- Participants who appeared to have responded carelessly were likewise excluded. Indicators of non-serious engagement included implausible rating patterns and survey completion times below the established minimum threshold of one minute.

B. The Results

Prior to examining the results, a threshold value on the rating scale was determined to distinguish acceptable (attested) from unacceptable (unattested) ones. As no crosslinguistically agreed-upon method exists for establishing such a cut-off point, a threshold of 3 was adopted for the purposes of this study. Accordingly, sentences with a mean rating of 3.0 or

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below were classified as acceptable and attested, while sentences with a mean rating of above 3.0 were classified as unacceptable and unattested.

The results of the acceptability judgment task indicate that all eight sentences were judged to be acceptable and attested by the participants, as each sentence received a mean rating below 1.20 (Figure 1). Specifically, mean ratings ranged from a minimum of 1.00 to a maximum of 1.19, values that fell considerably below the established threshold of 3.0.

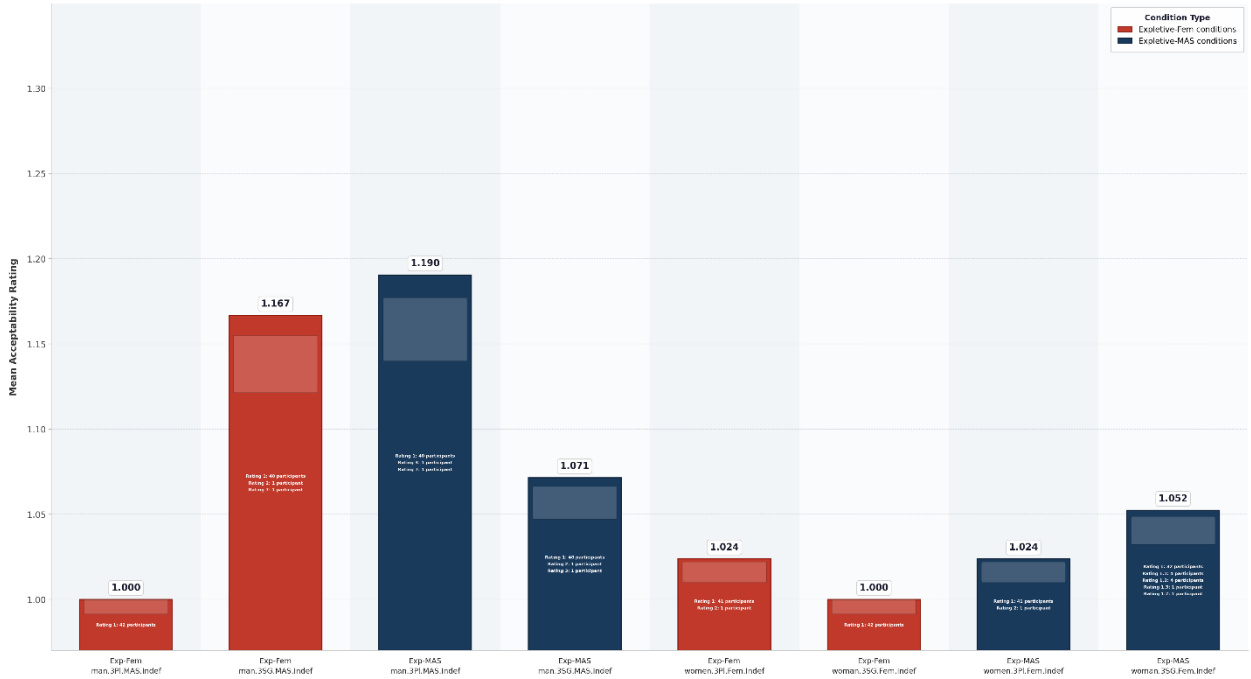


Figure 1. Acceptability Ratings of Sentences 5-12 by Expletive Genger Condition

In the chart, the y-axis represents mean ratings, while the x-axis corresponds to the individual target sentences. The bars are arranged in the same order as the examples (5-12), with example (5) represented by the leftmost bar and example (12) represented by the rightmost bar. Red bars represent sentences containing the feminine expletive *θammata*, while blue bars represent sentences containing the masculine expletive *θamma*. Mean ratings are listed above each bar and detailed information regarding individual participants' ratings is provided inside each bar.

III. Agreement in Arabic Non-Existential Constructions

Arabic exhibits agreement facts in declarative non-existential constructions that are different from those in existential constructions (Aoun et al., 1994; AlShammiry, 2016; Alshammari, 2023; Fakih, 2016, 2022; Fehri, 1993; Mohammad, 1990, 2000; Soltan, 2007). In SV word order, the subject agrees fully with the verb.

(13) al-rijalu kanu fi al-ħadikah
Def-man.3Pl.MAS.NOM be.PSt.Pl.MAS in Def-garden
"the men were in the garden"

(14) al-rajulu kana fi al-ħadikah
Def-man.3SG.MAS.NOM be.PSt.SG.MAS in Def-garden
"the man was in the garden"

(15) al-nisaʔu kunna fi al-ħadikah
Def-women.3PL.Fem.NOM be.PSt.Pl.Fem in Def-garden
"the women were in the garden"

(16) al-marʔatu kanat fi al-ħadikah
Def-woman.3SG.Fem.NOM be.PSt.SG.Fem in Def-garden
"the woman was in the garden"

When the subject precedes the verb, a full ɸ-features agreement between the subject and the verb is observed as exemplified in (13-16). However, in VS word order, the subject agrees with the verb partially.

(17) kana al-rijalu fi al-ħadikah
be.PSt.SG.MAS Def-man.3Pl.MAS.NOM in Def-garden
"the men were in the garden"

(18) kana al-rajulu fi al-ħadikah
be.PSt.SG.MAS Def-man.3SG.MAS.NOM in Def-garden
"the man was in the garden"

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(19) kanat al-nisaʔu fi al-ħadikah
be.PSt.SG.Fem Def-women.3PL.Fem.NOM in Def-garden
"the women were in the garden"

(20) kanat al-marʔatu fi al-ħadikah
be.PSt.SG.Fem Def-woman.3SG.Fem.NOM in Def-garden
"the woman was in the garden"

When the subject follows the verb, an impoverished agreement between the subject and the verb is noticed where the verb only agrees with the subject in gender and person but not in number. As illustrated in (17-20), in VS word order, the verb always bears third person singular features[3]. It is worth mentioning that such agreement mismatches in VS occurs with different classes of verbs not only with the different forms of the noninchoative unaccusative verb "*be"*. Various analyses have been proposed to account for anti-agreement in VS word order in Arabic (Aoun et al., 1994; AlShammiry, 2016; Alshammari, 2023; Fakih, 2016, 2022; Fehri, 1993; Mohammad, 1990, 2000; Soltan, 2007). However, for one reason or another, none of them can be adopted to account for agreement mismatches in Arabic existential constructions as will be clarified in section five.

IV. Agreement in Arabic Existential Constructions

This paper primarily aims to explain within minimalist framework how Case and ϕ-features checking and valuation proceed in existential sentences. In Arabic, Existence can be expressed by four different expletives: *judʒ͡ʒəd, hunak, θamma and θammata*. This paper focuses on the last two since they interestingly carry some agreement features. The first two words *judʒ͡ʒəd* and *hunak* lack such agreement features. It is worthy of note that *hunak* is the equivalent of English *there* as they behave identically. Unlike the other three Arabic expletives *judʒ͡ʒəd, θamma and θammata*, it can be used as a locative word just like the English *there*. The other expletives *judʒ͡ʒəd, θamma* and *θammata* cannot be used as locative words.

(21) *iðhab θamma/ θammata
go.Imperative locative
"go there"

(22) *iðhab judʒ͡ʒəd
go.Imperative locative
"go there"

(23) *θamma/ θammata muʃkelah θamma/ θammata
expletive problem locative
"there is a problem there"

(24) iðhab *hunak*
go.Imperative locative
"go there"

Examples (21-24) show that *judʒ͡ʒəd, θamma* and *θammata* cannot be used as locative words. On the other hand, example (12) shows how *hunak* can be a locative word.

Returning to agreement features, unlike *judʒ͡ʒəd* and *hunak,* the expletives *θamma* and *θammata* carry agreement features. The expletive *θamma* is masculine whereas *θammata* is feminine (al-Ghalayini, 1993). The morpheme *ta* attached to the end of the expletive *θamma**ta*** is what causes the expletive to be feminine. The suffix *ta* (might occur in different forms: "t", "tu", "tun" or "h" depending on the Case of the host) is an active gender-changing morpheme in Arabic. When suffixed to masculine verbs, nouns and adjectives, it changes the gender of the word from masculine to feminine.

(25) zawdʒ͡
husband.MAS

(26) zawdʒ͡a-ta
wife-Fem.Acc

(27) ʔakal
eat.MAS

(28) ʔakala-t
eat-Fem

(29) dʒ͡amil
beautiful.Mas

(30) dʒ͡amila-tun
beautiful-Fem.Nom

The above examples show that when the morpheme *ta*, or any of its different forms, is suffixed to nouns (25-26), verbs (27-28) and adjectives (29-30), it changes the gender of the host from masculine to feminine.

[3] In the case of a singular subject, the verb agrees with it in number because the verb is always singular in VS.

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With the expletives in questions established, it is now convenient to repeat the existential sentences tested in the acceptability judgement task in section two and examine their agreement facts.

(31)	kana	θamma-ta	rijalun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	man.3Pl.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were men in the garden"				
(32)	kana	θamma-ta	rajulun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	man.3SG.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a man in the garden"				
(33)	kana	θamma	rijalun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-MAS	man.3Pl.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were men in the garden"				
(34)	kana	θamma	rajulun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-MAS	man.3SG.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a man in the garden"				
(35)	kana	θamma-ta	nisaʔun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	women.3Pl.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were women in the garden"				
(36)	kana	θamma-ta	imraʔatun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	woman.3SG.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a woman in the garden"				
(37)	kana	θamma	nisaʔun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-MAS	women.3Pl.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were women in the garden"				
(38)	kana	θamma	imraʔatun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-MAS	woman.3SG.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a woman in the garden"				

As far as word order is concerned in existential constructions, the noninchoative unaccusative verb *kana* surfaces in a sentence-initial position followed by the expletive and the associate, respectively. Unlike VS declarative non-existential constructions where the verb agrees with the subject in person and gender but not in number, the verb in existential constructions always bears the features third person singular masculine regardless of what features the expletive and the associate carry. Comparing (31,33), (32, 34), (35, 37) and (36, 38), the expletives *θamma* and *θammata* can be used interchangeably. Examples (31), (35) and (36) show clearly that the verb does not have to agree with the associate. In (31), the verb bears third person singular masculine (which is the case across all examples) whereas the associate bears third person plural masculine. In (35), the verb only agrees with the associate in person while in (36), it agrees with the associate in person and number.

According to recent minimalist program (Chomsky, 1998; Chomsky, 1999; Chomsky, 2004; Radford, 2009), Case assignment and *T* agreement go hand in hand. The *T* probe cannot assign Case to a goal with which it does not agree. The agreement mismatches between the verb, expletive and associate observed in (31-38) raise several questions:

a- What checks the uninterpretable Case features of the associate?
b- Does *T* have Case features?
c- What Checks or values the ϕ-features on *T*?
d- Do the expletives have interpretable or uninterpretable ϕ-features? And, if they have uninterpretable ϕ-features, how are they checked?
e- Do the expletives have Case features?

Before presenting the proposal and addressing these questions, the following section reviews previous analyses of agreement mismatches in Arabic VS word order. Then it examines existing analyses of existential constructions and demonstrates why they cannot be adopted to account for the agreement facts observed in Arabic existential constructions in (31-38).

V. Previous Accounts on the Agreement Facts in Arabic Non-Existential Constructions

This section reviews previous analyses that have been proposed on the agreement facts in Arabic non-existential constructions. The purpose of presenting them is to show why these analyses cannot be extended to account for the agreement facts in existential constructions. Additionally, it explains why some of these analyses fail to account for the agreement facts observed in Arabic VS word order.

A large body of research has tackled the problem of subject-verb agreement in Arabic (Ackema & Neeleman, 2003; Aoun et al., 1994; Al-Balushi, 2025; Benmamoun, 2000; Mohammed, 1990, 2000; Ouhalla, 1994; Sahawneh & Al-Daher, 2025; Soltan, 2001, 2014, 2007). Mohammed's (1990, 2000), Soltan's (2001) and Ouhalla's (1994) accounts for the agreement mismatches between the subject and the verb in VS word order in Arabic are similar in spirit. They suggest that in VS word order the verb is agreeing with a covert expletive pronoun. The features on the verb are not dictated by the surface subject but rather by an expletive pronoun which always carries the features third person singular masculine.

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Such approach fails to account for all the aspects of anti-agreement in Arabic. It fails to account for the gender match between the subject and verb when the subject is feminine (39). It cannot be the case the verb receives its feminine feature from the covert expletive pronoun because the expletive pronoun carries third person singular masculine features.

(39) kanat al-marʔatu fi al-ħadikah
be.PSt.SG.Fem Def-woman.3SG.Fem.NOM in Def-garden
"the woman was in the garden"

Along similar lines, it does not account for the agreement mismatches observed in the presence of a conjoined NP with the first member being feminine either.

(40) raqasat al-bintu wa al-rajulu
dance.Pst.SG.fem Def-girl.3SG.fem and Def-man.3SG.MAS
"the girl and the man danced"

In the presence of a conjoined NP starting with a feminine member, the verb has the features of third person singular feminine. These features cannot be dictated by the covert expletive pronoun because the expletive pronoun carries third person singular masculine features. This type of analysis also fails to account for the agreement facts observed in Arabic existential constructions. It does not account for the agreement features occurring on the expletives. If the features on the verb are dictated by the covert expletive pronoun, then what dictates the features on the expletives?

In an attempt to explain the agreement facts in VS word order in Arabic, Aoun et al. (1994) propose that the subject and the verb agree in both word orders: SV and VS. However, in VS word order, due to various syntactic operations such as verb raising, the agreement gets lost. This analysis cannot be generalized as it seems to be structure-specific and ad hoc at best. Just like previous accounts, this type of analysis cannot handle the agreement facts in Arabic existential constructions because it does not touch on the checking and valuation of the features on the expletives.

In his (2004) and (2007) research papers, Soltan proposes the following structure to explain the agreement facts in VS word order:

(41)

[CP C[TP T Default/ Class[vP DP v[VP]]]]

Agree

He assumes that *T* does not have ϕ-features, but rather it has default ϕ-features with no agreement with the post-verbal subject. He also assumes that *T* does not have EPP feature which allows the subject to remain in situ. As for Case assignment, he assumes that the subject's Nom Case is assigned by the verb. However, such an analysis is ruled out by recent minimalist literature as mentioned earlier: Case assignment and *T* agreement go hand in hand (Chomsky, 1998; Chomsky, 1999; Chomsky, 2004; Radford, 2009). Even if the relationship between Case assignment and *T* agreement is ignored, this approach cannot be adopted to account for the agreement mismatches in existential Arabic constructions as, siding with the previous accounts, it does not explain the checking and valuation of the features on the expletives.

Ackema and Neeleman (2003) and Benmamoun (2000) have had their share of discussing syntactic agreement in Arabic. They suggest that agreement alternation in VS word order is a PF phenomenon. Although the characterization of configuration is developed differently, in both accounts, the agreement weakening occurring in VS is a result of PF merger. These analyses cannot be extended to account for the agreement mismatches in existential constructions for two reasons:

a- The expletives have nowhere to be incorporated in these analyses.

b- The features that the verb bears in existential constructions are different from those in non-existential constructions.

None of the abovementioned analyses can be adopted to account for the agreement facts observed in existential constructions. Similarly, as will be discussed in the following section, preexisting cross-linguistic accounts of existential constructions cannot be adopted to account for the agreement facts observed in Arabic existential sentences.

VI. Previous Accounts on the Agreement Facts in Arabic Existential Constructions

Groat (1995) argues against Chomsky's (1991) proposal that *there* is an LF affix that needs to adjoin to something (the associate) at LF in order to be interpretable. He proposes that *there* is interpreted as null and it bears Case features but not ϕ-features since it occupies case position but lacks agreement features. The expletive *there* will check the strong features on *T* since it is inserted in Spec, AgrSP before Spell-out, and the associate in VP will raise at LF to adjoin *there* to check its ϕ-features against N-features of AgrS. This approach cannot be taken to account for the Arabic existential constructions for two reasons: 1- For Groat, the associate checks ϕ-features on AgrS, so agreement mismatches are predicted to be impossible 2- He assumes that the expletive does not have ϕ-features which is not the case in Arabic expletives under investigation.

Cardinaletti (1997) hypothesizes a connection between Case and agreement in existential sentences known as the Nominative Agreement Hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, agreement in existential sentences is determined by the Case carried by the expletive. If the expletive has Nominative Case, then the agreement is with the expletive. However, when the expletive is Case-ambiguous, the agreement is with the associate. This account obviously cannot be adopted because Arabic expletives in question are at best Case-ambiguous, and, as the examples show, the associate does not show an agreement with the verb.

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According to Chomsky (2000, 2004), *T* assigns Nominative Case to the associate and receives ϕ values from the associate which shows as agreement morphology in the verb. It proposes that the expletive is base-generated in Spec, TP and that it does not have Case nor ϕ-features. This apparently cannot be adopted to account for the agreement facts in Arabic existential constructions for two reasons: 1- Lack of agreement between the verb and the associate 2- The expletives show defective ϕ-features (only gender) which leads to the assumption that they have a full set of ϕ-features most of which are covert.

Deal (2009) argues that *there* is externally merged low in Spec, vP. In answering why Spec, vP, she argues that *there* is contentful; it has uninterpretable features that are checked against its associate. For these features to be checked, the checking relation must be maximally local. The expletive *there* is an agreement mediator that migrates the associate's features to a high position to be checked which allows the associate to remain low. This approach cannot be adopted to account for agreement in Arabic existentials for two obvious reasons:

a- Expletives cannot check their features against the associates because they can be used interchangeably meaning that they do not show agreement with the associates

b- The existence of agreement mismatches between the verb and the associate.

To account for definiteness restriction in *there* constructions, Kayne (2018) argues that *there* is base-generated DP-internally. This account predicts that *there* would have the same ϕ-features as the associate which is not true in Arabic existentials. It does not address agreement mismatches between the verb and the associate either. Therefore, it cannot be extended to cover Arabic existential constructions.

None of these theories can account for the agreement facts observed in Arabic existential constructions. The next section proposes an account that can capture the observed anomalies.

VII. The Proposal

This section proposes a syntactic account of the observed anomalies, drawing on the research questions outlined earlier. As the results of the present acceptability judgment task empirically demonstrate, the agreement mismatches between the verb, expletive and associate in Arabic existential sentences pose problems to Case and ϕ-features checking and valuation. According to recent minimalist framework (Chomsky, 1998; Chomsky, 1999; Chomsky, 2004; Radford, 2009), since the ϕ-features on *T* are realized on the verb, and the verb does not enter into an Agree relation with the associate, the associate's uninterpretable Case features cannot be checked. Other possible options are: 1- The associate bears default Case, as a result, does not require Case checking 2- The verb assigns Partitive Case to the associate. If the Case checking problem of the associate can be eliminated, the remaining issue concerns the expletive and *T*. The discussion therefore turns to default Case and investigates whether the associate is eligible for default Case assignment.

In some theories, DPs cannot be sent to Spell-out without their NOM Case feature checked whereas their ACC feature is waiting to be checked covertly. In an Agree-based theory, all Case features are checked in the same component. However, caseless DPs can survive through LF and PF if they do not have uninterpretable features that require checking (Schütze, 2001). Case Filter is known to be the power that enforces structural licensing requirements. Nonetheless, since no LF or PF crash will be caused by the fact that a DP might lack Case features, the Case Filter cannot be morphologically motivated. This implies that a DP can get structural licensing without receiving Case, or even that structural licensing is not required at all for some DPs (i.e., nonarguments).

Schütze (2001) argues for the existence of default Case in all languages. The default Case for many languages is NOM including Arabic (Ouhalla, 1994). According to Schütze (2001), different processes can motivate morphological Case marking: 1- Case can be assigned by syntactic head 2- It can also surface by matching a semantically related constituent 3- A Case that is syntactically assigned to a head (i.e., D) could extend to other constituents within the same projection (DP). When none of these mechanisms has applied, default Case marking arises. Therefore, it can be stated that a DP is identified with a default Case in an environment where all these mechanisms are ruled out (Schütze, 2001).

The following discussion examines whether the environment under consideration provides motivation for default Case marking. It is worth repeating that default Case in Arabic is NOM (Ouhalla, 1994). In existential constructions, there is a potential Case assigner which is the finite *T*. However, Schütze (2001) argues that, in some languages, the post-copular NP might be an instance of default marking. This may arise in contexts where there is a mismatch in Case between the post-copular NP and the other DP, namely the expletives *θamma* and *θammata* in the construction under investigation. However, there is no evidence that the expletives bear Case. Consequently, it is impossible to determine whether the associate and the expletive match in Case, given that the Case properties of the expletive are unknown. It follows that the associate cannot be assigned a default Case.

Turning to Partitive Case, unaccusative verbs cannot assign structural accusative Case to their objects. However, this does not mean that they cannot assign Case altogether. They can assign Partitive Case to their objects which is an inherent Case (Belletti, 1988). This can be seen in the following examples from Finnish.

(42) a. Pöydälla on kirjoja.
on the table is (some) books.part.Pl
"There are some books on the table"
b. Helsingistä tulee kirjeitä.
from Helsinki comes (some) letters.part.Pl

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"There come some letters from Helsinki" (Belletti, 1988, p. 2)

In these examples, the unaccusative verb assigns Partitive Case to its object. In Finnish, a preverbal NP can bear Partitive Case when the verb is unaccusative.

(43) Vieraita tulee.
guests.part,Pl come.3SG
"Guests are coming" (Belletti, 1988, p. 39)

In the example above, the subject which has an inherent Partitive Case does not trigger verbal agreement on the verb. The verb contains the unmarked features of third person singular. This indicates that agreement between the subject and the verb is not required for the verb to assign Partitive Case to the associate.

Under Partitive Case assignment, Case and theta assignments are conjunctive: for an NP to receive Partitive Case, the verb must both Case-mark and theta-mark the NP, a condition satisfied in the present paper's examples.

One might argue that copulas are semantically vacuous and therefore incapable of theta-marking NPs. This view is plausible in cases involving predicative adjectives (e.g., He is happy), where the copular verb does not appear to contribute to the semantic content. However, in existential constructions, the copular verb expresses an existential meaning ("exist"), which cannot be considered semantically vacuous. In fact, there are several researchers who adopt the Partitive Case analysis, partially because of this reason (Bentley et al., 2015; Freeze, 1992; McNally, 1997, 2011, 2016).

Therefore, building on Belletti's (1988) account and following Lasnik's (1995) analysis where he suggests that the associate in English existential constructions is assigned Partitive Case, it is concluded that there is nothing that can go against assigning Partitive Case to the associate in Arabic existential constructions.

Turing to *T*, under the assumption that *T* bears uninterpretable ϕ-features and interpretable Case features, it is necessary to determine how these features are checked and valued. Since *T* may or may not bear a Case feature depending on the theoretical account (Chomsky, 2000), and given that the associate is assumed to be assigned Partitive Case by the verb, it is assumed that *T* in Arabic existential sentences lacks a Case feature. In such cases, Case on the DP is checked via agreement with *T* bearing a full ϕ-set.

As for ϕ-features on *T*, Ouhalla (1994) explores the idiosyncratic agreement system in Arabic where in SVO word order the subject agrees fully with the verb while in VSO the verb displays a third person singular feature. He concludes that the features displayed by the verb are the default. However, the features realized on the verb in VSO declarative non-existential sentences are different from those carried by the verb in existential constructions (compare 17-20 to 31-38). In non-existential constructions, the verb always bears third person singular features meaning that it agrees with the subject in person and gender but not in number. On the other hand, the verb in Arabic existential constructions always bears third person singular masculine features meaning that the gender match between the subject and the verb in non-existential constructions is not attested in existential constructions.

Building on Ouhalla (1994), it can be assumed that the *T's* ϕ-features in Arabic existential sentences are the default. This makes this account structure-specific due to the differences between the ϕ-features on the verb in non-existential constructions and those on the verb in existential constructions. Now, it is necessary to determine what checks these features.

An accurate determination requires an exploration of the ϕ-features of the expletives and the associate. The expletives *θamma* and *θammata* can be used interchangeably. However, the specifications of ϕ-features on the associate yield different semantic interpretations which indicate that they are interpretable and do not require checking (Chomsky, 1998). Since the specifications of ϕ-features on the expletives do not contribute to the semantic interpretation (the semantics at LF), the features are uninterpretable and need to be checked (Chomsky, 1998). It is suggested that uninterpretable valued features can check other uninterpretable features but not value them. Henceforth, the uninterpretable ϕ-features on the expletives are valued and they can check but not value the ϕ-features on *T*. Assuming uninterpretable valued features on expletives contradicts Chomsky's (2004) proposal that valuation and interpretability go hand in hand, and aligns with Pesetsky and Torrego's (2007) proposal which suggests a dissociation between valuation and interpretability.

Sobin (2014) tackles the agreement mismatches between the verb and the associate in existential sentences such as *there's cars in the parking lot*. He concludes that these associates are in a default position and bear no Case feature. He proposes that *there* may be assigned a gratuitous person and number value such as third-singular. In sentences where the verb does not agree with the associate, T_{fin} probes, Case-marks and moves *there* to Spec, *TP*. His assumption that *there* has ϕ-features that require checking aligns with and supports the validity of our proposal.

VIII. Conclusion

This paper explores existential constructions in Arabic and accounts for the patterns they exhibit. In particular, it addresses the agreement mismatches observed between the expletive, associate and *T*. It proposes that these agreement asymmetries can be explained by assuming that the associate is assigned Partitive Case by the verb and that it bears interpretable ϕ-features which does not require checking. With respect to *T*, it argues that it lacks a Case feature but carries default third person singular masculine ϕ-features. These features are checked, but not valued by the expletive, which itself bears uninterpretable valued ϕ-features.

The present proposal does not readily extend to agreement mismatches in non-existential constructions, owing to differences in the ϕ-features specifications of the verb in the two construction types. However, future research may

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explore modifications to the analysis that would allow it to accommodate both existential and non-existential constructions within a unified framework.

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- Alnuqaydan, A. (2022). Triconsonantal Clusters in Qassimi Arabic. In *Proceedings of the Annual Meetings on Phonology*.
- Alnuqaydan, A. (2020). N-Behavior in Quranic Reading.

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Comprehension Breakdown and Regulatory Strategies in Academic Reading: A Think-Aloud Case Study of University Students in Kupang, Indonesia

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***Abstract*—Academic reading is central to the performance of higher education students, but how students manage difficulties in reading comprehension remains under-researched. This study examined the comprehension breakdown and regulatory strategies that students verbalized during reading, focusing on strategies readers use to restore understanding and increase comprehension. Nine second-semester university students in Kupang, Indonesia, were involved in a think-aloud reading task followed by stimulated recall interviews. The results showed that academic reading unfolded in several episodes rather than as a smooth linear process when they found difficult technical terms, abbreviations, abstract conceptual labels, and underspecified evidential claims. Three main strategies to achieve comprehension were repair chains, concretization bridges to recover abstract meaning, and the application of meaning monitoring or epistemic monitoring. Across cases, participants varied in the density and depth of regulatory strategies; some produced longer, less stable episodes, while others often recovered meaning through glossing, paraphrasing, inference, and evaluative monitoring.**

***Index Terms*—academic reading, comprehension breakdowns, think-aloud protocol, Kupang students**

I. Introduction

Reading activity involves more than decoding written symbols (Hung et al., 2025; Paige et al., 2024)—it takes the capability of constructing meaning, evaluating textual coherence, and making interpretive judgments (Alruthaya et al., 2025; Kiili et al., 2024; McCrudden et al., 2024; Tibken & Tiffin-Richards, 2025). Recent scholarship reports that reading comprehension does not emerge from isolated subskills alone, but from the dynamic interactions between the reader's characteristics, text features, and context (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; McMaster & Kendeou, 2023). Today, the international assessment data continue to indicate persistent challenges in reading achievement. For example, the 2022 PISA report stated that 15-year-old Indonesian teenagers generally scored 359 in reading comprehension, with only 25% attained Level 2 and above, compared to the OECD average of 476 (OECD, 2023). While this nationwide finding indicates a persistent issue in literacy, it lacks information on how comprehension difficulties arise during the reading process.

In higher education, students are required to digest academic texts with more conceptual density, specialized lexicon, and complex structures. Beyond literal meaning, students must be able to connect propositions across clauses and

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paragraphs, relate textual information to their prior knowledge, and construct a coherent situation model of the text (Adams, 1990; Chall, 1983; Kintsch, 1998; Perfetti, 1985; Rayner et al., 2012; Smith, 2004; Snow & Sweet, 2003). As such, recent studies suggest that students often perceive reading comprehension—the key factor of academic participation and success—as a demanding and frustrating skill (Bergman, 2024; Mason & Warmington, 2024). In general, research on reading comprehension of higher education students remains outcome-oriented, focusing on comprehension scores, grades, or readers' self-reported strategies rather than the real-time processes through which understanding breaks down and is subsequently repaired. Some works from different parts of the world also reported that most students find it challenging to develop academic literacies (Lea & Street, 1998), which significantly influence their success in higher education (Atkinson & Smith Risser, 2023; Holschuh, 2020; Reynolds et al., 2020).

Successful reading depends not only on cognitive skills (linguistic processing) but also on metacognitive monitoring and metacognitive regulation. Cognitive skills involve mental processes required to attend to, interpret, store, and connect information in a text. More specifically, linguistic processing allows readers to comprehend vocabulary, parse syntactic structures, and establish semantic relationships within and across sentences. Metacognitive monitoring refers to a reader's ability to observe and evaluate ongoing comprehension, particularly in identifying misunderstanding, uncertainty, or gaps in interpretation. Metacognitive regulation is the deliberate actions taken to manage and repair comprehension, such as rereading difficult passages, inferring meaning from context, or adjusting reading strategies to task demands.

Readers experience what is called comprehension breakdown when they encounter difficulties in reading, such as unfamiliar technical terms, abstract concepts, or weakly signaled relations between ideas in the texts. To address this, they may identify the source of difficulty and try to increase comprehension by rereading, paraphrasing, inferring, or summarizing (Flavell, 1979; Nelson & Narens, 1990). Recent research continues to show that text with conceptually difficult content can disrupt readers' accurate judgment, so metacognitive monitoring is a useful strategy to increase comprehension (Hildenbrand et al., 2024; Tibken & Tiffin-Richards, 2025). Accordingly, research on reading comprehension should distinguish between comprehension breakdown, metacognitive monitoring, and regulatory strategies to identify how readers notice the difficulties and attempt to resolve them.

A substantial body of research mostly uses declarative instruments, such as strategy questionnaires or retrospective reports (Craig et al., 2020; Schellings & Van Hout-Wolters, 2011), to identify general tendencies, but it is less effective to capture online processing and vulnerable to recall bias and social desirability (Paulhus, 2017; Veenman, 2011). Recent scholarship has called for a closer alignment between theories of reading comprehension and the assessment and investigation of comprehension, particularly if the field is to account for the dynamic interaction between the reader, the text, and the context (McMaster & Kendeou, 2023). To understand how readers experience difficulty and attempt to recover from it, a more process-sensitive approach is needed.

This study addresses the need through the think-aloud protocol (TAP). Think-aloud is a research method in which participants speak aloud any words in their mind as they complete a task (Charters, 2003). Within the protocol-analysis tradition, think-aloud data provide structured access to verbalizable aspects of cognitive processing during task performance (Ericsson & Simon, 1993; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Tang et al. (2025) suggest that think-aloud remains a valuable method for examining reading comprehension, strategic behavior, and metacognitive activity, particularly in language-related contexts. To mitigate the limitations associated with relying solely on verbal protocol data and to strengthen the credibility of the findings, this study triangulated TAP data with stimulated recall interviews (SRI) conducted after the reading task. This allowed participants to elaborate on moments of hesitation, uncertainty, or strategic decision-making, thereby supporting a more comprehensive interpretation of their cognitive and metacognitive processes during academic reading (Fan et al., 2023).

It has been reported that a careful use of stimulated recall alone, or combined with other techniques, remains a productive way to access reflections on cognitive and affective processes in educational research (Zhai et al., 2024). The combination of TAP and SRI has been used in various research contexts to reveal participants' cognitive processes. Bowles (2018) explains that think-aloud and stimulated recall are forms of verbal reports that have long been used in language research to access learners' thinking processes. Empirically, this combination has been applied in the contexts of sport coaching, EFL writing, feedback-based revision, and EFL writing processes in Indonesia (Abas & Abd Aziz, 2018; Chapman et al., 2024; Hoang & Storch, 2024; Tian et al., 2022). Even in the Indonesian context, Supardan and Capati (2026) employed academic reading tasks, screen recordings, think-aloud protocols, AI interaction logs, and stimulated recall interviews to examine how EFL students use AI as a metacognitive mirror to monitor and repair comprehension breakdowns. However, studies that specifically integrate TAP and SRI to uncover students' cognitive processes in reading academic expository texts without AI mediation, particularly in the context of a university in Kupang City, remain limited. Therefore, this study focuses on students' cognitive processes as they engage directly with academic expository texts.

This research was conducted in Kupang, the capital city of East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. This area is selected because it receives less attention in previous TAP and SRI-based studies and is underrepresented in the international literature of academic reading. This study examines the cognitive processes that are verbalized during reading, focusing on the strategies readers use to restore understanding and achieve comprehension. Case-based evidence from such contexts can enrich broader theoretical discussions by showing how comprehension breakdown, monitoring, and regulation unfold in settings that remain underexamined.

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II. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study to explore the verbalized cognitive processes involved in academic reading. The participants were nine second-semester students of the Indonesian Language Department in a university in Kupang, who enrolled in the Indonesian Basic Reading Course. These participants were purposively selected based on their levels of UKBI (a standardized assessment of Indonesian proficiency): Semenjana (basic), Madya (intermediate), and Unggul (fluent), with three students from each level. The UKBI level only served as an interpretive background rather than a basis for statistical comparison. The participants were coded with S1-S3 (Semenjana), M1-M3 (Madya), and U1-U3 (Unggul). In the preliminary stage, the participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire about their language use, reading exposure, prior knowledge, and topic interest.

The primary data were the verbatim transcription of the think-aloud protocol (TAP) activities combined with the stimulated recall interview (SRI) as the supporting evidence. In the TAP sessions, the participants were asked to read an expository text about the application of technology in higher education. The 500-600-word text was in Bahasa Indonesia, divided into eight paragraphs. It contained technical terms, abstract concepts, and generalized claims to stimulate monitoring and regulation. While reading, the participants should say whatever came to their mind, and the researcher's intervention should be as minimal as possible and limited to neutral prompts when verbalization stopped for 5-7 seconds. Immediately after the TAP, each participant took part in the stimulated recall interview (SRI), focusing on selected moments from the reading session. The interview questions varied depending on the situations, such as why they took a long pause, why they skipped difficult words, or why they chose particular strategies. The TAP captured the participants' verbalized thoughts during reading, and SRI helped clarify moments in the TAP record that were difficult to interpret directly, such as long pauses, hesitation, skipped terms, or sudden changes in strategy (Ericsson & Simon, 1993; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995; Gass & Mackey, 2000).

All recordings were transcribed verbatim, annotated with timestamps, and then segmented into the smallest analytic units, which represented a single idea or comprehension-related action. These segments were coded into three broad tiers: cue/obstacle, monitoring/appraisal, and regulatory strategy/response (see Table 1). Following that, related segments were grouped into comprehension episodes based on the sequence: cue → monitoring/appraisal → regulation → outcome, with outcomes categorized as recovered, partially recovered, or skipped/avoided. Pauses and code-switching were not treated automatically as evidence of difficulty, but interpreted in relation to surrounding contextual cues and, where necessary, the SRI explanation. In conceptual terms, this study treats reading comprehension as a process of meaning construction that can be disrupted and later restored through metacognitive monitoring and regulation (Flavell, 1979; Nelson & Narens, 1990).

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TABLE 1
OPERATIONAL CODEBOOK FOR CODING TAP

Tier	Code	Operational definition	Inclusion indicators	Exclusion/notes
Code1 (Cue/ Obstacle)	PAUSE_LONG	Silence ≥ 5–7 seconds plausibly linked to processing (tracked with phone timer).	[pause 7s], gaze fixed on text, pointing to line/term, silent rereading, effortful facial expression.	If a pause coincides with an external disruption (e.g., an entrance, loud noise), mark it as non-cognitive in the memo and do not code it as a processing cue.
	VOCA_BREAK	Lexical/terminological breakdown: difficulty understanding a word, term, abbreviation, or phrase.	"What does X mean?", "This term…?", Pronounce out a term, stopping at an abbreviation.	If difficulty is primarily about coherence/argument across sentences, use COH_BREAK.
	COH_BREAK	Coherence/argument breakdown: unclear relations across clauses/sentences or uncertainty about claims/evidence.	"This does not connect…," "Why is it like this?" "Where does this claim come from?"	It may occur without term difficulty; often followed by QUESTION or MONITOR_NEG.
	TRANSLATE/ CODESWITCH	Translation or language shifting (ID↔MK↔EN) is used in meaning-making. ID: Indonesian MK: Local dialect EN: English	Switch language to search for an equivalent, gloss, or continue reasoning.	Treat it as a candidate cue: interpret as a breakdown only if corroborated by other indicators and/or SRI confirms difficulty-triggered switching.
Code 2 (Monitoring/Appraisal)	MONITOR_NEG	Explicit negative appraisal of comprehension.	"I don't understand," "I am confused," "I'm not sure," "It doesn't make sense."	If the statement is evaluative but not about understanding (e.g., "this is important"), do not code it as MONITOR_NEG.
	QUESTION	An explicit question used to test/build understanding.	"What does it mean?" "Refers to what?" "So, is this saying…?"	Questions may signal monitoring even if no difficulty cue appears in the same segment.
	EVAL_CLAIM	Evaluating the credibility/logic of a claim or evidence.	"They say data show… but from where?", "This seems too general."	Use only if argumentative evaluation is part of the analytic focus.
Code 3 (Regulatory Strategy/ Response)	GLOSS_WORD	Creating an equivalent or short definition for a term/phrase.	"ICT means…," "LMS is like…," defining in simpler words.	Often follows VOCA_BREAK, but can occur proactively.
	PARAPHRASE	Restating the idea in one's own words to maintain coherence.	"So, the point is…," "It means that…"	If the participant repeats the sentence verbatim, do not code it as a paraphrase.
	INFER_CONNECT	Making an inference or connecting ideas across the text and/or prior knowledge.	"That implies…," "This links to the earlier point…," "So, in campus context…"	The participant must add a connection beyond surface restatement.
	REREAD	Rereading a portion of text (aloud or silently) to restore comprehension.	"Let me reread…," visible silent reread in video memo.	If rereading occurs due to a pronunciation slip, it is a non-strategy.
	SUMMARIZE	Summarizing a section to consolidate meaning before moving on.	"So, this paragraph is about…" short recap before continuing.	Distinct from paraphrase: summarize condenses multiple propositions.
	SKIP/AVOID	Skipping or avoiding an unclear part to proceed.	"I will skip this," "I will move on," continuing without resolution.	Often associated with outcome partial/skip; corroborate with SRI when possible.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

The findings in this study are organized around comprehension episodes—the sequences of think-aloud segments that show how readers move from a difficulty cue to monitoring, then to regulatory action, and finally to an outcome. This approach allows us to go beyond listing isolated strategies to examine how comprehension was negotiated in real time. The original text and interview were in Bahasa Indonesia, but for this publication, we translated them into English.

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TABLE 2
COMPREHENSION EPISODES

Episode (Text Trigger)	Cue (Code1)	Monitoring (Code2)	Strategy (Code3)	Outcome	TAP Segment ID	Stimulated Recall (SR) Evidence
ICT / "information and communication technology (ICT)."	PAUSE_ LONG / TRANSLA TE	QUESTION / MONITOR_ NEG	GLOSS_ WORD + PARAPHRASE	Recovered	M2-018–M2-023	"The pause reflected an attempt to recall what ICT stands for before glossing it in Indonesian."
LMS / "Learning Management System (LMS)"	VOCA_ BREAK / PAUSE_L ONG	QUESTION	GLOSS_ WORD + PARAPHRASE (+ REREAD)	Recovered	M2-031–M2-036	"I glossed LMS so the paragraph would remain coherent and I could continue reading."
Disparity / "urban–rural disparity."	VOCA_ BREAK	QUESTION	GLOSS_ WORD + PARAPHRASE	Recovered	M1-053–M1-056	"I searched for an equivalent word—*kesenjangan*—to stabilize the meaning."
Digital accessibility	MONITOR _NEG / PAUSE_L ONG	QUESTION	GLOSS_WORD → INFER_CONNECT	Recovered	M1-044–M1-047	"I connected it to my own experience with signal coverage and data quotas."
Gamification / "points, badges, leaderboards."	VOCA_ BREAK	QUESTION	GLOSS_WORD + PARAPHRASE + INFER_CONNECT	Recovered	S3-060–S3-066	"I pictured it as a game-like reward system to make the concept concrete."
Evidence claim / "research indicates…"	(COH_BR EAK / MONITOR _NEG as cue)	QUESTION (source-oriented)	PARAPHRASE + SUMMARIZE (evaluative)	Recovered + evaluation	U3-040–U3-047	"I paused because the claim did not specify any evidence or citation."
Holistic / "a holistic approach."	VOCA_BR EAK	QUESTION	GLOSS_WORD + PARAPHRASE (+ INFER_CONNECT)	Recovered	M1-072–M1-076	"Later I realized the phrase framed the section as a set of integrated solutions."

Note: Five digits in segment ID consists of the participant's code (e.g., M1) and the order of segmentation (e.g., 036)

Across the dataset, episodes with the most evidence were concentrated around three types of textual triggers: technical or foreign terms and abbreviations (e.g., *ICT*, *LMS*, *VR*), abstract concepts (e.g., *disparity*, *digital accessibility*, *holistic*), and evidential claims (e.g., *data show…*, *research indicates…*). Analysis of these episodes revealed three recurring patterns: repair chains, concretization bridges, and differentiated monitoring. In Table 2, stimulated recall data were used selectively to clarify the meaning of pauses, language shifts, and strategy choices in key episodes. The following sections elaborate on the three patterns.

1. Repair Chains as a Recurrent Mechanism of Recovery

The repair chain refers to the relatively stable sequence in which comprehension breakdown was followed by monitoring and one or more regulatory moves that restored meaning. In these episodes, recovery was not contingent upon a single strategy but through a series of small but connected actions, such as pausing, questioning, glossing, paraphrasing, rereading, or linking the unfamiliar item to the immediate context.

This pattern was especially visible in episodes triggered by unfamiliar or technical terms. For instance, when participants encountered items such as *ICT*, *LMS*, or *disparity*, the episode often began with a cue such as hesitation, a prolonged pause, lexical breakdown, or language shifting. This condition was then followed by explicit monitoring, typically in the form of a question or a negative appraisal of understanding. Regulatory action usually took the form of generating a simpler equivalent, paraphrasing the surrounding clause, or briefly rereading the sentence before continuing.

a) Data 1
Episode "ICT" (S1)

The episodes began as the participant read a phrase about ICT
S1-024: *"ICT...*" coded as VOCA_BREAK

S1-025: "[silent for 6 seconds]" ---coded as PAUSE_LONG

S1-026: *"ICT... I don't know"* coded as VOCA_BREAK+MONITOR_NEG
In this episode, S1 met unfamiliar terms then followed by appraisal move but still didn't know and chose to skip. In SRI S1 stated that the tendency to skip because he was uncertain what ICT stands for.

b) Data 2
Episode "Disparity" (M1)

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In the sentence "data show a large disparity in internet access between urban and rural areas,"
The episode began with a difficulty cue in form of lexical breakdown:
M1-053: *"disparity…eee"* coded as VOCA_BREAK

An appraisal immediately followed this cue in the form of an explicit question marking a comprehension gap.
M1-054: *"What does "disparitas" mean?"* coded as QUESTION

After that, a meaningful pause occurred.
M1-055: —"[silent for 6 seconds]" ---coded as PAUSE_LONG
It signaled a processing space prior to the regulatory action.

M1-056: *"Disparity means a gap/large difference"* coded as REPAIR_STRAT + GLOSS_WORD + PARAPHRASE

After identifying an appropriate equivalent, the participant resumed reading more steadily and, in subsequent segments, was able to elaborate consequences (e.g., linking slow connectivity to disrupted learning). Stimulated recall supported these interpretations by showing that such pauses and shifts often occurred as a processing space for lexical retrieval or meaning consolidation rather than as signs of distraction.

Varied density and efficient use of repair chains were apparent based on students' levels of Indonesian proficiency (UKBI). Semenjana (basic level) participants tended to produce longer, less stable chains, often with repeated questions and more fillers, and ended with partial or no outcomes. Madya (intermediate level) participants showed a higher frequency of complete and reasonably efficient repair chains, combined with glossing and paraphrasing to restore local coherence. Unggul (proficient) participants generally displayed more compact and sometimes preventive chains, stabilizing meaning quickly before breakdowns became prolonged. In some cases, the repair went beyond word meaning to the level of argument and evidence.

2. Concretization Bridges in Recovering Abstract Meaning

The concretization bridge allows readers to recover abstract concepts by connecting them to examples, familiar situations, or lived experience. In this study, the concretization bridge was most evident when participants encountered terms that require more than a denotation, such as "digital accessibility", "inclusive learning", or "gamification". In these cases, readers often moved from uncertainty to understanding by anchoring the concept in a concrete situation they could imagine.

For example, when discussing "digital accessibility", some participants first expressed uncertainty through hesitation or direct questioning, then attempted a provisional gloss, and linked the term to practical situations such as poor signal coverage, a lack of devices, or difficulties with data quotas.

a) Data 3
Episode "Digital Accessibility" (M1)

The episode began as the participant read a phrase about limited connectivity *and barriers to digital accessibility*.
M1-043: "*barriers to digital accessibility*" was coded as reading segment.
When the abstract term appeared, the participant marked a processing disruption through negative monitoring:

M1-044: *"digital accessibility… hmm…"* coded as MONITOR_NEG
which then developed into an explicit question

M1-045: *"What does digital accessibility mean?"* coded as QUESTION
Following this appraisal, the participant engaged in regulation by producing an operational definition

M1-046: *"Maybe it is about whether you can access the internet/devices"* coded as REPAIR_STRAT + GLOSS_WORD + PARAPHRASE
Notably, the recovery did not stop at the definition. M1 immediately linked the concept to a concrete consequence grounded in a learning experience.

M1-047: *"This makes the quality of learning people receive unequal"* coded as REPAIR_STRAT + PARAPHRASE + INFER_CONNECT

Here, inference functioned as a "bridge" that tied the abstract concept (accessibility) to an easily imagined situation model (unequal learning quality), enabling the participant to continue reading with improved coherence. Stimulated recall strengthened this interpretation by showing that participants themselves experienced such examples as a way of "making the term real" so that the next part of the sentence would make sense.

b) Data 4

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Episode “Interactive Simulation” (S2)

The episodes began when participant read about the use of simulation application.
S2-088: *“Interactive simulation.. I’m not really understand”* coded as VOCA_BREAK+MONITOR_NEG

S2-089: *“Wait, maybe this means practicing independently using a computer”* coded as REPAIR_STRAT + PARAPHRASE + INFER_CONNECT.

Here the participant try to recover through highly concrete references as a way to grasp the concept.

For Semenjana (basic level) participants, concretization often served as the primary route to understanding, but it sometimes yielded only situational familiarity rather than a fully stable conceptual definition. Madya participants often combined concretization with initial glossing or paraphrasing to produce a more secure recovery. Among Unggul (proficient) participants, concretization tended to make the concept imaginable while supporting conceptual expansion and implication-making. In these cases, examples were used not only to understand the concept but also to test its broader relevance and consequences within the text argument.

3. From Meaning Monitoring to Epistemic Monitoring

The third and particularly important pattern was the nature of monitoring itself. Our data showed that monitoring not only acknowledged, “I do not understand,” but also appeared in at least two forms. The first was meaning monitoring, in which participants noticed that a word, term, or relationship between ideas was unclear. In the second form, epistemic monitoring, participants questioned whether a claim was sufficiently supported, the evidence was specified, or the argument's structure was convincing.

In this study, meaning monitoring appeared across all levels, especially around unfamiliar terms and abstract concepts. Participants often expressed meaning through direct questions, hesitation, or negative appraisal, and this was usually followed by glossing, paraphrasing, or inference. Below are the examples:

a) Data 5
Episode “transformation” (M1)

In the portion of text stating about the transformation of learning practices, M1 showed instability:
M1-008: *“transformation… hmm…”*coded as *MONITOR*_NEG

This monitoring was then intensified through an explicit question:
M1-009: *“What does transformation mean here?”* coded as QUESTION

M1-010: —“[silent for 6 seconds]” ---coded as PAUSE_LONG

After a pause, the participant enacted regulation through paraphrase and inference:
M1-011: *"Maybe it means a change in the way people learn, becoming more digital, maybe”* coded as REPAIR_STRAT+PARAPHRASE+ INFER_CONNECT

b) Data 6
Episode “Data Show..” (U3)

When participant met the section like “Data show”
U3-041: *“Here is stated that Data show… but there is no sources mention..hmm”* coded as MONITOR_NEG
U3-042: *“The sources must be stated, maybe BPS or Kemenkoinfo?)* coded as REPAIR_STRAT + INFER_CONNECT

c) Data 7
Episode “Research indicates”

The episodes began when participant read phrase like “research indicates”
U3-056: *“Research indicates..this is a general claim, so it should include a reference to make it stronger”* coded as MONITOR_NEG.

U3-057: *“Which research?”* coded as QUESTION

U3-058: *“But the concept is gamification increases engagement through rewards”* coded as REPAIR_STRAT+PARAPHRASE+INFER_CONNECT
In SR, the participant says that he paused because the claim did not specify any evidence or citation.

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The sequence above illustrates monitoring as an alarm that signals a meaning gap and simultaneously guides the form of repair, which, in this case, is the concept-based paraphrasing.

Epistemic monitoring, however, was most visible among participants in *the Unggul* level (proficient). Some of them understood episodes containing phrases like 'research indicates' or 'data show…' but questioned whether the claim had enough evidence and a strong connection with supporting evidence, or lacked citations. The subsequent stimulated recall confirmed that these responses reflected an evaluative stance rather than simple lexical or conceptual confusion.

Across the case, monitoring emerged as a central node linking obstacles to regulation, but the object of monitoring differed by proficiency level. *Semenjana* participants (intermediate level) showed intensive meaning monitoring, although it did not consistently lead to a stable recovery, whereas *Madya* participants tended to transform monitoring more directly into productive repair. *Unggul* participants extended monitoring into the epistemic domain, showing that academic reading in this dataset involved not only constructing meaning but also evaluating the warrant of what was being read.

B. Discussion

The findings of this research indicate that academic reading is best understood not as a smooth, linear act of processing, but as a process negotiated through recurring episodes of disruption and recovery. This study has demonstrated that the participants build comprehension through local moments when they meet a difficult part, assess it, and respond through regulation. These findings are consistent with the view that reading comprehension is the construction and maintenance of a coherent mental representation of text, which must be actively sustained during lexical, conceptual, or argumentative difficulties (Kintsch, 1998). In this sense, difficulty is not peripheral to academic reading; it is part of the process through which understanding is formed. It aligns with more recent work arguing that reading comprehension should be understood as a dynamic process shaped by interactions between reader characteristics, text features, and context rather than the product of isolated subskills alone (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; McMaster & Kendeou, 2023).

The first finding about the repair chain supports and extends metacognitive accounts of reading. The sequence observed in the data closely resembles the distinction between monitoring and control proposed in metacognitive theory (Flavell, 1979; Nelson & Narens, 1990). Participants first registered a disruption, then appraised the problem, and finally selected one or more actions to restore coherence. It is important to note that regulation rarely appeared as a single, isolated strategy, but through layers of actions that involve pausing, questioning, glossing, paraphrasing, rereading, and inferencing. This interpretation is aligned with a previous study by Tibken, who reported that comprehension monitoring and regulation among university students in Germany are especially important when they engage with expository texts and conceptually difficult material (Tibken & Tiffin-Richards, 2025). In this sense, the study extends current understandings of reading strategies by showing that what matters is not only which strategies are used, but how they are organized into a recoverable mechanism that can be empirically traced.

The second finding, the concretization bridge, shows that abstract concepts were often understood not from formal definition alone, but through movement toward concrete experience or familiar scenarios. This finding supports previous research on self-explanation, which reported that readers deepen their understanding when restating ideas in meaningful, personally interpretable ways (McNamara, 2004) and that verbalized responses during reading can support coherence building and reveal differences in how readers construct mental representations of the text (McCrudden et al., 2024). This resonates with the constructionist's ideas of comprehension that readers generate inferences to maintain coherence and build a workable mental model of the text (Graesser et al., 1994). In this study, however, the concretization bridge is not simply explanatory but specifically vital to stabilize meaning when facing difficulties. The findings also reveal an important distinction across proficiency levels. Concretization practiced by readers with moderate and higher proficiency can support recovery, whereas those at the lower proficiency level may not consistently produce a stable conceptual understanding. In this sense, a participant can get the example but not necessarily grasp the underlying abstraction.

The third finding, differentiated monitoring, is arguably the strongest conceptual contribution of this study. By distinguishing between meaning monitoring and epistemic monitoring, this study suggests that academic reading involves understanding of what a text says, as well as evaluating how well the claims in the text are supported. Accordingly, this finding expands the comprehension of academic reading beyond vocabulary and local coherence levels to knowledge appraisal, especially when readers encounter generalized or weak claims. In this respect, the findings resonate with the work on epistemic cognition and document processing, where beliefs about justification shape how readers evaluate and use information (Bråten et al., 2022). Although this study involved a single academic text rather than multiple documents, the same orientation was visible. Some participants were disrupted not because they could not decode the sentence, but because they questioned its evidential adequacy. Recent work on comprehension monitoring also supports the idea that the text characteristics can influence the monitoring accuracy; therefore, readers should check their monitoring process repeatedly (Hildenbrand et al., 2024; Tibken & Tiffin-Richards, 2025).

The variation across Indonesian proficiency levels (UKBI) reinforces this interpretation. Differences are not primarily about whether participants are monitored or regulated, but rather what they monitor, how efficiently they exercise regulation, and how far the outcome extends. At the *Semenjana* (basic level), monitoring was often intense, but regulation remained fragile, sometimes ending in partial recovery or avoidance, while students in *Madya* (intermediate level) readily converted monitoring into effective repair. The *Unggul* (proficient) students used regulation more economically and monitoring more evaluatively, extending to the level of argument quality and justification. These patterns are consistent with the process-oriented reading research, suggesting that comprehension differences are reflected in the final

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performance as well as the quality of online processing, reanalysis, and coherence-building activity during reading (McCrudden et al., 2024; Tibken & Tiffin-Richards, 2025).

Taken together, the three findings suggest that academic reading at the university level involves the interplay of cognitive, metacognitive, and evaluative work. When students are expected to engage with and critically evaluate complex texts containing many abstract concepts and claims, reading cannot be understood merely as the extraction of meaning from text. The repair chain explains how students procedurally restore comprehension when meaning breaks down, the concretization bridge shows how abstract ideas become workable through experiential anchoring, and the differentiated monitoring demonstrates that academic reading includes not only sense-making but also claim evaluation. These mechanisms support an episode-based account of academic reading in which meaning is not simply extracted from the text, but actively built, stabilized, and, at times, questioned. This study highlights how university students manage the cognitive and evaluative demands of academic reading. It offers a broader view that is compatible with recent calls to align theories of reading more closely with the dynamic ways in which readers actually interact with texts in context (McMaster & Kendeou, 2023).

IV. Conclusion

This study has shown that academic reading is more accurately understood as a series of comprehension episodes through which readers negotiate difficulty, monitor understanding, regulate meaning, and, at times, evaluate the adequacy of textual claims. Across the cases, three salient mechanisms were identified: repair chains to restore comprehension, concretization bridges to help readers stabilize abstract meaning through concrete examples and experience, and differentiated monitoring to conduct meaning-focused appraisal and epistemic evaluation of evidence and argument. These findings suggest that academic reading in higher education involves more than decoding and meaning construction, but requires the students to manage uncertainty, sustain coherence, and judge whether the text contains enough support for the claims.

Conceptually, the study contributes an episode-based account of academic reading that integrates cognitive, metacognitive, and evaluative processes within a single analytic framework. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of combining the think-aloud protocol (TAP) with the stimulated recall interview (SRI) to build a more transparent chain of evidence for interpreting reading processes. As a qualitative case study, this research presents an analytically grounded account of how academic reading unfolds in a linguistically diverse and underrepresented higher-education context. The limitation of this study is the lack of statistical generalization and the use of small samples. Future research can involve participants from a wider range of universities and disciplines to examine whether the identified episode patterns remain consistent across contexts. The use of different types of academic texts may lend insights into how textual demands shape comprehension breakdown, monitoring, and regulation.

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Transformation of Folkloric Plots and the Artistic Function of Mythic Motifs in Magzhan Zhumabayuly's Poems of the Tashkent Period

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***Abstract*—This article examines the transformation of folkloric plots and the artistic functions of mythic motifs—including alienation, loneliness, the search for eternal life and an eternal homeland, belief in supernatural forces, and sacred space—in four poems written by Magzhan Zhumabayuly during the Tashkent period (1922-1923): Korkyt, On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes, Batyr Bayan, and Qoilybai's Kobyz. The study combines mythopoetic, hermeneutic, and biographical approaches. Mythopoetic analysis identifies and classifies recurrent motifs; hermeneutic analysis interprets textual meanings, images, and symbolic details; and biographical analysis clarifies the relationship between the poet's Tashkent activities, his engagement with folklore, and the sources of the poems' plots. The analysis compares the poems with their probable folkloric and historical sources and traces changes in plot sequence, character motivation, motif function, symbolism, and psychological representation. The findings show that Zhumabayuly did not reproduce traditional plots verbatim: he preserved their narrative core while reorganizing their composition and intensifying their symbolic, psychological, and sociopolitical meanings. The Tashkent period, during which the poet participated in folklore-related scholarly and publishing activity, therefore provides an important context for understanding the authorial transformation of these plots.**

***Index Terms*—folkloric plot transformation, mythic motif, mythopoetics, Alash literature, Magzhan Zhumabayuly**

I. Introduction

The long poem occupies a special place in the oeuvre of Magzhan Zhumabayuly, a prominent representative of the Alash national liberation movement. He turned to the genre after 1920, when his poetic vision had matured and his creative capacity had reached a high artistic level. He began writing long poems in Kyzylzhar in 1920 and continued in Tashkent and Moscow. The influence of folklore, folkloric plots, artistic devices, and mythic motifs is clearly visible in his ten poems: *Yertegi* (1920), *Korkyt* (1922), *Qoilybai's Kobyz* (1923), *On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes* (1923), *Batyr Bayan* (1923), *Zhusip Khan* (A True Tale) (1924), *The Tale of Qanysh Bai* (1926), *The False Tale* (1926), *The Group of Ninety* (1927), and *Tolgau* (1927).

Folklore strongly shaped Zhumabayuly's poems, which helps explain the frequent appearance of mythic motifs. Kanarbayeva (1995) relates their folkloric basis to social change, while Zhurtbay et al. (2021) emphasize the poet's work in Tashkent, the capital of the Turkestan ASSR, where he taught at the Kazakh Institute of Education and served on education and science commissions in 1922-1923. Tileshov (2023) links the measured use of folkloric techniques to the poet's artistic mastery and distinguishes historical figures (Syzdyk Sultan, Kenesary Khan, Bayan Batyr, and Qoilybai Baksy) from the historical-legendary figure Korkyt. Nurgali (1997) likewise notes that folk legends and historical data were artistically re-created and given a new quality.

Yskakuly (2020) demonstrates that most of the poems were written in a historical-legendary mode, Kanarbayeva (1995) identifies the probable sources of plots based on folkloric material, and Baltogayeva (2015) examines their genre types, historical-plot foundations, and artistic system, classifying the plots as historical, legendary, or literary. These studies consistently address plot, idea, and motif because the central meanings of the poems are often conveyed indirectly through mythic motifs.

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Although the structural, artistic, and folkloric features of Zhumabayuly's poems have been studied comprehensively, the transformation of folkloric plots in the poems of the Tashkent period and the function of mythic motifs in restoring historical memory have not been examined as a distinct research problem.

The aim of this study is to analyze the transformation of folkloric plots and the artistic function of mythic motifs in four poems written during the Tashkent period (1922-1923), a period that occupies a special place in Magzhan Zhumabayuly's creative work. To achieve this aim, the article addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent did Zhumabayuly's Tashkent period influence his creative work, particularly his use of folkloric techniques in the poems?
2. What types of folkloric plots and mythic motifs occur in Zhumabayuly's poems of the Tashkent period?
3. Did the socio-political conditions of the 1920s influence the use of mythic motifs in the poems written in that decade?
4. Were folkloric plots used unchanged in Zhumabayuly's poems?

The Literature Review systematizes the concepts of folklore, myth, and motif, current approaches to mythic motifs, and the methodological foundations of mythopoetic, hermeneutic, and biographical analysis. The Materials and Methods section presents the corpus, methods, and procedure; the Results section examines the four Tashkent-period poems; the Discussion interprets the findings and their significance; and the Conclusion summarizes how the research aim was achieved.

II. Literature Review

The literature review is organized around three interrelated directions: first, the theoretical foundations of folklore, myth, and motif; second, current approaches to the study of mythic motifs in literary texts; and third, the scholarly foundations of the mythopoetic, hermeneutic, and biographical methods employed in this article. This structure integrates theoretical concepts, previous scholarship, and the analytical framework of the study.

A. Theoretical Foundations of the Concepts of Folklore, Myth, and Motif

The review focuses on studies of folkloric plot transformation and mythic motifs. Folklore is understood as a syncretic, multifunctional, multivariant, and evolving system of verbal art governed by its own plot structure, character system, and poetics (Rakysh, 2020, p. 223). Myth is defined as a prose narrative that explains the origin of the world, the earth, humankind, and the characteristics of living beings (Rakysh, 2020, p. 147). Motif denotes a generalized form of semantically related events and plot lines within a narrative tradition (Tamarchenko, 2008, p. 130). A mythic motif is therefore a motif connected with myth and manifested at different textual levels, from a mythonym to a mythic plot (Raznitsyna, 2016).

A. N. Veselovsky regarded the motif as a simple narrative unit, a semantically integral structure that cannot be further divided, and argued that a specific action or event lies at its core, making it the initial element of a mythological or folkloric plot (Silantev, 2004). V. Propp's analysis of the fairy tale demonstrated that motifs are divisible in practice, whereas E. M. Meletinsky identified affinities among the concepts of image, motif, and archetype (Kasen & Baitanasova, 2024).

B. Current Directions in the Study of Mythic Motifs

A review of studies analyzing mythic motifs in literary works reveals several shared tendencies.

Table 1
Review of Studies on Mythic Motifs

Author(s)	Article / study title	Research method	Motifs considered
Zh. A. Aimukhambet, M. N. Mirazova, B. A. Rakhmetova (Aimukhambet et al., 2025)	The Sacred Motif in Magzhan Zhumabayuly's Poems	Analysis, synthesis, mythopoetic analysis	Sacredness, sacred place, sacred person
A. T. Kasen, K. M. Baitanasova (Kasen & Baitanasova, 2024)	The Function of Mythic Motifs in the Text (Based on M. Magauin's story Kipchak Beauty)	Structural analysis, motif analysis, mythopoetic analysis, comparative method	Transformation, balbal statue, alter ego, bifurcation
Zh. E. Baltogayeva (Baltogayeva, 2015)	Genre and Artistic Features of Magzhan Zhumabayuly's Poems	Genre-based and structural-poetic analysis	Disillusionment with life, alienation
S. E. Mussabekova, Zh. A. Aimukhambet (Mussabekova & Aimukhambet, 2024)	The Use of the Motif of Meeting Mythical Characters in a Literary Work	Synthesis, analysis, comparative, historical-typological, genetic, image-associative, and structural methods	Meeting with mythological characters
A. A. Maulenov, A. I. Mamyrov (Maulenov & Mamyrov, 2024)	Archetypal Symbols of Neo-mythological Motifs in A. Altai's Novel Tuazhat	Archetypal and neo-mythological textual analysis	Neo-mythological motifs

The studies presented in Table 1 reveal three main directions in the analysis of mythic motifs: mythopoetic and symbolic interpretation; structural explanation of motif functions within a text; and examination of the relationship between authorial poetics and historical-cultural context. Together, these directions provide the theoretical basis for analyzing the transformation of folkloric plots and the artistic function of mythic motifs in Zhumabayuly's poems of the Tashkent period.

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C. Scholarly and Methodological Foundations of Mythopoetic, Hermeneutic, and Biographical Methods

This subsection clarifies the theoretical foundations of the methods used in the study. Rather than describing the practical analytical procedure, it explains the scholarly traditions underlying these methods and their application in international and Kazakhstani research.

Mythopoetic Analysis

Mythopoetic analysis identifies mythic motifs, examines them historically, and reveals national codes and sacred concepts within Kazakh cultural cognition. Lutsak and Vivcharyk (2025) demonstrate how traditional mythological plots and images can be interpreted and transformed in literary texts, while Kobakhidze (2022) discusses the tension between conscious authorial uses of myth and the expectation that mythic motifs emerge unconsciously.

Among Kazakhstani scholars, Aimukhambet (2016), Kokbas et al. (2020), Yeldos and Almaskhanqyzy (2026), and Kasen and Baitanasova (2024) have used mythopoetic analysis to identify motifs, distinguish their functions, and interpret symbolic and metaphorical meanings. The method is especially valuable for revealing the mystical, symbolic, and metaphorical dimensions of literary myth (Aimukhambet, 2016).

Hermeneutic Analysis

Hermeneutic analysis is used to interpret textual meaning and the relationship between the image system and folkloric sources. Kanzunnudin et al. (2026) apply hermeneutics to contemporary Indonesian poetry rich in connotation and symbolism. Karimnia and Hosseini Fard (2021) compare 23 translations of Rumi's Masnavi through a hermeneutic model and emphasize the principle of wholeness, showing how individual parts shape the interpretation of the whole.

Among Kazakhstani scholars, Yessembekov (2012) examines the theoretical foundations of hermeneutics in textual analysis, while Paltore et al. (2025) demonstrate its application in literary interpretation.

Biographical Analysis

The biographical method is used to examine one of the most productive periods in the author's life and creative work—the Tashkent period—and to clarify the sources from which mythic motifs, plots, and ideas were drawn.

Aytekin and Oznurhan (2025), for example, interpret pessimism in the poetry of Ibrahim Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini in relation to the author's life.

Radyshevskyj and Matorina (2025) show that biographical analysis treats the writer's temporal and spatial context, experience, and personality as factors shaping creativity and that the method has diversified in contemporary literary studies. Among the approaches they describe, the classical historical-biographical approach is most relevant here because it explains the relationship between life and creative work through historical context, biographical facts, and social circumstances. Cáseda Teresa (2024) similarly demonstrates how biographical events can become literary material.

Among Kazakhstani scholars, Yelkey (2025) analyzes the Kyzylzhar period of Khayretdin Bolganbaev, a contemporary of Magzhan Zhumabayuly, while Kamisheva and Baimakhanova (2024) examine the ideas of Naguib Mahfouz's novel Children of Gebelawi through the author's biography.

Aimukhambet's (2016) monograph Myth. Mythology. Mythopoetics is treated as a key source for analyzing the transformation of folkloric plots and the artistic function of mythic motifs in Zhumabayuly's four poems.

Thus, the Literature Review presents the theoretical and scholarly foundations of the methods, whereas the Materials and Methods section focuses on the research corpus, the methods as applied, and the analytical procedure.

III. Materials and Methods

This section presents the research design in three blocks: research materials, methods and tools, and research procedure. This division distinguishes the corpus, analytical approaches, and sequence of analysis, bringing the methodological section into line with the structure of an international research article.

A. Research Materials

Four poems from the Tashkent period were selected for analysis. Although ten poems by Zhumabayuly are currently known and some studies question whether one or two fully satisfy the generic features of the long poem (Yskakuly, 2020), this study retains them within the genre because they are conventionally presented as poems in scholarship. Examination of their writing and publication histories showed that four texts belong to the Tashkent period. This attribution rests on two criteria: correspondence with Zhumabayuly's residence in Tashkent, the capital of the Turkestan ASSR, in 1922-1923; and publication in newspapers, journals, or books associated with the Turkestan press.

Table 2
Poems Written by Magzhan Zhumabayuly During the Tashkent Period

Poem title	Year of publication	Publication	Period of writing
Korkyt	1922	*Sholpan* journal, Nos. 2, 3	Tashkent
On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes	1923	Poems collection, Tashkent edition	Tashkent
Qoilybai's Kobyz	1923	Poems collection, Tashkent edition	Tashkent
Batyr Bayan	1923	*Sholpan* journal, Nos. 4-5, 6-7-8	Tashkent

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The poem Yertegi, although published in 1922 in the Tilshi newspaper of the Zhetysu Regional Committee of the Turkestan ASSR, is excluded from this group because available evidence indicates that it had appeared earlier in the Aqmola provincial newspaper Bostandyq Tuy, although the text has not been located. It is therefore assigned to the Kyzylzhar period. The four selected poems first appeared in Sholpan, a Turkestan journal, or in the poet's Tashkent collection. In this article, Turkestan publications refers to newspapers, journals, and books issued within the Turkestan ASSR in 1918-1924, particularly in Tashkent.

The object of the study is therefore Zhumabayuly's four Tashkent-period poems, in which folkloric plot transformation and mythic motifs are especially prominent. The texts were taken from the second volume of the 2023 academic complete edition of Zhumabayuly's works, which includes the original poems and their Cyrillic transcriptions (Zhumabayuly, 2023b).

This corpus defines the chronological and textual boundaries of the study: the analysis is limited to four poems written during the Tashkent period and connected with its publishing environment. Accordingly, the article considers not Zhumabayuly's poems in general but the artistic function of folkloric plots and mythic motifs specifically in works from 1922-1923.

B. Methods and Tools

The study employs mythopoetic, hermeneutic, and biographical analysis. Because the theoretical foundations of these methods are presented in the Literature Review, this section specifies how each method is applied to the article's corpus.

TABLE 3
FUNCTIONS OF THE METHODS AND TOOLS USED IN THE STUDY

Method / tool	Purpose of application	Specific function in the article
Mythopoetic analysis	To identify mythic motifs, mythic-legendary plots, sacred space, supernatural force, the search for eternal life, the search for an eternal homeland, alienation, and loneliness in the poems.	Applied to classify motifs in *Korkyt*, *On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes*, *Qoilybai's Kobyz*, and *Batyr Bayan*, to identify recurrent motifs, and to explain the authorial transformation of folkloric plots.
Hermeneutic analysis	To interpret the implicit meaning of the poem texts, the system of images, symbolic details, and historical-cultural allusions.	Used to reveal the artistic function of the images of *Korkyt*, Kenesary, Qoilybai, and Bayan, as well as the textual meanings of symbolic images such as *aruak*, *kobyz*, Burabay, and Altai.
Biographical method	To connect the author's life, his activity during the Tashkent period, his relation to folklore studies, and the influence of the historical-social environment with textual analysis.	Applied to explain factors that influenced the folkloric plots of the poems through Zhumabayuly's work at the Kazakh Institute of Education, his folklore-collecting activity with A. Divaev, the collection *Tartu*, and Turkestan publications.
Comparative systematization and tabulation	To compare conclusions from previous studies with the authorial version proposed in the article and to present the findings concisely.	Enabled the comparison of B. Kanarbayeva's proposed source versions with the article's interpretation and the tabular systematization of the probable sources of the main plots, plot types, and recurrent motifs in the poems.

Table 3 shows that the methods function complementarily: mythopoetic analysis identifies motifs, hermeneutic analysis reveals their artistic meanings, and biographical analysis explains the connection among these motifs, the Tashkent period, and the poet's folklore-related activities. Comparative systematization enables the findings to be compared with previous scholarship and presented in tabular form.

C. Research Procedure

The research consisted of three stages. In the first stage, theoretical and biographical information concerning the author's life and creative work, the Tashkent period, folkloric plots, folkloric techniques, and mythic motifs was collected and analyzed. The literature review then systematized the principal scholarly positions on myth, motif, mythopoetics, hermeneutics, and the biographical method.

In the second stage, the types and probable sources of folkloric plots in the poems were identified. The texts in the 2023 academic complete edition served as the main corpus; the poems' dates of composition, first places of publication, and connections with the Tashkent period were compared, and the exclusion of Yertegi from the corpus was justified separately.

In the third stage, mythic motifs were analyzed and recurrent motifs were identified. Each poem was examined in a separate subsection, with attention to the artistic function and authorial transformation of motifs and to their relationship with historical memory and the sociopolitical situation. The findings were then summarized in tables according to plot type, source comparison, and recurrent motif.

This procedure answers the research questions sequentially: first, it establishes the boundaries of the corpus; second, it examines the nature and probable sources of the folkloric plots; and third, it interprets the artistic function of mythic motifs and the mechanisms of authorial transformation.

IV. RESULTS

Eleukenov (2008) calls Zhumabayuly's Tashkent period (1922-1923) a time of surging inspiration, whereas Zhurtbay et al. (2021) describe it as difficult and tense. Tashkent was the capital of the Turkestan ASSR from 1918 to 1924 (Kabyldinov, 2020).

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Drawing on archival documents, Zhanguttin (2016) confirms that Zhumabayuly taught at the Kazakh Institute of Education in Tashkent and participated in the education and science commissions of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Turkestan ASSR, as well as in the activities of the Talap cultural and educational organization.

In the Science and Education Commission, he collected oral literature together with the ethnographer A. Divaev. In the May 10, 1923 issue of the Tashkent newspaper Aq Zhol, they published the thirty-part Program for Collecting Literature Preserved in Oral Tradition and Other Materials Depicting the Life and Customs of the Kazakh-Kyrgyz People, calling for the collection of folklore materials (Zhumabayuly, 2023c). The program was signed by M. Zhumabayuly as Acting Head of the Turkestan Kazakh-Kyrgyz Education Commission and by A. Divaev as a commission member (Zhumabayuly, 2023c, p. 424).

For the fortieth anniversary of A. Divaev's scholarly activity, Zhumabayuly selected and published the scholar's collected materials in *Tartu* (*Offering*) (Zhumabayuly, 2024). In 1922-1923, he also published folklore-related articles in Tashkent, including *Akan Seri*, *Bazar Zhyrau*, *Kyrgyz Oral Literature*, *Zheti Batyr*, and *From the Narratives of Sholpankul Qazhy*. In *Bazar Zhyrau*, he argues that written literature must be based on oral literature, a view reflected in his poetry (Zhumabayuly, 2023c, p. 405). Thus, his folklore-related activity in Tashkent supports the hypothesis that it influenced his active use of folkloric plots in the poems of that period.

TABLE 4
FOLKLORIC PLOTS IN MAGZHAN ZHUMABAYULY'S POEMS OF THE TASHKENT PERIOD

Poem title	**Plot type**	**Main plot underlying the poem**
Korkyt	Mythic-legendary	*Korkyt*'s search for eternal life
On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes	Mythic-legendary	Communication with *aruak*
Qoilybai's Kobyz	Mythic-legendary	Entering the *kobyz* in a horse race
Batyr Bayan	Historical-legendary	*Batyr Bayan* killing his brother Noyan and the Kalmyk girl and setting out for war

Because the main characters in Zhumabayuly's poems are historical or historical-legendary figures who lived in different periods, the plot types are not uniform. The poet also transformed traditional mythic plot lines.

After examining Kanarbayeva's (1995) discussion of the earlier versions of the plots underlying Zhumabayuly's poems, this study proposes an alternative interpretation for the Tashkent-period works.

TABLE 5
COMPARISONS CONCERNING THE SOURCES OF THE MAIN FOLKLORIC PLOTS UNDERLYING THE POEMS WRITTEN BY MAGZHAN ZHUMABAYULY DURING THE TASHKENT PERIOD

Poem title	**Source of the main plot underlying the poem according to B. Kanarbayeva, *The Folkloric Aspects of Magzhan's Creative Work***	**Interpretation proposed in this study**
Korkyt	1. Works of Sh. Ualikhanov 2. Kazakh legends 3. Influence of Bazar Zhyrau and A. Divaev	The traditional plot is structurally transformed through relocation, altered motivation, and a different direction of travel; alternatively, the poem may draw on another circulating version of the legend.
On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes	1. The legend of Kenesary Cave 2. Nysanbai Zhyrau's Kenesary-Naurezbai epic	The poem combines legends associated with Kenesary's Cave and the folkloric motif of communication with aruak. Because the protagonist is a historical figure from a later period, this synthesis is best understood as a reworked authorial myth.
Qoilybai's Kobyz	1. Works of A. Margulan 2. The legend Baksy in the collection *Tartu* 3. The Baksy Saryny motif in S. Seifullin's works 4. Works of Sh. Ualikhanov	Although Ualikhanov's *Tengri* contains corresponding information, the Baksy legend in *Tartu* (Zhumabayuly, 2024) presents the same race episode. Priority is therefore given to Tartu because Zhumabayuly compiled the collection *and the* legend explicitly describes Qoilybai's kobyz entering a horse race.
Batyr Bayan	Works of Sh. Ualikhanov	Although *Batyr Bayan* is mentioned in Ualikhanov's works, the specific fratricide plot developed in the poem is not found there, and historical legends do not identify Bayan's brother. The poem therefore represents either an extensive authorial reconstruction or the transformation of another, as yet unidentified, legendary version.

These comparisons demonstrate that, in composing his poems, the author did not use folkloric plots in ready-made form. Instead, he preserved their narrative core, developed them through his imagination, and enriched them artistically. In Korkyt, the folkloric plot undergoes substantive structural transformation. Korkyt's birthplace is presented not as the Syr Darya region, as in Kazakh legends, but as Altai; his reflections on death are not prompted by a dream; and his journey begins in the East. Through these changes, the author reorganizes the composition of the traditional plot.

Qoilybai's Kobyz is a condensed adaptation of an episode from the legend Baksy, presented in verse in Tartu, a collection compiled by M. Zhumabayuly (2024). In Baksy, Qoilybai voluntarily enters his kobyz in the race, whereas in the poem he does so at the request of warriors and wealthy men. In On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes, the common folkloric motif of communication with ancestral spirits is combined with legends about Kenesary's Cave, thereby producing an authorial myth. In Batyr Bayan, although the central action of the legend about the warrior is retained, the author expands the plot through psychological characterization in order to reveal the characters' inner states and intensify the dramatic conflict.

Thus, the folkloric plots in M. Zhumabayuly's Tashkent-period poems underwent both structural and stylistic

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transformation. Structurally, the sequence of events, the functions of motifs, and the motivations for the characters' actions were altered. Stylistically, symbolic meanings were deepened, psychological representation was intensified, and authorial interpretation became predominant. In other words, a principal mythopoetic strategy identified by Lutsak and Vivcharyk (2025)—the interpretation and transformation of traditional mythological plots and images—is clearly manifested in Zhumabayuly's poems. The poet's primary purpose was not to reproduce folkloric plots verbatim but to reveal the realities of his own period. Mythologism therefore enabled him to express ideas about the sociopolitical circumstances of the 1920s indirectly, through implication and allusion (Aimukhambet, 2016).

At the level of individual texts, transformation occurs through four principal operations: relocation and reorientation in Korkyt (the Syr Darya region is replaced by Altai, and a dream-induced journey becomes a conscious eastward departure); motivational change in Qoilybai's Kobyz (voluntary participation in the race becomes participation at the request of warriors and wealthy men); synthesis of independent legendary materials in On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes (communication with aruak is combined with traditions about Kenesary's Cave); and psychological expansion in Batyr Bayan (a concise legendary action is developed through interior reflection, affect, remorse, and tragic conflict). These operations show that transformation affects not only content but also narrative causality, compositional order, and focalization.

The analysis of Zhumabayuly's four Tashkent-period poems revealed a set of mythic motifs. According to their mode of presentation and artistic function, these motifs can be grouped as follows:

1. Alienation, loneliness, the search for eternal life, and the search for an eternal homeland, found in *Korkyt, On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes*, and *Batyr Bayan*.
2. Belief in supernatural forces, sacred space, heroism, and national unity, found in *On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes*, *Qoilybai's Kobyz*, and *Batyr Bayan*.

Because several motifs occur within a single poem, the following subsections are organized by poem and explain the characters' social roles, relationships with their historical periods, and symbolic functions.

A. Motifs in Korkyt

Korkyt draws on the legend of Korkyt Ata, the seeker of a sacred, deathless place, and develops the motifs of alienation and loneliness. Kondybai (2018) interprets Korkyt's search for an immortal place in relation to the Kazakh idea of the primordial center: wherever he travels, he encounters a grave and ultimately returns to his own central homeland after crossing the four directions of the steppe. The solitary nature of this journey links the legend to the philosophical category of loneliness, a category that remained insufficiently explored in Kazakh literary studies partly because it was long constrained by ideological interpretations.

The restriction of individual will and freedom under the Soviet system deepened alienation in multiple spheres of society. The closure of consciousness led to alienation from one's foundational identity—from the self, national roots, history, and customs—and contributed to growing social contradictions (Zharylgapov, 2009, p. 65).

In comparative terms, the link to modernism should be understood as a functional analogy rather than as evidence of direct influence. Modernist representations of alienation typically foreground a fractured self, estrangement from social reality, and the collapse of stable meaning; in Kazakh mythopoetics, solitude is mediated through sacred geography, encounters with ancestral spirits, and a journey toward self-knowledge. Both traditions dramatize a crisis of belonging, but they do so through different cultural codes and narrative mechanisms (Zharylgapov, 2009; Smagulova, 2006).

From a psychological point of view, loneliness is a multidimensional concept defined by five dimensions:

- spiritual weakness;
- thoughtlessness;
- isolation;
- renunciation of everything;
- absence of limits.

In comparative literary criticism, this issue has been studied in connection with the broader problems of modernist poetics. Researchers of F. Kafka's work have observed that the stylistic texture typical of modernist writers often foregrounds the representation of a person's estrangement from the living environment and the world.

In Kazakh mythology, the motif of loneliness is associated not simply with isolation from the world but with self-knowledge. Mythic narratives portray the worlds of shamans, wandering dervishes, demons, and ancestral spirits, while the mysteries of sacred places—gravesites, flowing water, ancient dwellings, and mountains—are represented in close connection with solitude. The image of loneliness in Kazakh cultural consciousness can therefore be compared with existential loneliness in modernist literature without treating the two traditions as identical.

Existentialism—from the Latin existentia, meaning “existence”—developed as a major philosophical and literary current in the aftermath of the First World War, placing the human condition at the center of inquiry. Whereas existential loneliness in modernist literature is often characterized by fragmentation, alienation from the world, and destabilization of the inner self, loneliness in Kazakh mythic narratives is frequently mediated through cosmogonic imagination, contact with the mysterious forces of nature, sacred places, and dream symbolism. The comparison therefore concerns a shared problem—the individual's relation to self and world—rather than an identical philosophical genealogy.

This distinction allows the analysis to move from a broad comparative framework to the culturally specific forms of alienation identified in Kazakh literary scholarship.

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G. G. Marquez's novel One Hundred Years of Solitude likewise presents loneliness and alienation from one's environment as profound philosophical dimensions of human consciousness. In Kazakh literary scholarship, the concept of loneliness and the motif of alienation originate in folkloric works and have been artistically represented in accordance with the social and political conditions of different periods.

Smagulova (2006, p. 22) distinguishes two forms of alienation relevant to the poems: self-alienation, represented in On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes and Batyr Bayan, and alienation from society, represented in Korkyt.

In *Korkyt*, the hero's withdrawal from his people under the burden of sorrowful thought is depicted as follows:

Since he first became aware, one thought settled in *Korkyt*;
Unchanging, he drank poison each day with that thought;
Ruled by thought, he turned away from home and people;
The crowd gossiped about him and called him mad. (Zhumabayuly, 2023b, p. 6)

Korkyt functions on three levels in the poem: first, as a folkloric figure seeking eternal life; second, as a romantic personality experiencing loneliness and alienation; and third, as a symbol of poetic existence. These levels converge in the symbolic connection between the *kobyz* and the poet's heart at the end of the poem.

Alongside alienation and loneliness, *Korkyt* develops the motif of the search for eternal life. Through the question "What is life?", the poet presents Korkyt as a legendary figure who senses social injustice, reflects on the future of the land and nation, and seeks the meaning of immortality. The poem locates spiritual crisis both within the individual and in the tragic space of existence.

Aimukhambet (2016, p. 34) argues that *Korkyt*'s journey in search of eternal life reveals the poet's restless being, anxious about the fate of Alash and unable to fit into his environment. The conclusion of the poem supports this interpretation by stating that all poets of humankind received a blessing from *Korkyt*.

As noted above, Zhumabayuly identifies Altai as *Korkyt*'s birthplace. In the poet's work, Altai functions as a prominent motif of sacred space. Its sacred status is connected with its place in national cognition as an ancestral homeland and primordial center (Aimukhambet et al., 2025).

Altai occupies a special place in Zhumabayuly's poetic vocabulary. In *Kazakh Language*, he writes, "The lofty Altai, the golden mother, is forgotten; heroes and khans, exalted souls, are forgotten!" (Zhumabayuly, 2023a, p. 89), calling upon his readers not to forget Altai. Zhumabayuly thus activates the mental and symbolic meanings of Altai and the Kazakh people's longing for this sacred land. Nevertheless, Kazakh legends usually locate Korkyt in the Syr region.

B. Motifs in On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes

In *On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes*, the image of Kenesary Khan conveys the people's sorrow under colonial oppression through the mythic motif of the search for an eternal homeland.

Opening his eyes, Kene found himself on the ground.
From that moment, Kenekem set out and went away;
He took with him the young tiger Nauryzbai;
To lead Alash out and make it a nation,
He fell upon the Russians like a hungry wolf;
Joining hands with Uisin, Dulat, and Kyrgyz,
He considered establishing relations with China. (Zhumabayuly, 2023b, p. 66)

The author connects Kenesary's journey toward an eternal homeland with the image of *aruak* ("ancestral spirit").

After he seemed slightly alarmed,
Kenekem invoked the *aruak*.
No sooner had he uttered *aruak*,
Than he saw a white-haired old man before him. (Zhumabayuly, 2023b, pp. 64-65)

The old man who appears in the cave as *aruak* guides Kenesary. In *Tengri*, Ualikhanov (2013, p. 80) defines *aruak* as the ancestral spirit invoked in difficult moments for support and protection. This definition confirms the figure's positive role in Kazakh cultural understanding as a sacred force that protects and sustains the human spirit.

Within the poem, *aruak* appears not as a threatening apparition but as *a* sacred guide who directs K*enesary and link*s his political mission to ancestral memory. Zhumabayuly therefore uses the motif to authorize the hero's journey spiritually while also foreshadowing *it*s tragic limits.

The poem also develops the motifs of sacred space and transformation. By describing Kokshetau and Burabay as unmatched landscapes capable of relieving inner sorrow, the poet prepares the reader to perceive the setting as sacred:

No land in Arqa equals Burabay;
No other place stirs thought in such a way.
If you do not see Lake Burabay and Kokshetau,
The sorrow in your breast will not depart. (Zhumabayuly, 2023b, p. 63)

The sacred cave is significant because Burabay is associated with Abylai Khan's white horde and Kenesary's ancestral memory. The scene of communication with aruak is therefore rooted in both historical and symbolic geography.

In this sacred space, the aruak bids farewell to Kenesary and says:
If you die without reaching your purpose,
At that moment I shall turn to stone here.

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Waiting for another hero like you to be born in Alash,
I shall remain on the hill, sunk as stone,
after which he gives his blessing and disappears. (Zhumabayuly, 2023b, p. 66)

Kenesary's death is represented through transformation: when the lion dies in Alatau, the old man at Oqzhetpes turns to stone. The aruak's petrification expresses the author's longing for historical leaders and suggests that society awaits another Kenesary. The cliff, silence, and stillness also intensify loneliness and reveal the spiritual bond between human beings and nature.

C. Motifs in Qoilybai's Kobyz

In *Qoilybai's Kobyz*, the author again turns to the mysterious nature of the *kobyz* ("Kazakh bowed string instrument"). The instrument also appears in Korkyt, creating an intertextual link between the two poems. The *kobyz* functions as a mystical and sacred instrument that connects the living and the dead, communicates with Tengri and *aruak*, and summons spirits (Tokzhanov, 2025, p. 11).

Qoilybai, a powerful *baksy* ("shaman/diviner") and a disciple of Korkyt, enters his *kobyz* in a race. The episode echoes the ancient belief that the instrument could serve as the baksy's vehicle between visible and invisible worlds (Kondybai, 2018).

In *Qoilybai's Kobyz*, the character moves through the spatial and temporal dimensions of a mysterious world by means of supernatural power. Belief in supernatural forces is represented through Qoilybai's shamanic art and extraordinary abilities. In *Tengri*, Ualikhanov (2013, p. 82) defines a *baksy* as a Kazakh seer or diviner who predicts the future and speaks in the name of a spirit.

Ualikhanov's explanation suggests that baksy figures are associated in Kazakh cultural cognition with beneficial magical power. Kaskabasov (2015) likewise distinguishes between good and bad, beneficial and harmful magic, while Koch (1999) defines magic as knowledge and control of the spiritual world through otherworldly forces or mystical rites and distinguishes white from black magic.

In Kazakh literature, the *baksy* is frequently portrayed as a figure who predicts the future, foresees misfortune, and warns the community. Such figures interpret symbols and signs in answering people's questions. As cited by Aimukhambet (2016), A. Divaev describes *baksy* figures as people capable of establishing contact with a powerful spirit and commanding it.

In *Spirits or Ongons*, Ualikhanov (2013, p. 99) examines *aruak*, *baksy*, and shamanism in Kazakh religious belief and notes that *baksy* is a common Turkic term: among Kazakhs it denotes a shaman, in Mongolian a teacher, among Uighurs *bakhshi*, and among Turkmens a poet. He also identifies Qoilybai as a *baksy* figure in Kazakh cultural memory.

D. Motifs in Batyr Bayan

The poem frames Bayan's inner experience through the psychology of affect. Hegel (1977, p. 118) distinguishes feelings tied to the individual's immediate situation—such as anger, revenge, jealousy, shame, and regret—from feelings connected with universal values such as law, conscience, custom, religion, beauty, and truth. In Batyr Bayan, Bayan kills Noyan and the Kalmyk girl under the pressure of anger, revenge, jealousy, and honor. The act torments him, leads to self-alienation and loneliness, and ultimately drives him to defend the nation and land. The motif therefore reveals Bayan's inner contradiction, personal tragedy, and isolation from society.

Although Bayan tries to convince himself that his action was justified, grief over his brother's death plunges him into profound spiritual rather than physical loneliness.

Through inner monologue and psychological reflection, the poet reveals Bayan's suffering. Although he is respected as a courageous warrior, no one can share his grief or fully understand his inner state. He therefore remains lonely even within the community, an artistic device that intensifies the poem's tragic pathos.

The motif of loneliness also shapes Bayan's departure for the final battle. Having lost the meaning of life, he meets death heroically; his apparently solitary charge becomes a symbol of spiritual isolation. Loneliness thus reveals his inner tragedy, human suffering, and fatal destiny.

Sacred space is also represented through Burabay. The lines "No land in Arqa equals Burabay" and "Burabay is the island of Arqa, the beloved land" identify it not merely as a landscape but as a site of ancestral sovereignty and collective memory. Its sacred status is reinforced by associations with the white horde of Alash and Abylai Khan's rule (Aimukhambet et al., 2025).

Overall, the analysis confirms that the four Tashkent-period poems contain both poem-specific and recurrent mythic motifs.

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TABLE 6
PRINCIPAL AND RECURRENT MOTIFS IN ZHUMABAYULY'S FOUR POEMS

Poem title	Recurrent motifs
Korkyt	Alienation, loneliness, sacred space, search for eternal life
On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes	Alienation, loneliness, sacred space, search for an eternal homeland, ancestral spirit, transformation
Qoilybai's Kobyz	Belief in supernatural forces, sacred instrument, alienation (implicit), blessing
Batyr Bayan	Self-alienation, loneliness, sacred space, heroism, national unity

Alienation from society and from the self is most explicit in *Korkyt* and *Batyr Bayan*. Their protagonists, burdened by thought, inner anguish, and sociopolitical conflict, become estranged from their communities and from themselves. The poet connects their loneliness with nature through symbolic images of the mountains and stones of Kokshetau and Altai, as well as water, forest, wind, and fire.

In *Qoilybai's Kobyz* and *On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes*, alienation appears more implicitly. At the end of *Qoilybai's Kobyz*, the speaker says:

> O God, as if in the play of an *albasty*,
> Why have You placed me in this accursed age?
> If only I could turn this crooked age to ash,
> If I received a blessing from Baganaly Qoilybai (Zhumabayuly, 2023b, p. 62),

thereby rejecting his own society through the epithets "accursed age" and "crooked age." In *On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes*, the speaker says:

> Kene is gone, and there is no younger brother to follow in his footsteps;
> Alas, sorrow poisons my heart (Zhumabayuly, 2023b, p. 67),
> expressing estrangement from the present through longing for the past.

In these poems, the ritual of *bata beru* ("giving a blessing") has particular importance. *Bata* is a rich and morally significant form of magical folklore (Rakysh, 2020, p. 41), but it functions differently in each poem. In *On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes*, Kenesary receives a blessing from *aruak* yet is defeated; the blessing therefore symbolizes spiritual support rather than a force capable of changing fate. In *Qoilybai's Kobyz*, the lyrical speaker dreams of receiving Qoilybai Baksy's blessing in order to overcome his age, making *bata* a cultic and magical motif that connects historical memory with national consciousness.

V. DISCUSSION

This study analyzed the transformation of folkloric plots and the artistic function of mythic motifs in Magzhan Zhumabayuly's Tashkent-period poems and examined how the poet's activities during that period shaped his use of folklore.

The findings show that folkloric plots served as an important means of expressing the poet's position and emotional state. The novelty of the study lies in foregrounding the Tashkent period as a distinct biographical and publishing context. Zhumabayuly's work in education, folklore collection, and Turkestan publishing brought him into direct contact with oral-traditional materials, while mythic motifs enabled him to encode contemporary tensions indirectly.

The findings extend the conclusions of Tileshov (2023), Kanarbayeva (1995), Yskakuly (2020), and Baltogayeva (2015). In particular, combining biographical evidence from the Tashkent period with mythopoetic and hermeneutic analysis offers a new account of how source material was reorganized within the poems.

The results contribute to the study of prominent representatives of Alash literature in the first quarter of the twentieth century. In this context, folkloric plots and mythic motifs became important artistic means through which Kazakh poets and writers represented the condition of society.

The analytical framework used here may also inform studies of recurrent folkloric motifs and patterns in other works of Alash literature, offering a broader perspective on the relationship between oral tradition and written Kazakh literature.

The article provides an analytical foundation for systematizing the transformation of folkloric plots and the artistic function of mythic motifs in Zhumabayuly's Tashkent-period poems. Future research may extend the inquiry through decolonial, comparative, and reception-oriented approaches.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study answered the research questions formulated in relation to its main aim and reached the following conclusions.

The Tashkent period had a major influence on the poet's creative work, especially on his use of folkloric plots and mythic motifs. Although brief, the period produced several of his major poems. The experience gained in Tashkent also influenced later works such as *Zhusip Khan*, *The Tale of Qanysh Bai*, and *The False Tale*.

Zhumabayuly's Tashkent-period poems contain mythic-legendary plots such as *Korkyt*'s search for eternal life, communication with *aruak*, and the *entry of a baksy*'s *kobyz* in a horse race, as well as the historical-legendary plot of *Batyr Bayan*'s killing of his brother Noyan and the Kalmyk girl before departing for war. Because precise historical

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evidence for the latter episode has not been established, its treatment in the poem is best understood as a substantial authorial expansion of legendary material. The poems also develop alienation, loneliness, the search for eternal life and an eternal homeland, belief in supernatural forces, and sacred space.

The motifs of alienation and loneliness in Zhumabayuly's poems of the 1920s are closely connected with sociopolitical conditions. To characterize his age, the poet uses epithets such as “crooked age” and “accursed age.” In Korkyt, On the Cliffs of Oqzhetpes, and Qoilybai's Kobyz, traditional plots are transformed through changes in setting, motivation, sequence, and motif function, whereas Batyr Bayan represents the most extensive authorial reconstruction.

Overall, the study shows that the relationship between poem and source is not a binary choice between unchanged borrowing and complete invention. Zhumabayuly retains recognizable folkloric cores but reshapes narrative causality, composition, characterization, symbolism, and psychological depth. Parallel versions of myths and legends may underlie three of the poems, while Qoilybai's Kobyz can be linked most directly to the Baksy legend in Tartu. The transformation of folklore is therefore the central artistic mechanism through which the poet connects historical memory with the sociopolitical experience of the 1920s.

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Desublimating Death in Liquid Modernity: Familiarity and Absurdity of the Sublime in Dickinson's "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" and Albee's *The Sandbox*

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***Abstract*—This paper examines the desublimation of death in Emily Dickinson's poem "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" and Edward Albee's play *The Sandbox*. It focused on how each text reconfigures death beyond its traditional association with transcendence and awe. The study used a qualitative, text-based approach to show how Dickinson domesticates death by representing it in a familiar ambient and temporal suspension, while Albee presents death as a trivial, visible, and emotionally detached event. Drawing on the concept of liquid modernity, the study explains how these representations reflect different stages of dissolving stable meaning and concepts in modernity. While previous studies have discussed death and the sublime within individual texts, limited attention has been given to comparative desublimation across genres. This study highlights the different poetic and theatrical representations of death within these two texts, which showcase the shifting of stable meaning and cultural consciousness in modern society.**

***Index Terms*—Albee, death, desublimation, Dickinson, liquid modernity**

I. Introduction

In philosophy and literature, death has often been conceptualized as a sublime, metaphysical, intense, and transcendent experience (Burke, 1998; Young, 2005). Immanuel Kant distinguishes the sublime by linking it to tension and exhaustion, and connects sublimity to moral seriousness, authority, and elevated thought (Kant, 2011). Death is positioned as overwhelming and elevating yet difficult to comprehend. For example, Burke (1998) described terror as "the ruling principle of the sublime" (p. 58). According to him, "the great and sublime in nature" cause a state of astonishment where "all [the soul's] motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other" (p. 58). Therefore, death has long been associated with an irresistible sense of grandeur and given an existential significance, as it connects the familiar and the incomprehensible.

Death is not merely understood as a biological event or metaphysical concern, but as a socially constructed and culturally regulated phenomenon (Sumiala & Jacobsen, 2024). Therefore, the sociology of death, as a framework, focuses on how societies organize and interpret death through rituals and discourses. These social and cultural practices are subject to change throughout time. Hence, this perspective explains the transformation of death within early and late modernity. Modernist and postmodernist texts have reframed the view of death while destabilizing its elevated conception. This transformation reflects what Bauman (2000) describes as liquid modernity, where stable ideas, fixed meanings, and metaphysical certainties of the past have dissolved into fluid, fragmented, and temporary experiences in the context of modern life. This suggests that death, like other cultural concepts, has lost its fixed meaning and is no longer linked to stable symbols or the sublime. In liquid modernity, it becomes a normal and emotionally detached event in human experience. Rather than presenting death as a transcendental experience, writers render it as closely mundane, familiar, and absurd. This change in perspective reflects a profound transformation in the contemporary consciousness.

Despite extensive scholarship on portrayals of death and the sublime, such as studies grounded in Burkean and Kantian theories, limited attention has been paid to the desublimation of death. In addition, the representations of death across different genres and periods have been rarely explored, particularly in relation to liquid modernity. This study has aimed to fill that gap by analyzing the conceptual transformation of death through the process of desublimation, in which death is stripped of its traditional sublimity and represented as an ordinary or theatrical constructed experience. Instead of inspiring awe, sacredness, or existential terror, death is portrayed as controlled and empty of affective depth. This desublimation of death mirrors how modern subjects encounter the loss of traditional meaning and limits, as death is presented in emotionally flattened, simplified, and socially constructed forms.

To investigate this transformation, the study renders a comparative analysis of Emily Dickinson's poem "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" and Edward Albee's short play *The Sandbox*. Although the two texts differ in terms of genre and historical context, both reconfigure death deprived of its traditional sublimity. Death in Dickinson's poem is a calm and courteous companion, while Albee sets death as a strange gentleman within an absurd theatrical framework that lacks

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a serious emotional ambience. This study also explains how the desublimation of death aligns with liquid modernity, since death loses its stable transcendental authority to become a fluid and ambiguous experience through simplification and absurdity.

II. Literature Review

A. Death and the Sublime

The sublimity of death has been widely discussed and represented in literature and philosophy. Drawing on Kant's theory of the sublime, Young (2005) and Mooney (2009) associated death with experiences that exceed ordinary human understanding. For Yong, the fear underlying the sublime is closely connected to mortality because individuals confront something overwhelming and unavoidable. Similarly, Mooney argued that the awareness of death reveals the limitations of human existence and encourages a reconsideration of life's meaning and purpose. Both studies presented death as an experience that evokes fear, awe, and reflection. Other studies focused on the emotional and psychological dimensions of the relationship between death and the sublime. Moskot (2022) argued that grief can function as a sublime experience because it confronts individuals with the incomprehensibility of death and loss. In a similar way, Hur et al. (2020) demonstrated that the sublime emerges through the interaction of attraction and fear, producing intense emotional responses associated with overwhelming experiences. These studies suggested that encounters with death often involve a tension between fascination and terror. Recent scholarship also explored how the sublime operates in contemporary contexts. Hasnaoui (2024) argued that postmodern literature reconfigures sublime terror through experiences of uncertainty, fragmentation, and symbolic forms of loss. Rather than emphasizing transcendence alone, the postmodern sublime reflects anxieties surrounding unstable realities and the loss of coherent meaning.

Taken together, these studies approached death as a sublime experience characterized by fear, awe, transcendence, and existential reflection. However, they generally assumed that death retains its elevated and exceptional status. Less attention has been given to literary representations that reduce or undermine death's sublimity by presenting it as ordinary, familiar, or materially grounded. This study addresses that gap by examining how Dickinson's "Because I Could Not stop for Death" and Albee's *The Sandbox* challenge the traditional association between death and the sublime through strategies of desublimation.

B. Death in Dickinson

Studies of death in her poetry have largely focused on its transcendental and transformative dimensions. Several scholars argued that Dickinson presents death as a passage rather than a final ending. Daghamin (2017) asserted that although Dickinson's perception of death is unstable and shifting, death remains a central mystery and a pathway to ultimate reality. Through personification, Dickinson transforms death from abstract concept into a tangible presence. Similarly, Kumar (2020) argued that Dickinson reconceptualizes death as a transformative and life-giving force that mediates between material and spiritual realities and leads toward immortality. Radhakrishna (2024) likewise interpreted death as a transition into another state of existence, while Raza and Zahra (2024) argued that Dickinson challenges conventional understandings of death by rejecting its finality and presenting immortality as an ongoing experience.

Alongside these transcendental readings, other scholars emphasized the uncertainty and ambiguity that characterize Dickinson's treatment of mortality. Jasim (2022) suggested that Dickinson's perception of death was shaped by personal losses and historical circumstances, leading her to represent death through transformation, ambiguity, and uncertainty. Similarly, Ullah et al. (2025) argued that Dickinson constructs death through paradox, irony, and unconventional imagery. Their study concluded that Dickinson challenges religious and social attitudes toward death by presenting it as both beautiful and uncertain. However, Etter (2020) offered a different perspective by examining death from a psychological standpoint. According to Etter, death appears as the Other in Dickinson's poetry. despite its painful implications, it becomes a source of self-awareness and personal strength.

These studies showed that Dickinson's representation of death is commonly interpreted in terms of transcendence, transformation, ambiguity, and psychological reflection. While they offer valuable insights into the philosophical significance of death in her poetry, they continue to treat death primarily as a metaphysical or existential threshold. Less attention has been paid to the ways Dickinson's poetic language and imagery make death appear familiar, accessible, and integrated into everyday experience. The present study examines how "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" simultaneously engages with and weakens the traditional aesthetics of the sublime, presenting death as both ordinary and philosophically complex.

C. Death in Absurdist Drama

Death and mortality in the theatre of the absurd are frequently depicted as fragmented, pointless, and empty of metaphysical transcendence. Klimczak (2019) argued that death is frequently represented as a form of biological determinism that exposes the absence of inherent meaning in human existence. Likewise, Schvey (1987) showed that modern dramatic representations of death tend to focus less on transcendence and more on the responses of the living. He argued that death often exposes a state of "death-in-life", in which individuals are unable to establish meaningful human connections. Similarly, Yadav and Azeem (2022) suggested that Albee presents death as a transformative force that

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highlights the psychological and moral responses of survivors while also functioning as a release from an absurd existence. Other studies approach death in Albee's drama from a social perspective. Jaf et al. (2016) argued that Albee strips death of its metaphysical significance and presents it instead as a consequence of social injustice and distorted human relationships. Similarly, Soomro et al. (2023) examined commodification and alienation in *The Sandbox*, arguing that Grandma's treatment as a burden reflects the deterioration of meaningful social bonds. Al-Jasim and Obayes (2023) likewise interpreted Grandma's suffering and acceptance of death as evidence of emotional detachment and family disintegration in modern American society.

Although these studies discussed death in relation to absurdity, alienation, psychological response, and social fragmentation, they paid limited attention to how death's traditional sublimity is challenged within the dramatic form itself. These studies focused on the meaning of death or its social implications, while overlooking the aesthetic strategies through which death is presented ordinary and stripped of transcendence. This study contributes by examining *The Sandbox* as a dramatic representation of desublimated death, where comedy, domesticity, and material concerns reduce the sense of awe traditionally associated with mortality.

III. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative, text-based approach to examine the conceptual representation of death in selected poetic and dramatic texts. Through a close reading, the study analyzed Emily Dickinson's "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" and Edward Albee's *The Sandbox* as representative texts that reconceptualize death. The selected texts were chosen for their distinct generic forms -poetry and drama- while both present death as a conceptual construct. The lyric poem and the absurdist play offer different generic affordances through which desublimation operates. In Dickinson's poem, death is presented through subjective consciousness and compressed poetic language. In contrast, the theatrical space, visual symbolism, fragmented dialogue, and performative interaction in Albee's absurdist drama produce another mode of desublimation.

The analysis is conducted through textual interpretation that focused on figurative language, symbols, tone, and representations of death as a figure and how each text constructs the experience of death. This interpretive reading is followed by a comparative framework to identify the convergences and divergences between the two works with regard to the desublimation of death and the shift from transcendence to irony and emotional neutrality. Drawing on a sociological and cultural theoretical framework, the study examined these texts through the sociology of death and concepts of Bauman's liquid modernity. Within this framework, death is approached as a cultural construct shaped by changing perceptions of stability, meaning, and transcendence in modernity. The study situated death within broader cultural transformations, demonstrating how existential meaning and concepts are reshaped through perceptual changes.

The study was limited to the representations of death in the two cited works. These texts cannot fully capture the different representations of death across time periods, cultures, and genres. Moreover, the study applied a qualitative methodology through specific theoretical lenses, which may involve subjectivity and risk overlooking some relevant critical perspectives.

IV. Discussion

A. Emily Dickinson

Death is a recurrent theme in Emily Dickinson's poetry, reflecting her thoughtful interest in the experience of death and its ramifications for human life. Dickinson's representation of death emerged from a nineteenth-century culture preoccupied with mortality, but her poetry "offered and continue to offer, a crucial rebuttal to nineteenth-century and Puritan discourses eager to bring false certainty to the unknowable" (Schnable, 2020, p. 5). Speaker in her poetry actively challenges and destabilizes religious and cultural discourses of her time, creating a space in which death can be imagined beyond inherited certainties. In her poem "Because I Could Not Stop for Death," she presents death in an unconventional way that contradicts the traditional conception of its sublimity (Dickinson, 2016). The poem presents the experience of death as devoid of any cultural ceremonies and religious rituals, with no deathbed rites, religious expectations, or mourning practices. Instead of depicting death as a terrifying or majestic figure within an experience of transcendental rupture, she personifies it as calm, courteous, and socially well known. This is apparent in the poem's opening lines: "Because I could not stop for Death – / He kindly stopped for me." Domesticating death removes the sense of terror and anxiety from its presence. Death appears as a "kindly" companion, who patiently pauses for the speaker, in a journey suggested to be tranquil and serene from the first two lines. The speaker appears to feel safe and comfortable despite being alone with death: "The Carriage held but just Ourselves." In this journey, the absence of urgency ("He knew no haste") and the speaker's quiet response of leaving behind "labor" and "leisure" contribute to an ambience free of drama or emotional intensity. Since grandeur and terror are traditionally associated with death, presenting death as civilized and familiar is a clear indication of its desublimation, which the poem's narrative structure reinforces. The journey by carriage passes through a series of everyday scenes (children at school, "Fields of Gazing Grain," "the Setting Sun") that symbolize different stages of life. Hence, death is presented as a part of a continuously lived experience and not a moment of rupture. From a socio-stylistic analysis, Dickinson's use of grammatical simplicity and rhythmic regularity functions to normalize

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death. her poetic structure reduces linguistic disruption and thus reduces existential rupture (Mubarak & Joodi, 2023, p. 112). The hymn-like common meter contributes to this effect by embedding death within familiar auditory patterns, allowing the poem to maintain emotional restraint rather than sublime intensity. Hence, the interplay between narrative voice, stylistic regularity, and metaphorical framing positions death as a mediated, linguistically contained experience.

From the lens of the sociology of death, Dickinson's poetry participates in the nineteenth-century culture of mortality while also exposes the emotional and spiritual instabilities that lurk beneath it. Bauman (2000) suggests that social and existential patterns are no longer fixed and authoritative; instead, they have become unstable, contradictory and unable to regulate social life (p. 7). Dickinson's cultural world was marked by early industrialization, rising urbanization, and a gradual loosening of Puritan theological certainties. These transformations initiated an early stage of social and spiritual fragmentation creating a degree of instability and fluidity in personal identity and religious belief. Accordingly, Dickinson's poetry reflects a world in which earlier certainties are already beginning to dissolve. Her representation of death, in which death loses its sublime status and terrifying absoluteness, registers the conceptual transformation of reality from solid and stable to liquid and inconstant.

However, this desublimation is not total, since the speaker separates between death and its aftermath. Beneath the poem's calm atmosphere lurks a metaphysical unease. The mention of "immortality" during the ride emphasizes the idea that this journey is beyond the ordinary (Dickinson, 2016). As the events of the journey unfold, the early serene environment starts to be disturbed by subtle changes; the shift in perspective ("Or rather – He passed Us –"), the sudden feeling of cold and vulnerability, and the unreadiness of the speaker who joins the ride with "gown" made of "Tulle," obviously suggest the fragility and exposure of the speaker's body at the end of the journey. These moments bring back traditional expectations about death. While death is a gentle and civilized companion, the human narrator's lack of preparedness complicates the aftermath. The poem's final stanzas reveal one aspect of the sublime that is connected to the eternal. The representation of the grave as a house that looks like "A Swelling of the Ground" confirms the physical finality of death, yet the last lines reflect the speaker's perception of time, where hundreds of years can seem to last less than a day while pointing "toward Eternity." This poem "suggests that Eternity is embedded within time, challenging traditional notions of death and afterlife […] the departure is portrayed as a pleasant journey, and Death is depicted as perpetual existence throughout eternity" (Singh, 2025, p. 482). In this shift, Dickinson reintroduces the sublime, not through terror and awe but the collapse of human measures of time within metaphysical expansion.

Instead of fully desublimating death, Dickinson portrays death between familiarity and transcendence. While domesticating death through softness and civility, she maintains its existential depth through eternity and unmeasurable temporality. Hence, she positions death in a liminal space between the ordinary and the infinite. In this poem, Dickinson thus anticipates the conceptual transformation of death in modernist and postmodernist literature.

B. Edward Albee

In *The Sandbox*, Edward Albee presents death stripped of its traditional sublimity and situates it within a theatrical absurdity of emotional detachment and social superficiality. Instead of portraying death as a moment of transcendence and dignity, Albee renders death as a normal event that is devoid of reverence or existential depth. The desublimation of the experience of death emphasizes a transformation in modern consciousness. This shift is embodied from the outset through the staging. The "bare stage" with beach setting, where the grandmother is placed in a sandbox, trivializes the experience of death and its symbolic sacredness. The spatial regression mirrors the conceptual regression of death. by placing Grandma in a child's play space, Mommy and Daddy reduce her to an infantilized object, stripping her of adult agency. Thus, the sandbox becomes a metaphor for how late-modern society contains death: in controlled spaces where the elderly are kept out of sight rather than respected. Based on the chosen place for this event, death can be staged, managed, and eventually ignored. Moreover, the extreme brevity of the play is a thematic strategy that mirrors the desublimation of death, reducing what was once a profound existential experience into a brief, flattened event. The structural compression reflects the logic of liquid modernity: time is accelerated, experiences are shortened, and anything that cannot be quickly consumed or managed is stripped of its depth.

The way the parents treat the grandmother contributes to this desublimation:

> […] Mommy *and* Daddy *re-enter, carrying* Grandma. *She is borne in by their hands under her armpits; she is quite rigid; her legs are drawn up; her feet do not touch the ground; the expression on her ancient face is that of puzzlement and fear*". (Albee, 1959, p. 2)

The parents indifferently transport the grandmother to the sandbox like a cast-off object instead of accompanying her through what would normally be presented as a more meaningful experience. Grandma's treatment exemplifies the liquid-modern replacement of durable familial obligations with a logic of disposability. Once she ceases to be useful, she is symbolically and physically discarded, reflecting what is identified as the replacement of durability by transience and disposability in modern relationships (Palese, 2013, p. 4). Their language is fragmented and empty of any emotion. The dialogue between them is repetitive and hollow, which implies a collapse of human empathy and authentic response to mortality:

> Daddy. Do you think . . . do you think she's . . . comfortable?
> Mommy (*impatiently*). How would I know?
> Daddy (*pause*). What do we do now?

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> Mommy (*as if remembering*): We . . . wait. We . . . sit here . . . and we wait . . . that's what we do. (Albee, 1959, p. 3)

Hence, death in this play is no longer an existential rupture accompanied by awe and profound meaning. This behavior aligns with Bauman's (2000) notion of liquid modernity, in which stable social and cultural structures, like ethics, emotions, and relations, dissolve into fluid and shapeless forms. In other words, death loses its solidity as a meaningful experience and becomes part of everyday life. The characters' lack of engagement with Grandma's dying process reflects the modern cultural tendency to make uncomfortable and disturbing experiences into something superficial and trivial.

The representation of the Angel of Death in the play as a young man is another aspect of desublimating death. Traditionally, the presence of such a character brings forth feelings of terror and awe, yet in Albee's play, the Young Man is described as physically attractive, gentle, and considerate. His role is performed with theatrical simplicity. Burke (1998) insisted that the sublime and the beautiful are very different, conflicting ideas:

> The ideas of the sublime and the beautiful stand on foundations so different, that it is hard, I had almost said impossible, to think of reconciling them in the same subject, without considerably lessening the effect of the one or the other upon the passions. (pp. 113–114)

This tension is evident in *The Sandbox*, where death is aestheticized through the figure of the Young Man, yet stripped of its terror, weaking its sublime effect. Moreover, the admiration and acceptance that Mommy shows to the Young Man from the first meeting, and Grandma's feeling of comfort in his company prove that both women are experiencing the emotional effects of the beautiful. The Young Man's embodiment of the Burkean "beautiful" is a liquid-modern strategy to aestheticizes death as something pleasant and reassuring, transforming mortality into a consumable image. Thus, aesthetic pleasure functions a mediating structure to soften the confrontation with death, replacing sublimity with familiarity and even desire. As Sun (2023) suggests that aesthetic forms operate within capitalist cultural logic as mechanisms that extend into lived experience and shape perception beyond material objects (p. 210). Accordingly, the aestheticization of death in the play organizes how mortality is perceived and emotionally processed by both characters and audience.

Through visual beauty, physical attractiveness, and theatrical simplicity, death is portrayed with aesthetics while stripped of its metaphysical depth. Moreover, the characters' awareness of their performative condition on stage reinforces this desublimation of death. Grandma directly addresses the audience and exposes the artificiality of the situation. The audience, as a consequence, cannot engage with death as an emotional and sacred experience, breaking with the traditional notion of the sublime. Eventually, Grandma accepts death, not as a transcendent moment, but as a quiet and polite conclusion of her life. Throughout the main dramatic elements, the absurd staging, the emotionally detached characters, the indifferent dialogue, and the ironic use of symbolic figures, the representation of death is a clear demonstration of its desublimation in modern culture.

C. Dickinson and Albee

Both Emily Dickinson and Edward Albee desublimate death in their texts by presenting it without its profound presence, sacredness, transcendence, terror, and metaphysical meaning. However, each work also portrays death in a distinctive way that mirrors different configurations of modern consciousness.

In Dickinson's poem, death is quietly desublimated within a familiar environment. It is neither terrifying nor transcendent in a Burkean or Kantian sense. Instead, it is presented as a gently patient companion guiding the speaker through a temporally suspended journey. The figure of death, portrayed as civilized and patient, replaces the grandeur of a force of nature previously associated with the sublime. Although the mention of immortality preserves some traces of transcendence, the experience does not generate awe or terror. Instead, death is rendered as a controlled and calm experience that unfolds in measured progression. Moreover, Dickinsons' use of poetic compression and figures allows its transformation to take place within the consciousness of the speaker. Thus, the representation of death in Dickinson's poem demonstrates a peaceful acceptance within a lyrical framework where death is absorbed into poetic subjectivity.

In contrast, *The Sandbox* renders a more radical form of desublimation that appears through exposure, theatricality, and absurdity. The visible and performative representation of death, in the figure of the Young Man, strips death of its symbolic depth. In addition, the play's metatheatrical strategies, such as the staged death scene, the indifferent dialogue, and the performative presence of the young man, and fragmentation add to the artificiality of the scene and expose death as a constructed event rather than inherently meaningful. The process of Grandma dying is staged in an indifferent and artificial manner, especially given the detached behavior of the other characters. Ultimately, death becomes an external and cursory event that is devoid of emotional or existential gravity.

Based on Bauman's (2000) notion of liquid modernity, both texts can be seen as destabilizing fixed meaning in modernity. Dickinson's treatment reveals a transitional moment: although traditional structures are losing their authority through the process of desublimation, death still carries some significance despite the partial loss of its sublimity. Albee's play reveals a further dissolving of these structures, leaving death lacking depth and coherence within the social and symbolic order. Both works present death as something that can be normalized, managed, or familiarly observed.

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V. Conclusion

This study has examined the desublimation of death in "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" by Emily Dickinson and *The Sandbox* by Edward Albee, showing how each work uses different strategies to depart from the traditional sublime presentation of death. The analysis showed that Dickinson domesticates death through lyrical containment and temporal suspension, whereas Albee renders a more radical desublimation by staging death as a visible, performative, and emotionally detached event.

The findings suggest that literary form plays a significant role in reconfiguring the experience of death. Dickinson creates a soft and internal experience within poetic consciousness, where death is softened and rendered manageable, while Albee externalizes and exposes death as an empty construct devoid of existential gravity. The comparison between these works indicated that this desublimation could range from partial symbolic meaning to total dissolution; that is, while Dickinson's poem reflects a transitional stage in which traces of transcendence remain, Albee's play is situated in a more advanced stage in which such traces are largely dissolved.

Viewed through Bauman's (2000) conception of liquid modernity and the sociology of death, these representations mirror a broader shift in modern consciousness, where death is no longer a source of transcendence but an event increasingly normalized and detached from stable meaning. This study thus contributes to the broader literature by offering a cross-genre analysis of how poetic and theatrical forms can redefine death in different ways within changing cultures. It also paves the way for further research into similar fields in other literary contexts, especially contemporary literature where similar processes of desublimation may reveal additional dimensions of modern and postmodern sensibilities.

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Teaching Arabic Grammar and Morphology to Chinese Learners: A Pedagogical Analysis of the Al-Arabiyyah al-Kulijiyyah Textbook

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***Abstract*—This study examines how Arabic grammar and morphology are taught to Chinese learners through a qualitative content analysis of Volumes 1 and 2 of Al-Arabiyyah al-Kulijiyyah, a university textbook used at beginning levels in China. Positioned within the Chinese instructional context, the study evaluates the textbook in terms of sequencing, mode of presentation, exercise types, use of Chinese as a mediating language, and the extent of cultural and instructional support. The analysis is guided by a functional view of grammar in which rules are treated as resources for communication rather than ends in themselves. The findings show that the textbook contains valuable contextual texts and substantial coverage of core grammar and morphology, but it remains largely shaped by a grammar-translation orientation, uneven progression, and a predominance of closed-form exercises that do not sufficiently support transfer from declarative knowledge to communicative performance. The study proposes a framework for teaching grammar and morphology in the Chinese context that emphasizes staged progression, contextualized rule presentation, focus on form within communicative activity, strategic use of the first language, and performance-based assessment. The study concludes with implications for textbook development, teacher preparation, and future empirical research on Arabic pedagogy in China.**

***Index Terms*—Arabic as a foreign language, grammar and morphology, Chinese learners, textbook evaluation, Al-Arabiyyah al-Kulijiyyah**

I. Introduction

Arabic is characterized by a rich syntactic and morphological system, and mastery of these systems is central to accurate comprehension and production. In teaching Arabic to speakers of other languages, grammar and morphology are especially consequential because they regulate relations within the sentence, determine semantic precision, and shape both oral and written performance (Al-Naqa, 1985; Tuaima, 1989). The issue becomes more pressing when Arabic is taught in contexts where learners' first-language systems differ sharply from Arabic in structure, morphology, phonology, and writing conventions.

The Chinese context provides a particularly important case. Arabic has a long historical presence in China through religious, commercial, and cultural contact, and university-based Arabic education has expanded considerably in the modern period in response to the needs of translation, diplomacy, media, commerce, and intercultural communication (Badr al-Din, 1980). As the field has grown, however, the challenge has shifted from access to quality: the existence of departments and textbooks does not automatically guarantee strong learner performance, especially in grammar and morphology.

Several contextual features make this issue more complex in Chinese universities. Instruction is often structured around textbooks and examinations, learners tend to value explicit explanation and orderly progression, and classroom success is frequently associated with memorization and mastery of forms that can be assessed efficiently. At the same time, opportunities for sustained exposure to Arabic outside the classroom remain relatively limited when compared with immersion settings. In some institutions, teacher preparation may also be uneven, particularly in relation to teaching Arabic as a foreign language rather than teaching Arabic to native speakers (Al-Fawzan, 2010). These conditions make the textbook and its pedagogy central mediators between the learner and the language.

The linguistic distance between Arabic and Chinese intensifies the problem. Chinese is commonly described as an analytic language that relies heavily on word order and contextual cues, whereas Arabic depends on inflectional case marking, agreement, and a complex derivational system. Chinese learners therefore encounter difficulties in areas such as gender, definiteness, inflectional endings, verbal patterns, and the relationship between root and pattern, in addition to the shift from left-to-right to right-to-left script. Recent studies of Arabic as a second or foreign language similarly identify morphology, grammar, pronunciation, curriculum relevance, and the availability of communicative practice as persistent

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challenges for non-native learners (Aljenobi, 2025; Almelhes, 2024; AlAwfi, 2024).

Against this background, the present study examines the teaching of Arabic grammar and morphology to Chinese learners through a case study of Al-Arabiyyah al-Kulijiyyah (Yang, 2009), a textbook commonly used in Chinese universities at beginning levels.

A preliminary review of the textbook suggests that although it presents substantial grammar and morphology content, it often does so through direct explanation and practice patterns that lean toward translation and mechanical drills. When rules are treated mainly as information to be memorized, rather than as resources for understanding and communication, learners may succeed in isolated exercises without being able to transfer that knowledge to actual performance.

The study therefore has two closely related aims. First, it analyzes how grammar and morphology are organized and taught in Al-Arabiyyah al-Kulijiyyah in light of the linguistic, pedagogical, cultural, and instructional realities of Chinese learners. Second, it proposes a development-oriented framework that can make grammar and morphology teaching more functional, gradual, and communicatively meaningful. The importance of the study stems from the fact that, despite growing interest in Arabic education in China, there remains limited applied research that critically evaluates the presentation of grammar and morphology in the textbooks actually used by Chinese university learners.

To accomplish this, the paper reviews relevant studies, outlines the theoretical framework guiding the analysis, explains the qualitative content-analysis methodology and coding instrument, presents unit-level patterns from the textbook analysis, and discusses pedagogical implications before drawing directions for future research.

II. Literature Review

A. Contrastive and Error-Analysis Studies

Research on Arabic language learning among Chinese-speaking learners has frequently emphasized linguistic contrast and learner error. Fu (2012), for example, investigated common morphological errors among Taiwanese students learning Arabic and interpreted those errors in light of differences between Arabic and Chinese. The study is important because it identifies areas in which Chinese-speaking learners struggle with Arabic morphology; however, its contribution remains largely diagnostic. It focuses on learner errors in one geographical setting and does not examine how teaching materials or classroom practices may contribute to those difficulties.

Huang (2012) examined definiteness and indefiniteness in Arabic and Chinese through a contrastive linguistic lens. The study provides a valuable foundation for understanding areas in which Chinese-speaking learners may encounter conceptual difficulty, but its orientation is primarily descriptive and linguistic rather than pedagogical. Likewise, Yi (2017) analyzed differences between Arabic and Chinese at the level of simple sentence structure and highlighted structural contrasts that may produce learner difficulty. Such studies illuminate the sources of transfer-related problems, but they do not address how grammar should be sequenced, contextualized, or practiced in actual instructional materials.

B. Studies on Arabic Teaching and Curricula in China

A second strand of research has examined Arabic teaching more broadly in the Chinese context. Luna (2014) provided a general description of teaching Arabic to Chinese learners, discussing curricula, cultural conditions, and broad acquisition challenges. Its contribution lies in situating Arabic teaching within the Chinese educational environment; nevertheless, it remains descriptive and does not focus specifically on grammar and morphology or on a detailed analysis of a particular textbook.

Ma (2023) offers one of the closest precedents to the present study. That work examined problems in Arabic teaching curricula for non-native speakers in China through the textbook Al-Jadid fi al-Lughah al-Arabiyyah as a model. It provides a valuable pedagogical evaluation of a textbook used in Chinese universities, yet its concern is with curriculum issues more generally rather than with grammar and morphology as a distinct pedagogical domain. It also analyzes a different textbook.

C. Recent Studies on Arabic Pedagogy, Communicative Competence, and Morphology

Recent scholarship has moved increasingly toward learner-centered, communicative, and proficiency-oriented approaches in Arabic pedagogy. Abdallah and Noor (2023) found that interactive Kagan strategies were more effective than traditional methods in developing Arabic skills, grammar, and communicative competence among non-Arabic-speaking students. Similarly, Almelhes and Alsaiari (2024) proposed a 3Cs approach combining communicative language teaching, collaborative learning, and social constructivist theory to increase active involvement and real-world application in Arabic learning. These studies support the present paper's view that grammar should not be isolated from communicative activity.

Recent textbook- and curriculum-related research also reinforces the need for clearer alignment between teaching materials, proficiency standards, and learner needs. Alrababa'h et al. (2024) assessed reading texts for non-native Arabic-speaking students in relation to CEFR criteria and emphasized the importance of real-life situations, linguistic richness, and accurate reading. Mohamad Zaki et al. (2024) reported that grammar teaching in Malaysian religious secondary schools remained largely teacher-oriented, with lectures, memorization, repetition, and translation still common. These findings are relevant to the present study because they show that reliance on explicit explanation and closed practice is not limited to the Chinese context.

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Morphology has also received renewed attention. AlAwfi (2024) argued for a functional conception of morphology for non-Arabic-speaking learners and identified the need to select morphological topics according to level, relevance, and usability. This is consistent with the present study's focus on the movement from rule knowledge to usable competence. Recent research on non-native Arabic learners further suggests that feedback, customized curricula, technology, and cultural components can help address the challenges learners face in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and communication (Aljenobi, 2025; Almelhes, 2024).

Although the present study is not a study of literary theory, the recent work by Ibrahim et al. (2024) is included because it highlights the importance of conceptual and terminological clarity in Arabic humanities scholarship. For pedagogy, this point is relevant: grammatical terminology should not be assumed to be transparent to beginning learners, especially when they come from a distant linguistic background. It should instead be introduced economically, connected to examples, and tested through use.

D. Gap Addressed by the Present Study

Taken together, previous studies provide important insights into linguistic contrast, learner error patterns, general conditions of Arabic teaching in China, and contemporary directions in Arabic pedagogy. However, they leave an important gap at the intersection of textbook analysis and grammar/morphology pedagogy. There remains limited applied research that examines how a widely used textbook such as Al-Arabiyyah al-Kulijiyyah presents grammatical and morphological content, what kinds of practice it privileges, how it uses Chinese as a mediating language, and how far it responds to the realities of Chinese learners. The present study addresses this gap through a qualitative content analysis that connects instructional content with pedagogical interpretation and practical development proposals.

III. Theoretical Framework

A. Grammar and Morphology as Means to Communicative Competence

In teaching Arabic to speakers of other languages, grammar and morphology should be understood as tools for organizing language use rather than as ends in themselves. Learners do not need terminology for its own sake; they need forms that help them understand messages, express meanings, and avoid ambiguity. Grammar regulates relations among words and clauses, while morphology supports word formation and the interpretation of derivational meaning. From this perspective, the success of grammar teaching depends not only on the correctness of the rule, but on how clearly it is linked to listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Al-Naqa, 1985; Tuaima, 1989).

This principle is particularly important in Arabic because morphology can easily become a collection of paradigms detached from meaning. Introducing topics such as verb patterns, derived nouns, or case marking is not inherently problematic at beginner level, but these topics need to be simplified, staged, and continuously connected to function and context. Otherwise, learners may memorize patterns without understanding when and why they are used.

B. The Chinese Learner and Cross-Linguistic Distance

Chinese learners bring to Arabic a first-language system that differs from Arabic on points central to grammar and morphology. Chinese does not use case-inflected word endings to mark syntactic function in the way Arabic does, relies heavily on word order and discourse context, and lacks Arabic-like systems of grammatical gender and rich derivational patterning. These structural differences help explain recurrent learner difficulty in agreement, case marking, definiteness, verb forms, and the interaction between root and pattern. The writing direction of Arabic and the phonological difficulty of sounds such as ayn, ghayn, and dad add further cognitive and performance demands (Fu, 2012; Huang, 2012; Yi, 2017).

These gaps suggest that grammar instruction for Chinese learners should begin with functional meaning before technical classification. For example, possession can be taught through the communicative logic of the construct state before detailed terminology is introduced, and subject-object distinction can be established functionally before learners are asked to master fine-grained case theory. At the same time, Chinese learners' preference for order and tables can be used constructively: charts and paradigms should support use, not replace it.

C. Form-Focused and Contextualized Instruction

An exclusive reliance on Grammar-Translation - where rules are presented through definitions, translated examples, and mechanical drills - may help learners in short-term recognition tests, but it rarely guarantees transfer to spontaneous communication. More recent approaches emphasize presenting rules within meaningful texts and tasks, then drawing learners' attention to form as needed. In practice, this can involve a flexible combination of inductive noticing, simplified explicit explanation, and graduated practice.

Research in second language acquisition supports this position. Large-scale syntheses have shown that form-focused instruction produces substantial learning gains, with explicit instruction often proving especially useful for complex linguistic features (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada & Tomita, 2010). Within task-based approaches, Long's (1991) notion of focus on form highlights the value of drawing attention to linguistic form within meaning-oriented communication, while research on oral corrective feedback suggests that timely feedback contributes to durable development (Lyster & Saito, 2010). Updated discussions also stress that the effectiveness of instructional techniques depends on factors such as

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feature complexity, treatment length, and learner characteristics (Goo et al., 2015). For Chinese learners of Arabic, these findings support a principled combination of explicit clarity and communicative activation.

D. Criteria for Selecting and Sequencing Content

The analysis in this study is guided by several pedagogical criteria for evaluating grammar and morphology content. High-frequency and functionally useful structures should appear before rare or heavily classified forms; progression should move from simpler to more complex uses; key structures should recur across units so that learning is recycled rather than isolated; technical terminology should be economical in early stages; and error-prone contrasts resulting from Arabic-Chinese differences should receive explicit pedagogical attention. A well-designed beginner textbook should also balance grammar and morphology, link rules to the four skills, and provide practice that moves from recognition to controlled use and then to more generative performance. These criteria form the basis on which Al-Arabiyyah al-Kulijiyyah is examined in the present study.

IV. Methodology

A. Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical design based on qualitative content analysis. The objective is not to test statistical hypotheses or measure the effect of an intervention, but to analyze how grammar and morphology are presented in a widely used instructional textbook and to interpret the pedagogical implications of that presentation. Because the study is a documentary analysis of published materials, it does not involve human participants. Instead, it is guided by research questions and by a set of analytic premises derived from the literature: that grammar and morphology should support communication, that sequencing matters in structurally distant learning contexts, and that the design of exercises influences the transfer of knowledge to performance.

B. Research Questions

1) What major linguistic and pedagogical challenges do Chinese learners face in learning Arabic grammar and morphology, and what factors underlie those challenges?
2) How effectively does Al-Arabiyyah al-Kulijiyyah present grammar and morphology in terms of content selection, organization, and mode of presentation?
3) What teaching orientation is implied by the textbook's lessons and exercises, and how far does it correspond to the characteristics of Chinese learners?
4) How does Arabic-Chinese cross-linguistic distance appear in the textbook's treatment of grammar and morphology and in the kinds of learner difficulty it is likely to generate?
5) What instructional framework can improve grammar and morphology teaching for Chinese learners in light of the findings?

C. Corpus, Scope, and Unit of Analysis

The corpus consists of Volumes 1 and 2 of Al-Arabiyyah al-Kulijiyyah (Yang, 2009). These two volumes were selected because they constitute the beginner stage in which learners establish their first systematic knowledge of Arabic structures.

The analyzed material covers Units 1-10 in Volume 1 and Units 1-15 in Volume 2, for a total of 25 units. The unit was adopted as the primary unit of analysis because it represents the textbook's functional instructional block, within which texts, rules, exercises, and auxiliary explanations are combined.

The study focuses specifically on content related to grammar and morphology: the topics selected, the way they are introduced, the types of practice they receive, and the extent to which they are supported by cultural and instructional mediation. Other curricular components, such as lexical choice or listening activities, are considered only insofar as they directly affect grammar and morphology teaching.

D. Coding Instrument and Operational Definitions

To analyze the textbook systematically, the study employed an analytic checklist developed from the objectives of the study and from criteria found in the literature on teaching Arabic to non-native speakers, textbook evaluation, form-focused instruction, and proficiency-oriented pedagogy. The checklist recorded the grammatical and morphological topic targeted in each unit, the mode of presentation, exercise type, use of Chinese as a mediating language, cultural integration, and instructional support. The coded observations were then interpreted across four interrelated dimensions: linguistic, pedagogical, cultural, and instructional.

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TABLE 1
CODING INSTRUMENT AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Category	Operational definition	Decision rule used in coding
Grammar/morphology topic	Any explicitly taught syntactic, inflectional, derivational, or word-formation feature.	Recorded at unit level and classified as grammar, morphology, or mixed.
Mode of presentation	How the rule is introduced to learners.	Deductive = rule first; inductive = examples/noticing first; mixed = text/examples followed by explanation.
Exercise type	The dominant practice format following the rule.	Closed = one expected answer; semi-open = limited production; open = free or communicative production.
L1 mediation	Use of Chinese for explanation, translation, contrast, or instructions.	None, limited, moderate, or extensive, according to frequency and instructional function.
Density	Estimated cognitive load of new grammar/morphology in one unit.	Light = 1 main point; moderate = 2-3 related points; high = several new or abstract points.
Cultural/instructional support	Whether examples, texts, teacher guidance, or supplements help learners use forms meaningfully.	Coded as present, partial, or limited.

E. Reliability, Trustworthiness, and Limitations of Coding

A second independent coder was not available; therefore, no inter-coder reliability coefficient such as Cohen's kappa is reported. This is acknowledged as a methodological limitation. To mitigate interpretive bias, the analysis followed a fixed checklist, applied the same reading sequence to all 25 units, and separated descriptive coding from pedagogical interpretation. Each coded entry was checked against the research questions and was reviewed again after the first coding cycle to ensure consistency of category use.

Because exercises in the textbook are sometimes grouped by lesson rather than by a single item count, the study reports the balance of practice through dominant-task coding and frequency bands rather than by claiming a mechanically exact count of every exercise. This decision is appropriate for a qualitative content analysis but limits fine-grained statistical generalization.

F. Procedures of Analysis

The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, the units in both volumes were read closely to identify all explicit grammar and morphology points and the contexts in which they appeared. Second, each unit was coded according to the checklist categories. Third, patterns were compared across the two volumes in order to distinguish recurring tendencies from isolated cases. Fourth, the results were interpreted in light of the theoretical framework and of the documented characteristics of Chinese learners and university instruction in China. To avoid reproducing copyrighted textbook material extensively, examples in the discussion are brief paraphrases or minimal illustrative excerpts rather than long quotations.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. General Profile of the Analyzed Textbook

Al-Arabiyyah al-Kulijiyyah provides a substantial amount of foundational linguistic content at the beginner level. The lessons usually center on short dialogues or short descriptive texts related to everyday domains such as the classroom, home, market, and university. This is a pedagogically valuable starting point because beginners need familiar topics and manageable input. The presence of contextual texts suggests that the textbook aspires to place language in use rather than presenting isolated rules from the outset.

Yet the analysis shows that the pedagogical potential of these contexts is not fully realized. In many lessons, the contextual text functions primarily as an introduction, after which the unit shifts quickly to explanation and practice that are only loosely connected to the communicative purpose of the text. As a result, the book contains contextual material, but it does not consistently build grammar and morphology through context.

B. Unit-Level Mapping of Grammar/Morphology Topics

Table 2 summarizes the unit-level coding. The entries are paraphrased coding records rather than reproductions of the textbook. They show the general order in which grammar and morphology are introduced, the dominant exercise orientation, and the degree of Chinese mediation identified during analysis.

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TABLE 2
UNIT-LEVEL CODING SUMMARY FOR AL-ARABIYYAH AL-KULIJIYYAH, VOLUMES 1 AND 2

Unit	Main grammar/morphology focus	Dominant practice pattern	L1 mediation and density
V1-U1	Arabic script, sound-letter correspondences, basic word classes.	Recognition, reading aloud, copying.	Extensive Chinese support; light load.
V1-U2	Nominal identification, demonstratives, basic gender contrast.	Substitution and translation.	Moderate Chinese support; moderate load.
V1-U3	Definiteness, sun/moon letters, noun-adjective agreement.	Gap filling and sentence matching.	Moderate support; moderate load.
V1-U4	Nominal sentence, subject-predicate relation, simple questions.	Sentence transformation and translation.	Moderate support; moderate load.
V1-U5	Possession and idafa-like structures; attached pronouns.	Controlled composition and translation.	Extensive support; high load.
V1-U6	Prepositions, case-sensitive phrases, spatial expressions.	Gap filling and short answers.	Moderate support; moderate load.
V1-U7	Past tense verb forms and subject agreement.	Conjugation tables and transformation.	Extensive support; high load.
V1-U8	Present tense patterns and personal endings.	Conjugation, substitution, translation.	Extensive support; high load.
V1-U9	Negation, interrogation, sentence order.	Closed question-answer tasks.	Moderate support; moderate load.
V1-U10	Review of nominal/verbal sentence patterns and common endings.	Mixed closed review tasks.	Moderate support; moderate load.
V2-U1	Expansion of verbal sentence, past-present contrast.	Transformation and translation.	Moderate support; high load.
V2-U2	Case endings and syntactic function.	Parsing-like exercises and gap filling.	Extensive support; high load.
V2-U3	Plural types and agreement patterns.	Classification and substitution.	Extensive support; high load.
V2-U4	Dual forms, number agreement, quantity expressions.	Table completion and translation.	Extensive support; high load.
V2-U5	Weak/hamzated verb patterns in simple contexts.	Conjugation and recognition.	Extensive support; high load.
V2-U6	Derived verb patterns and meaning extension.	Pattern identification and substitution.	Extensive support; high load.
V2-U7	Imperative, jussive-like forms, command functions.	Transformation and dialogue completion.	Moderate support; moderate load.
V2-U8	Hollow and defective verbs; sound/weak contrast.	Conjugation and error correction.	Extensive support; high load.
V2-U9	Participles and basic derivational nouns.	Matching forms to meanings.	Moderate support; moderate load.
V2-U10	Masdar and verbal noun functions.	Pattern recognition and translation.	Moderate support; high load.
V2-U11	Comparative/superlative and adjectival patterns.	Sentence completion.	Moderate support; moderate load.
V2-U12	Relative clauses and pronoun reference.	Sentence combining.	Moderate support; moderate load.
V2-U13	Kana/inna-type structures and case effects.	Parsing, gap filling, translation.	Extensive support; high load.
V2-U14	Conditional and connective structures.	Controlled sentence building.	Moderate support; moderate load.
V2-U15	Review and integration of grammar/morphology patterns.	Closed review with limited production.	Moderate support; moderate load.

C. Presentation and Sequencing of Grammar and Morphology

One of the clearest patterns in the textbook is the predominance of direct presentation. Many units move from dialogue or reading passage to rule explanation and terminological abstraction with limited guided noticing. This procedure is not ineffective in itself - Chinese learners often value explicit explanation and can benefit from it - but the problem lies in the abruptness of the shift. The text is rarely exploited as evidence from which learners can observe the target form, connect it to meaning, and understand why the form is needed in communication. In this sense, the dialogue and the rule remain partially disconnected.

A representative pattern appears in early lessons where a brief exchange for identification or location is followed by an explicit rule concerning demonstratives, gender, or nominal sentence structure. The communicative situation can help learners notice how reference is established, but the subsequent grammar box tends to classify forms rather than guide learners to use them to solve a communicative need. A more functional treatment would begin with the meaning of the exchange, ask learners to identify recurring forms, explain the contrast briefly, and then return learners to a speaking or writing task using the same forms.

A second issue concerns internal progression. Units with several interrelated morphological distinctions - such as verb tense, agreement, case endings, plural categories, weak verbs, and derived patterns - impose a heavier processing burden than units focused on one or two transparent structures. The density coding in Table 2 shows that the highest cognitive load clusters around verb morphology, case marking, pluralization, and derived patterns. For beginners working across a major structural distance, such density can make it more difficult to stabilize previously learned forms before new distinctions are introduced.

The sequencing of topics also appears to draw more strongly on the logic of traditional grammatical organization than on a learner-centered progression based on frequency, communicative need, and cross-linguistic difficulty. In a context where learners need systematic scaffolding, such sequencing may lead teachers either to rush through complex content or to re-sequence the material informally in class. Both possibilities reduce the pedagogical transparency of the textbook.

These findings align with the theoretical principle that rules should emerge through a balance between clarity and function. The literature on teaching Arabic to non-native speakers emphasizes gradual presentation and the integration of rules with actual language use (Al-Naqa, 1985; Tuaima, 1989). Similarly, research on form-focused instruction suggests that explicit teaching is most effective when it is linked to meaningful input and guided use rather than delivered as

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detached information (Long, 1991; Norris & Ortega, 2000).

D. Exercises and Practice: From Recognition to Use

The exercise system in Al-Arabiyyah al-Kulijiyyah is dominated by closed-form tasks such as gap filling, sentence transformation, classification, conjugation tables, and translation to or from Chinese. These tasks have clear practical advantages: they are easy to administer, easy to correct, and useful for checking whether learners can recognize a form or remember a rule. In examination-oriented settings, such tasks also fit institutional assessment patterns.

However, their predominance limits the textbook's ability to support transfer from declarative knowledge to actual performance. Grammar and morphology are not fully learned when a learner can select the correct answer from a set of options; they are learned when the learner can deploy the relevant structure while speaking, writing, reading, or interpreting meaning in context. The textbook offers relatively fewer open-ended tasks that require learners to describe a picture, extend a dialogue, write a short paragraph, summarize information, or perform a brief communicative role.

The coding summary indicates that closed-form exercises were dominant across the majority of units, semi-open activities appeared occasionally, and open communicative tasks were limited. This pattern supports the reviewers' concern that claims about grammar-translation orientation require evidentiary support. The evidence lies not in the presence of translation alone, but in the repeated movement from explanation to closed practice without enough production-oriented follow-up.

TABLE 3
EXERCISE-ORIENTATION SUMMARY FROM QUALITATIVE CODING

Exercise orientation	Typical task formats	Observed role in the textbook	Pedagogical implication
Closed-form	Gap filling, matching, conjugation tables, sentence transformation, translation.	Dominant across most units.	Useful for checking recognition but insufficient for transfer.
Semi-open	Guided dialogue completion, controlled sentence building, short answers.	Occasional, often after rule explanation.	Can bridge recognition and production if linked to context.
Open/communicative	Role play, paragraph writing, problem-solving task, information exchange.	Limited in the analyzed volumes.	Needed to activate grammar and morphology in use.

This gap between recognition and use is especially problematic for Chinese learners, who may already tend toward memorization when classroom design rewards it. A pedagogically stronger progression would preserve some closed-form exercises at early stages but would treat them as only the first step in a broader sequence that moves from controlled practice to generative application. Such a progression is more consistent with focus on form and with the view that language development requires opportunities to coordinate meaning and form simultaneously (Long, 1991; Lyster & Saito, 2010).

E. Use of Chinese as a Mediating Language

The textbook and the teaching practices associated with it make noticeable use of Chinese as a language of explanation and translation. In the Chinese context, the first language can play a legitimate supportive role. It can reduce cognitive overload, clarify abstract distinctions quickly, and highlight contrasts between the two languages, particularly at the beginning stages. This is especially relevant when the target concept has no close structural equivalent in Chinese.

The problem arises when Chinese becomes the default route to understanding, rather than a limited scaffold in the service of Arabic use. When grammar is explained primarily through Chinese and reinforced mainly through translation, learners may process Arabic through the filter of the first language instead of developing direct control over Arabic forms and meanings. The risk is not the presence of L1 support itself, but its overextension.

A more effective pattern would be strategic rather than pervasive use of Chinese: brief clarification when necessary, followed by Arabic-based examples, practice, and feedback. This position is compatible with professional guidance that encourages maximal use of the target language while allowing the first language to serve as a carefully bounded support mechanism (ACTFL, 2010). For Chinese learners, such a balance can reduce confusion without turning translation into the core pedagogical method.

F. Cultural and Instructional Support

The analysis also shows that the cultural and instructional support surrounding grammar and morphology is relatively limited. Although the textbook includes everyday topics, cultural content is not systematically exploited as a communicative resource for building grammatical meaning. Cultural references remain thin, and the textbook does not consistently use them to create interactional situations that motivate the target forms.

This point matters because cultural content is not merely decorative in Arabic as a foreign language. It can support pragmatic awareness, text comprehension, and motivation. Tuaima's (1990) framework for cultural content in Arabic programs reminds curriculum designers that language forms should be embedded in meaningful cultural situations rather than presented as isolated structures. In the Chinese context, carefully chosen comparative cultural situations can reduce distance and create reasons to use Arabic grammar and morphology for expression.

At the instructional level, the material provides limited evidence of detailed teacher guidance, digital resources, or interactive supplements. This is significant because Chinese learners often have fewer opportunities to encounter Arabic outside the classroom. In such environments, teacher guides, audio-visual materials, and interactive tasks can compensate

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for the lack of immersion and help transform textbook content into richer classroom practice. Without this support, much of the burden of adaptation falls on individual teachers, whose training and available time may vary considerably.

G. Main Challenges for Chinese Learners and Their Pedagogical Meaning

When the textbook findings are viewed against the background of Chinese learners' linguistic profile, the major challenges become clearer. These include the absence in Chinese of inflectional case marking, grammatical gender, and Arabic-style derivational morphology; the relative reliance of Chinese on word order and contextual inference; the complexity of Arabic agreement patterns; and the script and phonological difficulties that affect both perception and production. These factors do not simply produce isolated errors; they shape the kind of pedagogy learners need (Fu, 2012; Huang, 2012; Yi, 2017).

For this reason, the central problem identified by the study is not the presence of grammatical content in Al-Arabiyyah al-Kulijiyyah, but the way that content is activated. Complex features may indeed require explicit and simplified explanation. Yet explanation alone is insufficient if it is not followed by staged practice, guided production, and formative feedback. This conclusion is consistent with meta-analytic evidence suggesting that explicit instruction can be highly effective, especially for complex linguistic features, provided that it is embedded within a broader learning sequence rather than treated as an end in itself (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada & Tomita, 2010; Goo et al., 2015).

H. A Proposed Framework for Teaching Grammar and Morphology in the Chinese Context

In light of the above findings, the study proposes a framework for teaching grammar and morphology to Chinese learners that combines functional pedagogy with the need for explicit clarity. The framework rests on four interrelated foundations: a learner-centered pedagogical foundation that values active construction of knowledge; a linguistic foundation sensitive to the structural distance between Arabic and Chinese; a cultural foundation that reduces distance through meaningful and comparative contexts; and a reference foundation informed by international proficiency-oriented frameworks such as CEFR and ACTFL (ACTFL, 2012; Council of Europe, 2001). The common principle across these foundations is that outcomes should be defined in terms of what learners can do with the language, not only what they can state about it.

Operationally, the framework calls for staged progression. High-frequency and functionally urgent structures should be taught first, while complex topics should be broken into smaller teachable steps and revisited in later units through recycling. Grammar and morphology should be introduced through short texts, dialogues, pictures, or situations that make the target form meaningful. Learners should then be guided to notice the form, receive a simplified explanation when needed, and practice it first in controlled ways and then in more open-ended tasks.

A second principle is strategic use of Chinese. The first language should function as a rescue tool rather than as the main medium of instruction. It may be used briefly to clarify an abstract distinction, but it should be followed immediately by Arabic-based practice that helps learners process meaning and form directly in the target language. A third principle is the integration of grammar and morphology with the four skills. Instead of assessing rules mainly through isolated recognition tasks, teachers should use short conversations, guided writing, summaries, oral descriptions, and mini-projects that require the target forms to be used for communication.

TABLE 4
EXAMPLE OF A REVISED LESSON SEQUENCE FOR CASE MARKING

Stage	Instructional move	Purpose for Chinese learners
Contextual warm-up	Present a short dialogue about classroom objects and who owns or uses them.	Connects form to a meaningful situation before terminology.
Guided noticing	Ask learners to underline endings or functional positions in repeated sentences.	Builds awareness of syntactic function without immediate overload.
Brief explanation	Use a concise Chinese clarification only for the contrast absent in Chinese, then return to Arabic examples.	Uses L1 strategically rather than as default medium.
Controlled practice	Complete short sentences with provided nouns and verbs.	Stabilizes form-meaning mapping.
Communicative task	Learners describe a desk, classroom, or schedule using the target structure.	Moves from recognition to performance.
Formative feedback	Teacher corrects only high-impact errors first, especially errors that obscure meaning.	Develops accuracy without interrupting communication excessively.

A similar sequence can be applied to al-mizan al-sarfi. Instead of presenting the topic immediately as an abstract classificatory system, the teacher can begin with a short, familiar text containing a small set of related words. Learners then identify the shared root, map the words onto the pattern, and use them in short sentences connected to their own university lives. If Chinese is needed, it can be used only to stabilize the core concept quickly, after which practice returns to Arabic. In this way, morphology becomes a tool for noticing meaning relationships and building vocabulary, rather than a memorized table detached from communication.

The proposed framework does not require abandoning the textbook altogether. Rather, it offers a way to mediate its existing strengths - such as the presence of contextual texts and substantial linguistic content - through better sequencing, more purposeful activity design, and more balanced use of the first language. The broader implication is that improving grammar and morphology teaching in the Chinese context is less a matter of adding more rules than of reorganizing how rules are made meaningful and usable.

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VI. Conclusion

This study analyzed the teaching of Arabic grammar and morphology to Chinese learners through Volumes 1 and 2 of Al-Arabiyyah al-Kulijiyyah. The analysis showed that the textbook contains substantial foundational content and employs everyday texts that could support learning, but its dominant pedagogical pattern remains closer to Grammar-Translation than to a functional, communicative approach. Rules are often presented abruptly, exercises are largely closed-form, progression is not always even, and the reliance on Chinese as a mediating language can exceed what is pedagogically necessary.

These findings indicate that the main challenge is not the absence of grammar and morphology content, but the limited connection between explanation and communicative use. In response, the study proposed a framework based on staged progression, contextualized presentation, strategic L1 use, integration with the four skills, and performance-based assessment. The practical implication is that textbook development, supplementary material design, and teacher training in the Chinese context should focus on transforming rules from objects of memorization into tools for comprehension and production.

The study is limited by its focus on documentary analysis of the first two volumes of a single textbook and by the absence of an independent second coder. Future research would benefit from combining textbook analysis with classroom observation, interviews with teachers and learners, learner corpus or error data, and experimental comparison of different approaches to grammar and morphology instruction. Such research would make it possible to test more directly how alternative pedagogical designs affect learner performance in the Chinese context.

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Translation Regimes and Language Hierarchy in Huai Khwang's Multilingual Signage: Evidence From Bangkok's Emerging Chinese Commercial District

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Abstract—**This article examines how translation regimes and visual prominence jointly organise language hierarchy in Huai Khwang, Bangkok, a commercially dynamic district associated with Chinese-oriented urban change. Drawing on a district-wide corpus of 1,144 photographed public signs collected across six major routes between March 2024 and March 2025, the study analyses 840 multilingual signs by sector, language configuration, relative prominence, and translation regime. The results show that multilingual display in Huai Khwang is sectorally differentiated rather than uniform. Consumer-oriented sectors account for the largest share of multilingual signage, indicating that the district's visible multilingualism is driven primarily by market activity rather than by state signage alone. Thai remains foundational to public legibility and institutional authority, English is strategically elevated in sectors oriented to access, mobility, and commercial reach, and Chinese is highly visible but selectively dominant in Chinese-oriented commercial addressivity. Direct translation is the dominant regime overall, especially in government signage and in sectors where communicative clarity and service transparency are central, whereas partial translation is strongest in tourism and retail and wholesale consumption, where branding and selective audience targeting carry greater weight. The article argues that Huai Khwang is best understood not as a uniformly Chinese-dominant district, but as a stratified multilingual marketplace in which language hierarchy varies systematically by sector, audience, and communicative purpose.**

Index Terms—**linguistic landscape, multilingual signage, translation regime**

I. Introduction

Public signs are not neutral carriers of information. Landry and Bourhis (1997) showed that public signage has both informational and symbolic value, while Spolsky and Cooper (1991) demonstrated that language choice on signs is shaped by expected readers, social conditions, and practical constraints of display. Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) further argued that signs should be understood as symbolic constructions of public space rather than as transparent labels. Taken together, these studies make clear that the key issue in multilingual public display is not simply whether multiple languages appear, but how they are ordered, valued, and made meaningful.

This issue is especially important in commercially dynamic urban districts. In such settings, languages rarely function as equivalent communicative units. Instead, they often perform differentiated roles: one language may secure local legitimacy, another may signal mobility or prestige, and another may target a specific market segment. As Leeman and Modan (2009) showed in Chinatown, and Kasanga (2012) similarly demonstrated in Phnom Penh, multilingual signage is closely tied to commodification and audience design. Public multilingualism is therefore better understood as an organised semiotic economy than as a flat inventory of languages. French and Armitage (2020) similarly question monolingual assumptions in linguistically diverse contexts. Leung and Jenkins (2020) further argue for a flexible multilingualism perspective that better captures contemporary communicative practice.

Huai Khwang is a particularly revealing site in which to examine these processes. Recent studies have shown that Chinese visibility in the district is significant and that parts of Huai Khwang have been framed as an emerging Chinatown shaped by authenticity claims, urban governance, and Chinese-oriented place branding. Wu et al. (2020) highlighted conflicting discourses around Pracha Rat Bamphen Road, Chaisingkananont et al. (2026) examined signage through xinyimin visibility and governance, and Wu et al. (2026) showed how culinary signage participates in Chinese-oriented place branding. These studies establish the importance of the district, but they do not yet explain how multilingual hierarchy is organised across Huai Khwang as a broader cross-sector public-sign environment.

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The present article addresses that issue by focusing on the relationship between translation regime and visual prominence. This focus matters because the co-presence of Thai, English, and Chinese on a sign does not imply equal communicative load or equal symbolic value. Reh (2004) showed that multilingual writing may distribute information unevenly across languages, and Chen and Numtong (2023) demonstrated that Thai–Chinese public-sign translation is shaped by communicative purpose and target readership rather than by simple lexical equivalence. Translation and prominence therefore provide a productive way of explaining how hierarchy becomes materially visible in multilingual signage.

Against this background, the article examines Huai Khwang not simply as another multilingual district in Bangkok, and not merely as a descriptive instance of an emerging Chinatown, but as a stratified multilingual commercial district in which Thai, English, and Chinese are assigned unequal but co-functional roles. Using a district-wide corpus of public signs collected across six major routes in Huai Khwang, the study asks how language hierarchy is produced through sectoral distribution, visual prominence, and translation practice.

The article makes three contributions. Empirically, it provides a broader district-level account of Huai Khwang's signage than previous studies, which have tended to focus on narrower streets, themes, or sign domains. Analytically, it brings visual prominence and translation regime into a single framework, showing how they work together rather than as separate dimensions of multilingual display. Theoretically, it argues that Huai Khwang is best understood not as a uniformly Chinese-dominant district, but as a stratified multilingual marketplace in which language hierarchy varies systematically by sector, audience, and communicative purpose.

The article is guided by two research questions:

RQ1: How are Thai, Chinese, and English distributed and hierarchised across major sign sectors in Huai Khwang?

RQ2: How do translation regimes vary across commercial and official signage in the district?

II. Literature Review and Research Gap

Public signs are not neutral carriers of information. They are visible artefacts through which languages are ordered, valued, and made socially consequential in public space. Landry and Bourhis (1997) established linguistic landscape research by showing that public signage has both informational and symbolic value. Spolsky and Cooper (1991) demonstrated that language choice on signs is shaped by expected readers, social circumstances, and practical conditions of display. Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) then argued that signs should be understood as symbolic constructions of public space, while Ben-Rafael (2009) extended this sociological view by treating signage as an index of public negotiation and social positioning. Cenoz and Gorter (2006) further showed that visibility alone cannot explain the social role of languages in multilingual settings. Taken together, these studies shift the analytical question from whether multiple languages are present to how they are distributed, prioritised, and made meaningful.

This shift is especially important in commercial multilingual environments. Coulmas (2009) linked linguistic landscaping to the public sphere, showing that language display is inseparable from social authority and publicity. Leeman and Modan (2009) demonstrated that Chinatown signage often commodifies language rather than simply representing ethnicity. Kasanga (2012) likewise showed that multilingual signs in Phnom Penh reflect commercial targeting as much as communicative necessity. Manan et al. (2015) further argued that politics, economics, and identity operate together in multilingual urban display. Multilingual signage, then, should not be read as a flat inventory of languages. It is better understood as an organised semiotic field in which different languages perform different forms of social and commercial work.

Translation is one of the principal mechanisms through which such hierarchy becomes visible. Reh (2004) remains especially useful because her reader-oriented typology distinguishes among direct translation, partial translation, and functionally differentiated multilingual writing. This distinction matters because the co-presence of Thai, English, and Chinese on a sign does not imply equal informational load or equivalent communicative function. Tan (2011) similarly showed that naming practices may involve differentiated symbolic functions rather than straightforward repetition across languages. In the Thai context, Chen and Numtong (2023) demonstrated that Thai–Chinese public-sign translation in medical institutions is shaped by communicative precision, standardisation, and target readership rather than by simple lexical transfer. Translation on signs should therefore not be treated as a minor stylistic feature. It is one of the main ways in which language hierarchy becomes materially visible.

Thailand provides a strong setting for this kind of inquiry. Smalley (1994) described Thailand as a complex language ecology shaped by national hierarchy and regional diversity. Premsrirat (2006) likewise characterised Thailand's language situation as one in which Thai remains institutionally central even when other languages become publicly visible. Rappa and Wee (2006) situated Thailand within a broader Southeast Asian pattern in which language policy, modernity, and market pressure interact unevenly. At the level of public signage, Huebner (2006) showed that Bangkok already exhibited codemixing, multilingual layering, and language change that could not be reduced to neat monolingual orders. Prapobratanakul (2016) demonstrated how hybridity and globalisation shaped shop naming in a Bangkok commercial neighbourhood, while Sutthinaraphan (2016) showed that multilingual display on Bangkok's Skytrain was strategically organised rather than incidental.

Subsequent studies across Thailand confirmed that multilingual signage is patterned by place, sector, and audience. Thongtong (2016) documented the strong presence of bilingual and multilingual signage on Nimmanhemin Road in

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Chiang Mai, and Mu and Rungruang (2013) found that English was especially salient in Chiang Mai tourist areas. Prasert and Zilli (2019) showed that Pattaya signage was organised by tourist-commercial logics, whereas Vivas-Peraza (2020) showed that English in Hat Yai functioned as a visible international code. Pipattarasakul (2021) demonstrated that multilingual display in Bangkok's historic railway station reflected transport, heritage, and public communication functions. Rhekhalilit (2020) and Siricharoen (2016) showed that university spaces in Thailand also produce their own patterned multilingual orders. More recently, Pan (2024) argued, through a comparative study of Thai universities, that linguistic landscapes should be analysed comparatively rather than descriptively. Pathanasin (2025) showed that signage in Phuket must be understood through identity, tourism, and policy together. Mongkolyos et al. (2023) described commercial signage in Hua Hin as structured by business function and audience, while Bennui (2025) showed that English on Koh Lipe is glocalised through tourism and localisation. Collectively, this literature makes clear that multilingual display in Thailand is not random; it is organised by market sectors, place identity, and communicative design.

Huai Khwang is one of the most revealing sites in which to examine these developments. Wu and Techasan (2016) showed that Chinese on commercial signs in Yaowarat carried symbolic and identity value. Wu et al. (2020) then argued that Pracha Rat Bamphen Road in Huai Khwang could be read as an emerging Chinatown shaped by authenticity claims and conflicting urban discourses. Chaisingkananont et al. (2026) examined how urban signage in Huai Khwang is interpreted through xinyimin visibility and governance, while Wu et al. (2026) demonstrated that culinary signage in the district participates in Chinese-oriented place branding. These studies are important, but they focus mainly on discourse, perception, governance, and restaurant-centred branding. They do not yet answer a different question: how translation regimes and visual prominence together organise language hierarchy across a broader cross-sector corpus of signs.

Recent comparative work elsewhere in Asia points in precisely that direction. Huang and Zhao (2025) showed that Chengdu restaurant signage expresses a gradient of compliance between language policy and local identity rather than a simple multilingual spread. Nambu and Ono (2025) demonstrated that Shin-Okubo contains differentiated neighbourhood semiotics rather than a single ethnic-signage pattern. Wang and Gao (2025) showed that English in Luang Prabang occupies a tourism-oriented niche distinct from other languages. Wang et al. (2025) linked multilingual shop signs in Lhasa to place-specific cultural ordering. Xia (2025) showed that different districts in Hong Kong develop distinct indexical orders, while Yao et al. (2025) demonstrated that multilingualism in an ethnic city in China changes through patterned shifts rather than random accumulation. These studies support a stronger claim for Huai Khwang: the key issue is not whether the district is multilingual, but how hierarchy is produced through sectoral differentiation, prominence, and translation.

A sectoral approach is especially important because commodification does not operate uniformly across urban space. Leeman and Modan (2009) showed that the market value of language in Chinatown depends on business type and target consumers. Kasanga (2012) similarly demonstrated that multilingual shop signs vary by commercial niche, not just by language mix. Pietikäinen and Holmes (2011) connected linguistic diversity to local economic activity, showing that sign choice can track value creation rather than simply demographic composition. Manan et al. (2015) likewise argued that identity and economy are intertwined in multilingual display. For Huai Khwang, this means that a restaurant strip, a hotel corridor, a government frontage, and a retail-wholesale cluster may all be multilingual, but they do not necessarily organise multilingualism in the same way.

This article addresses that gap through a district-wide analysis of public signage in Huai Khwang. It asks how Thai, English, and Chinese are hierarchised through visual prominence and translation across sectors rather than whether the district is simply "more Chinese" or more multilingual. Empirically, the article provides a broader district-level corpus than previous Huai Khwang studies. Analytically, it integrates visual prominence with translation regime. Theoretically, it argues that Huai Khwang is best understood as a stratified multilingual commercial district in which language hierarchy varies by sector, audience, and communicative purpose.

III. Methodology

A. Study Site and Corpus

Huai Khwang is a mixed urban district in Bangkok where commerce, accommodation, mobility, entertainment, and public services intersect. For the purposes of this article, it is treated not simply as an emerging Chinatown but as a multilingual commercial district whose signage can be analysed across sectors. This framing is preferable because it captures differentiated language practices across the district rather than reducing the area to a single ethnic label.

The spatial design follows six principal routes documented in the source project: Ratchadaphisek Road, Pracha Rat Bamphen Road, Watthana Tham Road, Thiam Ruam Mit Road, Pracha Uthit Road, and the Mengjai intersection area. Figure 1 shows the study area and the six data-collection routes. Fieldwork was conducted between March 2024 and March 2025. The full corpus comprises 1,144 photographed public signs, classified into six sectors: consumer goods, retail and wholesale consumption, beauty and health, accommodation, tourism, and government signage. From the full corpus, 840 multilingual signs were retained for detailed analysis. This distinction is analytically important because the larger corpus establishes the overall signage ecology of the district, whereas the multilingual subset enables closer analysis of hierarchy and translation on signs containing more than one language.

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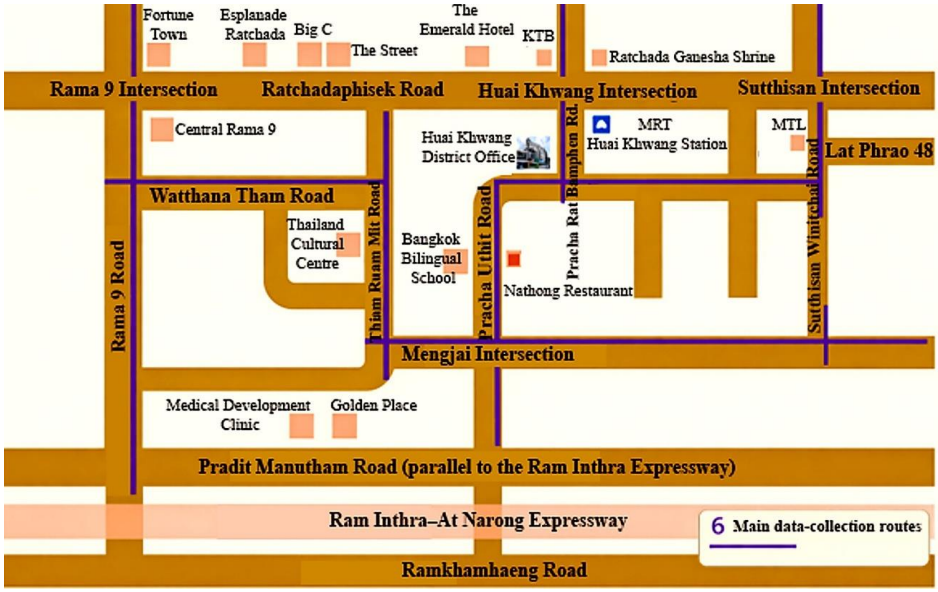


Figure 1. Map of Huai Khwang and the Six Data-Collection Routes

B. Data Collection and Inclusion Criteria

The corpus includes signs located in publicly accessible space. Both government and non-government signs were included. A sign was eligible for analysis only when at least one written language was visibly displayed. Logos, product packaging, standard abbreviations, and purely non-textual symbols were not treated as primary evidence of language choice.

Photographs were taken in situ during walking-based fieldwork and stored in JPG format. This approach is appropriate for district-level linguistic landscape research because it captures signage as encountered in everyday urban space rather than through selective digital sampling. The year-long collection window also reduces the risk that the analysis depends too heavily on short-term or episodic signage conditions.

To improve corpus consistency, the study adopted an explicit permanence rule. Only signs judged to be materially stable and publicly displayed as part of the district's ongoing signage environment were retained. Signs associated with businesses that had already ceased operation were excluded. Where identical wording was repeated by the same institution or business in multiple locations, only one instance was counted. This procedure reduced artificial inflation and kept the analysis focused on language patterning rather than repetition frequency.

C. Coding and Analytical Procedure

Each sign was treated as one analytical unit and coded for sector, producer type, language configuration, relative prominence, translation regime, and interpretive function. Sector categories were consumer goods, retail and wholesale consumption, beauty and health, accommodation, tourism, and government signage. Producer type broadly tracked the distinction between top-down and bottom-up signage. Language configuration identified whether a sign was monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual and recorded the languages present. Relative prominence was operationalised primarily through comparative font size and layout hierarchy. Translation regime followed Reh (2004): direct translation, partial translation, and free writing. Interpretive function captured the communicative and symbolic role of the sign in relation to the study's theoretical framework. This coding structure restates the logic of the thesis corpus in a form more suitable for journal review.

The analysis proceeded in four steps. First, the full corpus was classified by sector and language configuration to establish the overall structure of Huai Khwang's signage ecology. Second, the multilingual subset was analysed for visual prominence, especially the relative size and ordering of Thai, English, and Chinese on the same sign. Third, multilingual signs were classified by translation regime. Fourth, the results were interpreted through the frameworks of Landry and Bourhis (1997), Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), Ben-Rafael (2009), Spolsky and Cooper (1991), and Reh (2004). Giles (1973) was used only as a supplementary interpretive frame where convergence, divergence, or symbolic accommodation helped clarify sign function; it was not treated as the article's main explanatory model.

D. Methodological Scope and Limitation

The main strengths of the study are the size of the corpus, the district-wide route design, and the integration of sectoral comparison, visual prominence, and translation regime within one dataset. These features provide stronger explanatory leverage than a single-street or single-domain design.

At the same time, the source project was conducted as single-researcher fieldwork and coding, and it did not generate intercoder coefficients. The present article therefore does not make claims about intercoder reliability that the original

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project cannot support. Instead, it prioritises methodological transparency by keeping the inclusion criteria explicit, the coding variables rule-based, and the analytical claims closely aligned with the documented corpus.

IV. Results

A. Overall Corpus Profile

Huai Khwang's linguistic landscape is shaped primarily by commerce rather than by state signage. As Table 1 shows, the largest sector in the full corpus of 1,144 photographed signs was consumer goods (n = 431, 37.67%), followed by retail and wholesale consumption (n = 232, 20.28%), accommodation (n = 168, 14.69%), beauty and health (n = 155, 13.55%), government signage (n = 117, 10.23%), and tourism (n = 41, 3.58%). This distribution indicates that the district's visible multilingualism is generated above all by market activity, service provision, and everyday commercial interaction rather than by institutional signage alone. Figure 2 visualises the same distribution.

Table 1
Corpus Composition by Sign Sector

Sector	Signs (n)	Percent
Consumer goods	431	37.67
Retail and wholesale consumption	232	20.28
Accommodation	168	14.69
Beauty and health	155	13.55
Government signage	117	10.23
Tourism	41	3.58
Total	1,144	100.00

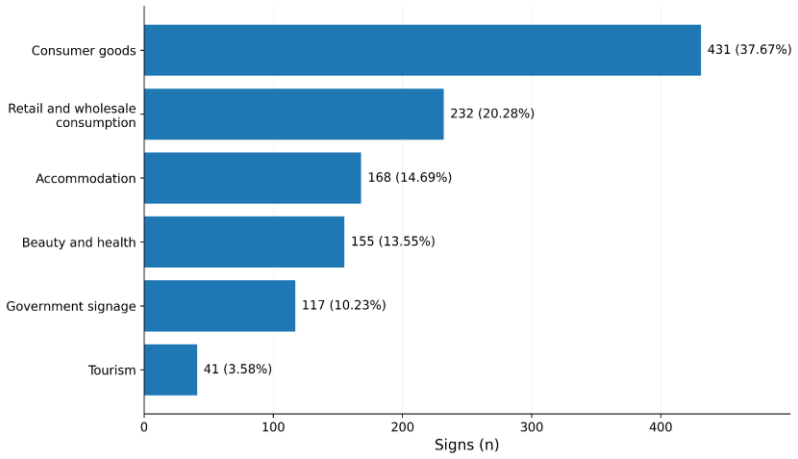


Figure 2. Sectoral Distribution of Photographed Signs in Huai Khwang (N = 1,144)

The multilingual subset further shows that multilingual display is not evenly distributed across domains. As Table 2 indicates, consumer-oriented sectors account for the largest shares of multilingual signs, especially consumer goods (n = 303), retail and wholesale consumption (n = 163), beauty and health (n = 138), accommodation (n = 121), government signage (n = 83), and tourism (n = 32). Multilingualism in Huai Khwang is therefore concentrated where signs mediate among customers, residents, visitors, and service users. This already suggests that multilingual display in the district is sectorally organised rather than uniformly distributed.

Table 2
Cross-Sector Distribution of Multilingual Signs

Sector	Multilingual signs (n)	Percent of multilingual subset
Consumer goods	303	36.07
Retail and wholesale consumption	163	19.40
Beauty and health	138	16.43
Accommodation	121	14.40
Government signage	83	9.88
Tourism	32	3.81
Total	840	100.00

B. Language Hierarchy by Visual Prominence

Prominence patterns show that multilingual hierarchy in Huai Khwang is differentiated rather than uniform. Within Thai–English pairings across the multilingual corpus, English was the most frequently enlarged language: signs with EN > TH accounted for 253 cases (30.12%), compared with 219 cases (26.07%) for TH > EN and 64 cases (7.62%) for

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equal-size Thai–English display. This indicates that English functions not merely as an auxiliary code, but as a visibly elevated language of accessibility, prestige, and market reach in substantial parts of the district. Table 3 summarises the dominant prominence configurations across the multilingual corpus.

Thai nonetheless remains structurally central. Within the Thai–English–Chinese subset, the most frequent trilingual hierarchy was TH > EN > CH (n = 109, 12.98%), followed by EN > TH > CH (n = 64, 7.62%), whereas CH > EN > TH was much less common (n = 23, 2.74%). Even where English is foregrounded, Thai therefore continues to anchor the district's broader public semiotic order.

Figure 3 clarifies how these prominence patterns vary by sector. English-led prominence is strongest in retail and wholesale consumption (71%), followed by tourism (61%) and accommodation (56%). Thai-led prominence is strongest in government signage (100%) and remains dominant in beauty and health (66%). Consumer goods is evenly split between Thai-led and English-led prominence (41% each). Chinese-led dominance remains limited across sectors. Overall, Huai Khwang does not exhibit a simple replacement of Thai by English or Chinese; rather, it displays a patterned hierarchy in which Thai remains foundational, English is strategically elevated, and Chinese is selectively mobilised.

TABLE 3
DOMINANT PROMINENCE CONFIGURATIONS ACROSS MULTILINGUAL SIGNS

Language configuration	Relative prominence	Signs (n)	Percent
TH–EN	EN > TH	253	30.12
TH–EN	TH > EN	219	26.07
TH–EN	Equal	64	7.62
TH–CH	CH > TH	20	2.38
TH–CH	TH > CH	19	2.26
TH–CH	Equal	5	0.60
EN–CH	EN > CH	2	0.24
EN–CH	Equal	1	0.12
TH–EN–CH	TH > EN > CH	109	12.98
TH–EN–CH	EN > TH > CH	64	7.62
TH–EN–CH	CH > EN > TH	23	2.74
TH–EN–CH–JP	TH > EN > CH > JP	16	1.90
TH–EN–CH–JP	EN > TH > CH > JP	5	0.60
TH–EN–CH–KR	TH > EN > CH > KR	10	1.19
TH–EN–CH–KR	EN > TH > CH > KR	5	0.60
Other low-frequency configurations	Grouped remainder	25	2.98
Total		840	100.00

Note. "Other low-frequency configurations" pools configurations not reported individually in order to preserve table readability while retaining the full multilingual total (N = 840).

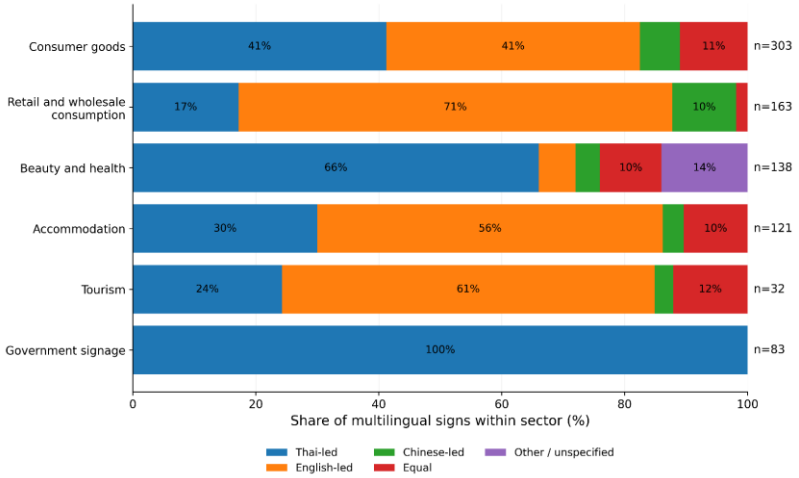


Figure 3. Cross-Sector Visual Hierarchy Across Multilingual Signs in Huai Khwang

Note. Bars show the within-sector distribution of visually dominant prominence patterns, grouped into Thai-led, English-led, Chinese-led, equal-size, and other/unspecified configurations. Sector totals are n = 303 for consumer goods, n = 163 for retail and wholesale consumption, n = 138 for beauty and health, n = 121 for accommodation, n = 32 for tourism, and n = 83 for government signage.

C. Translation Regimes Across Sectors

Translation patterns reveal an equally structured form of multilingual differentiation. As Table 4 shows, direct translation was the most common regime across the 840 multilingual signs, followed by partial translation and then free writing. However, this aggregate pattern conceals substantial sectoral variation. Figure 4 visualises the same contrast.

Direct translation was strongest in government signage (77.11%) and remained the majority pattern in beauty and health (62.32%), consumer goods (59.08%), and accommodation (59.50%). In these sectors, multilingual signage

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appears to prioritise clarity, service information, or formal accessibility. Direct translation is therefore most closely associated with signs whose primary function is informational, regulatory, or commercially transparent.

By contrast, partial translation dominated in tourism (62.50%) and retail and wholesale consumption (54.60%). This pattern suggests that these sectors rely more heavily on selective multilingualism: brand names, product labels, or commercially meaningful terms are often retained in one language, while explanatory material is supplied in another. Partial translation thus functions not as incomplete translation, but as a structured strategy that preserves symbolic or commercial specificity while still providing usable information across audiences.

Free writing remained marginal overall (3.57%), but it was most visible in accommodation (12.40%) and only sporadically present elsewhere. Where it occurs, it does not aim at semantic equivalence. Instead, different languages carry different communicative functions, making free writing the most overtly symbolic translation regime in the corpus, even though it is the least frequent.

TABLE 4
TRANSLATION REGIMES BY SECTOR

Sector	Direct translation	Partial translation	Free writing
Consumer goods	179 (59.08%)	116 (38.28%)	8 (2.64%)
Retail and wholesale consumption	72 (44.17%)	89 (54.60%)	2 (1.23%)
Beauty and health	86 (62.32%)	48 (34.78%)	4 (2.90%)
Accommodation	72 (59.50%)	34 (28.10%)	15 (12.40%)
Government signage	64 (77.11%)	19 (22.89%)	0 (0.00%)
Tourism	11 (34.38%)	20 (62.50%)	1 (3.12%)
Overall (N = 840)	484 (57.62%)	326 (38.81%)	30 (3.57%)

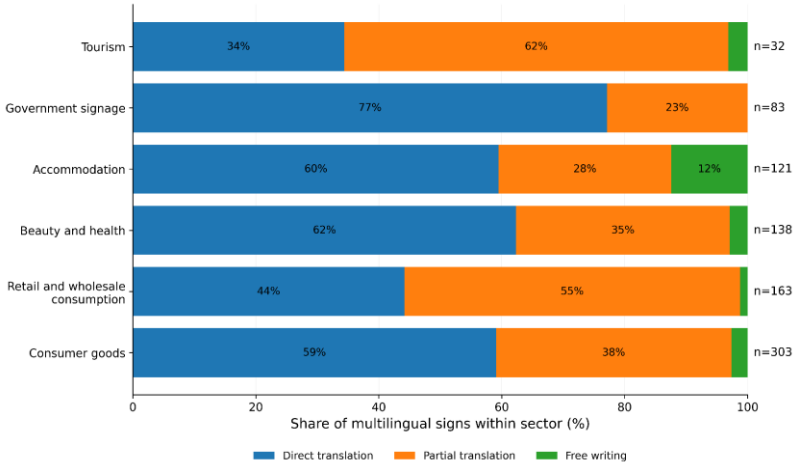


Figure 4. Translation Regimes Across Multilingual Signs in Huai Khwang by Sector.
Note. Bars show the within-sector distribution of direct translation, partial translation, and free writing. Sector totals are n = 303 for consumer goods, n = 163 for retail and wholesale consumption, n = 138 for beauty and health, n = 121 for accommodation, n = 83 for government signage, and n = 32 for tourism.

D. Functional Differentiation of Thai, English, and Chinese

When prominence and translation are considered together, the results point to a clear functional differentiation. Thai operates as the language of local anchoring, public legitimacy, and baseline legibility. English functions as a language of translocal access, cosmopolitan presentation, and service visibility. Chinese plays a more selective role, indexing commercial targeting, ethnic-market addressivity, and, in some cases, the symbolic value of Chinese-oriented consumption. Importantly, Chinese is not absent from high-visibility signage, but it rarely dominates across the district as a whole.

Multilingualism in Huai Khwang is therefore not simply additive. The languages displayed on signs do not merely repeat the same message; they are distributed according to sectoral logics. Government signage prioritises clarity and institutional accessibility. Tourism and retail rely more heavily on selective multilingualism that combines information with branding. Accommodation uses multilingual display to negotiate both practical access and market positioning, while consumer goods and beauty-and-health signage combine commercial clarity with symbolic indexicality. Taken together, the results support the interpretation of Huai Khwang as a sectorally differentiated multilingual marketplace rather than a uniformly Chinese-dominant district.

V. DISCUSSION

The results show that Huai Khwang should not be understood as a uniformly Chinese-dominant district, nor reduced to a simple case of increasing multilingual diversity. Rather, it is more accurately described as a stratified multilingual marketplace in which Thai, English, and Chinese are distributed unevenly but co-functionally across sectors. This

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interpretation refines earlier work on Huai Khwang. Wu et al. (2020) were right to identify Pracha Rat Bamphen Road as part of an emerging Chinese-oriented urban formation, and Chaisingkananont et al. (2026) and Wu et al. (2026) have since shown how governance, visibility, and culinary place branding shape the district's semiotic profile. Yet the present results indicate that Chinese visibility alone is insufficient to explain the organisation of Huai Khwang's broader signage ecology once the district is examined through a cross-sector corpus rather than a single street or thematic domain.

What emerges is not Chinese takeover but hierarchical multilingual differentiation. Thai remains foundational to public legitimacy and local legibility. English is strategically elevated in the sectors most strongly oriented to mobility, service access, and market reach, especially retail and wholesale consumption, tourism, and accommodation. Chinese is highly visible, but its dominance is selective rather than generalised. It becomes most salient where market targeting, consumer addressivity, and Chinese-oriented commercial indexing are most relevant, but it rarely displaces Thai or English across the district as a whole. This pattern is consistent with work showing that multilingual signage is structured by audience design and economic function rather than by multilingual accumulation alone. Leeman and Modan (2009) showed that commodified language in Chinatown is shaped by commercial addressivity, not simply ethnicity. Kasanga (2012) likewise demonstrated that multilingual shop signs vary by commercial niche. Pietikäinen and Holmes (2011) further showed that linguistic diversity may be closely tied to local economic life. Taken together, these perspectives help explain why Huai Khwang displays layered multilingual ordering rather than a flat Chinese-dominant semiotic regime.

The translation results deepen this interpretation. Reh's (2004) framework is especially productive here because it distinguishes multilingual repetition from multilingual differentiation. In Huai Khwang, direct translation dominates where communicative clarity is central, especially in government signage and in sectors where service transparency matters. This pattern suggests that multilingual display is often used to widen access without redistributing symbolic authority. By contrast, partial translation is strongest in tourism and retail and wholesale consumption, where branding, selective audience targeting, and commercially meaningful terms carry greater weight. Chen and Numtong (2023) similarly showed that Thai–Chinese public-sign translation is shaped by communicative purpose and target readership rather than by simple lexical equivalence. In Huai Khwang, partial translation therefore functions not as incomplete translation but as a structured regime of controlled multilingualism in which languages carry different informational loads.

A further implication concerns the symbolic economy of English and Chinese. The results do not support a zero-sum model in which one language replaces the other. Instead, the two languages occupy different semiotic niches. English remains the more generalised language of translocal access, cosmopolitan presentation, and service visibility. Chinese is more targeted and commercially specific, particularly where signs index Chinese-speaking consumers, Chinese-oriented goods, or Chinese-linked business ownership. This distinction helps explain why Huai Khwang cannot be described either as a Thai–English bilingual zone with Chinese additions or as a new Chinatown that displaces Bangkok's broader public language order. Huang and Zhao (2025) showed that restaurant signage in Chengdu reflects graded alignment between language policy and local identity. Nambu and Ono (2025) demonstrated that Shin-Okubo contains internally differentiated multilingual orders rather than a single ethnic-signage pattern. Xia (2025) likewise showed that different urban zones can produce different indexical orders within the same city. Huai Khwang belongs to this broader pattern of internally differentiated multilingual urbanism.

The article's main theoretical contribution lies in showing that language hierarchy in Huai Khwang is produced through the interaction of sector, prominence, and translation rather than through visibility alone. Public multilingualism becomes analytically meaningful when it is read as a structured system of unequal but co-functional roles. In this case, Thai anchors public order, English extends market and service reach, and Chinese selectively intensifies ethnic-commercial addressivity. The district's signage ecology is therefore best understood not as a simple accumulation of languages in space, but as a patterned semiotic arrangement shaped by sectoral logic, communicative purpose, and audience orientation.

VI. Conclusion

This article has shown that multilingual signage in Huai Khwang is organised through sector-specific hierarchies rather than through flat multilingual coexistence. Using a district-wide corpus of 1,144 photographed signs, including 840 multilingual signs analysed in detail, the study demonstrates that Thai, English, and Chinese are distributed unevenly across sectors and assigned different communicative and symbolic roles. Thai remains foundational to public legibility and institutional authority. English is strategically elevated in sectors oriented to access, mobility, and commercial prestige. Chinese is highly visible but selectively dominant, especially where targeted commercial addressivity is most relevant. Huai Khwang should therefore be understood not as a uniformly Chinese-dominant district, but as a stratified multilingual marketplace.

The study contributes empirically by providing a broader district-level account of Huai Khwang's signage than previous studies, analytically by integrating visual prominence and translation regime within a single framework, and theoretically by showing how multilingual hierarchy is materially organised through sectoral differentiation. Its main limitation is that the source corpus was collected and coded within a single-researcher design and therefore does not

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support claims about intercoder reliability. Even so, the findings provide a strong basis for further work on multilingual urban change in Bangkok. Future research could extend this design through diachronic comparison, audience-centred interpretation, or multimodal analysis of colour, imagery, and spatial placement alongside written language.

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"I Was Rahim": Postmemory, Gendered Hermaphroditism, and Embodied Precarity in Hashimi's *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*

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***Abstract*—This paper examines how ideas of vulnerability and post-traumatic memory are fixed within the everyday lives of Afghan women through Nadia Hashmi's *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* (2014). Through the deeply entwined narratives of Shekiba and Rahima, who live parallel lives years apart, the study explores how gendered trauma is not only experienced but also transmitted across generations. Through an analysis of the Afghan custom of bacha posh, the paper suggests that the freedom associated with a male identity is often accompanied by uncertainty and conflict in constructing individual gender identity and selfhood. Rooted in vulnerability theory, gender performativity, and postmemory, the study introduces the concept of gendered hermaphroditism to describe this enforced oscillation between the two gender roles. The novel reveals inherited trauma as both a living condition and a site of narrative resistance.**

***Index Terms*—vulnerability, gender, memory, postmemory, trauma, gendered hermaphroditism**

I. Introduction

Afghanistan, situated as a landlocked nation in the heart of Asia, holds a significant place in world history and geopolitics. Marked by many years of prolonged conflict and complex cultural dynamics, the region reflects a complicated relationship through its tribal diversity, embedded historical trauma, and numerous geopolitical escalations. The land thus assumes a dynamic role in present-day international relations, making it pivotal for various political lineages. Its conservatism is often simplified in Western narratives, revealing a much more complex socio-political fabric. Ewans (2002) notes that nineteenth-century Afghanistan functioned as a "crucible of transformation" within its political imagination, while its modern history was shaped at the intersection of colonial borders and imperial interests (Rasanayagam, 2003). More than a peripheral space, Afghanistan emerges as a central site of geopolitical contestation. Afghan literature continues to bear the imprint of this history. Repeated invasions ranging from the early campaigns of Alexander the Great in 330 BC to the Persian invasions in the 18th century, to later devastations by the Mughals and the Taliban have left long-lasting marks on its cultural memory (Hiro, 1985; Simpson, 2012). Literary traditions in Pashto and Persian seek to capture this heritage through expressions of loss, resilience, resistance, and fragile identity formation. Contemporary Afghan writers have also developed new narrative forms through which they have explored questions of identity, vulnerability, and resistance while representing experiences of war, displacement, and gendered oppression (Crews, 2015; Abu-Lughod, 2013). As Afghan narratives entered global literary markets, they became entangled with other transnational discourses of representation, thereby creating new opportunities and constraints for articulating gendered experiences (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Bhabha, 1994). Contemporary studies on gender and power in Afghanistan suggest that practices such as bacha posh that became embedded in Afghan culture reveal the performative nature of gender roles by exposing how access to authority and recognition remain structured through patriarchal systems (Nordberg, 2014; Wimpelmann, 2017).

Themes of displacement, gendered oppression, and justice continue to shape the Afghan literary imagination, where writing functions as a form of witnessing (Ahmed, 1992; Butler, 1990). Memory, testimony, and cultural survival become important means through which these narratives reclaim agency in situations marked by prolonged violence and displacement, without reducing survival to a narrative of easy hope (Hirsch, 2008; Crownshaw et al., 2010). These narratives preserve diverse experiences of suffering, survival, and cultural endurance. Nadia Hashimi's fiction builds on this tradition while bringing particular attention to the gendered realities of Afghan women's lives. As an Afghan-American novelist, she constructs narratives that are both diasporic and deeply rooted in cultural memory. Her writing engages closely with questions of gender, identity, and survival, approaching Afghan womanhood not as an abstraction but as a lived experience. Across novels such as *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* (2014), *When the Moon Is Low* (2015), and *A House Without Windows* (2016), Hashimi explores the effects of displacement, patriarchal control, and inherited trauma within Afghan women's lives (Hashimi, 2014; Abu-Lughod, 2013). Her fiction does not isolate personal experience from larger structures; instead, it reveals how individual lives are shaped by overlapping social and historical forces.

The Pearl That Broke Its Shell (2014) explores the tradition of *bacha posh*, in which a girl or a group of girls temporarily assumes masculine roles to navigate patriarchal restrictions (Hashimi, 2014). This practice operates not

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only as a cultural phenomenon but also as a socio-political metaphor, revealing how gender is shaped through social control. Set across rural villages in Afghanistan and in Kabul, the novel constructs a symbolic panorama of confinement and resistance, where the symbolic "pearl" evokes both fragility and endurance through which it is ultimately formed. Hashimi avoids portraying suffering as a noble or redemptive deed but links it to the social and political restrictions that govern women's lives. Her characters move through experiences of loss and negotiation, reframing Afghan womanhood not as passive victimhood but as a site of knowledge, resilience, and agency. Such experiences reflect vulnerability's dual character wherein it exposes the individuals to injury and dependency and can also become the centre for ethical responsiveness, relationality, and resistance (Gilson, 2014, pp. 1–8).

The current study argues that the narrative *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* (2014) portrays vulnerability and post-traumatic memory through gender hermaphroditism, where the practice of *bacha posh* produces a fractured self and a psychological impasse in the identity formation of the cross-dresser. The analysis adopts a qualitative literary approach foregrounded by gender performativity, trauma theory, and memory studies to analyse how identity, vulnerability, and resistance are shaped throughout the characters in the novel.

II. Literature Review

Modern Afghan feminist literature occupies a complex position within global literary discourse, engaging with themes of war, patriarchy, exile, and survival. These narratives do more than document violence; they preserve cultural memory while resisting erasure through storytelling. Within this body of work, the *bacha posh* tradition has emerged as a recurring motif, reflecting deeper anxieties about gender, identity, and social survival. The term, meaning "dressed as a boy," gained wider recognition through *The Underground Girls of Kabul* (2014), where the practice is situated within Afghanistan's gendered social structure. The narrative highlights the unequal value assigned to gender, showing how masculinity grants access to social freedom that gets frequently denied to women. *Bacha Posh* operates within the logic of a system that values male identity, allowing temporary access to mobility and recognition while leaving intact the underlying hierarchies in the society (Nordberg, 2014). Here, gender becomes less than a fixed identity and more of a role shaped by social necessity (Butler, 1990). Families use this practice to negotiate the limitations imposed on girls, relying on the social privileges attached to masculinity as a strategy for survival and participation in public life. Gender hierarchies in Afghan society are sustained through access to visible authority and subtle forms of regulation silently rooted within everyday life (Felitti et al., 1998). Social norms are fortified through routine practices, moral expectations, familial structures and ethical injustices that shape behaviour and limit sovereignty. These processes are often adopted not as a passive acceptance but as a form of adaptation within these constrained environments (Butler, 1990). The novel portrays a social order where masculinity is associated with honour, authority, and public recognition, whereas girls are subjected to expectations that limit their freedom and shape their life choices (Rashid, 2000; Abu-Lughod, 2013).

Research on trauma inflicted on an individual often expresses how certain conditions shape an individual's subjectivity over time. Experiences of denial, neglect, and isolation get rooted in the psychological and physiological responses, influencing identity formation and emotional regulation (Bremner, 2016; Evans & Kim, 2010). Thus, trauma is shaped by persistent social and interpersonal challenges, thereby influencing the character for a much longer period even after the whole events have culminated. Studies highlight how these experiences disrupt the usual stability and produce a lasting effect that extends beyond individual moments of violence (Felman & Laub, 1992; Rubin, 2002; van der Kolk & Fisler, 1995). Patriarchal trauma in Afghan society repeatedly intersects with class stratification, rural–urban divides, illiteracy, and geopolitical marginality, producing multiple forms of vulnerability which inhabit cultures shaped by silence and shame (Mahmood, 2005). Through her experiences, Hashimi demonstrates how economic, political, and spatial inequalities shape these gendered lives and reveal the interconnected nature of these forms of domination (Spivak, 1988). Vulnerability appears as an individual psychological state and as a structurally produced condition. Gilson (2014, pp. 12–18) argues that vulnerability should be understood as a relational condition produced through social, political, and embodied interactions. This perspective is useful for understanding the experiences of Afghan women in Hashimi's novel, where vulnerability gets imposed by patriarchal structures and gets negotiated through everyday acts of survival. The rise of the Taliban and the rising influence of conservative religious interpretations identified additional constraints on women's lives, with religion being used to justify and enforce existing gender norms (Mahmood, 2005; Enloe, 2000). Through their focus on women's lives, these Afghan feminist narratives question social and cultural structures that restrict female agency. They record experiences that are often absent from dominant historical accounts and highlight the role of postmemory in sustaining this identity and continuity. In preserving silenced experiences, they align with the witnessing of trauma that understands testimony as an ethical act capable of restoring subjectivity (Felman & Laub, 1992; van der Kolk & Fisler, 1995).

Trauma and vulnerability occur as the result of ongoing experiences whose impact builds gradually across different stages of life (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Recent scholarship has expanded postmemory studies beyond Holocaust contexts to encompass transnational, postcolonial, and conflict-based forms of memory transmission.

Researchers argue that inherited memory transmits through emotional and affective methods, inter-generational family narratives, and embodied practices, thereby shaping identity formation across generations living within the structures of violence and displacement (Reading, 2022; Bond et al., 2017; Craps, 2013). Such advances are useful for understanding how Shekiba's life is mediated through Rahima's experiences. Trauma deepens vulnerability, particularly

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in situations already shaped by marginalisation (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2003; Brewin, 2007). Thus, vulnerability is both inherent to human experience and gets amplified through social and political conditions (Ahmed, 2004). Under militarised patriarchal circumstances like those in Afghanistan, femininity becomes associated with expendability, while male dominance is reinforced through cultural and ideological systems (Mahmood, 2005; Enloe, 2000). Afghan feminist literature responds to this ideology by reconstructing female subjectivity not as a passive victimhood but as a form of endurance and narrative control. Resistance in this literature often takes the form of memory, storytelling, and everyday acts of survival, through which women assert their presence and recover their histories that have been constantly overlooked or silenced (Herman, 1992; Hashimi, 2014). Modern vulnerability studies increasingly understand precarity as structurally produced through intersecting systems of gender, class, migration or displacement, and geopolitical instability. Vulnerability is thus shaped not only by personal circumstances but also by unequal social and political structures that determine access to protection and recognition. Studies on Afghanistan after the Taliban regime highlight how stories about Afghan women serve as archives of resistance by documenting their everyday forms of oppression by preserving memory amid political uncertainty and intensified gender restrictions (UN Women, 2024; Wimpelmann, 2017).

III. Analysis

The Pearl That Broke Its Shell (2014) offers a continuous exploration of Afghan womanhood through the frames of gender vulnerability that is lived, inherited, and negotiated throughout the novel (Hashimi, 2014). Rahima's experience as a *bacha posh* provides temporary access to her mobility, education, and social visibility, only to be withdrawn afterwards through her forced return to domestic confinement. This switch of gender from female to male and back to female reflects a system in which masculinity functions as a conditional privilege, accessible only within certain specific limits (Nordberg, 2014). Her cross-dressing transformation into the male Rahim earns her father's recognition, while her return to femininity results in the loss of his validation, marking a symbolic rupture in identity and social belonging. The narrative reveals that the independence gained through this swing is fragile and temporary, exposing the instability of the gender roles on which it depends. The novel therefore highlights how identity is influenced more by external expectations than by personal continuity (Butler, 1990).

From Arif and Abdul Khaliq to Abdul Sharif, the male figures in the novel function as personifications of a broader socio-cultural order in which violence is normalised, marital rape justified, and women are reduced to apparatuses of reproduction and social reputation (Mahmood, 2005; Enloe, 2000). Rahima's experience of physical abuse is not framed as an individual's cruelty but as a manifestation of the systemic patriarchal violence perpetuated across generations (Mahmood, 2005). Instead of presenting her as a passive victim, the narrative proposes how fear, shame, and silence together shape the everyday relationships and social behaviour across bodies and social spaces to sustain compliance. (Ahmed, 2004). Parwin's story introduces an additional layer of vulnerability shaped by intersecting forms of marginalisation recurring in her everyday life. Her disability, when combined with an abusive marriage, explains how gender, bodily difference, and social dependency deepen the precarity of her existence (Evans & Kim, 2010; Crenshaw, 1989). Her suicide underscores the limits of resilience within her historical setting. Alongside characters such as Shekiba, Khala Shaima, and Kamala, she reflects what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) describes as the condition of the subaltern, whose suffering remains structurally inaudible and unexpressed. These multiple experiences are not only suppressed but rendered ineffective outside the dominant outlines of recognition by the male-dominated society.

Hashimi reveals this patriarchal continuity by exposing how the institutional structures mould the women's bodies (Hashimi, 2014). Badriya's placement into a reserved parliamentary seat becomes a symbolic gesture of inclusion that conceals deeper exclusions, where visibility does not translate into voice but more into silence (Mahmood, 2005). The novel's movement between Shekiba's past and Rahima's present creates a layered temporal structure in which historical patterns continue to repeat within these lived experiences (Hirsch, 2008). This narrative strategy makes use of postmemory, which Hirsch (2008, pp. 106–111) defines as the relationship that successive generations establish with traumatic experiences transmitted to them through stories, images, and cultural memory (Hirsch, 2008; Felman & Laub, 1992). Rahima does not simply inherit Shekiba's experiences but reworks them to understand her own condition. (Hashimi, 2014). Through this to-and-fro interaction of past and present, it becomes more of a memory trail, with aporias getting filled through memories and experiences gained through generations. The novel exposes both the intimate violence of domestic spaces and the broader failures of patriarchal systems (Mahmood, 2005; Abu-Lughod, 2013), while opening fragile spaces for resistance through storytelling and remembrance. Within Afghan gender politics, practices such as *bacha posh* and *bacha bazi* reveal how gender roles get manipulated within patriarchal contexts (Nordberg, 2014; Mahmood, 2005). These practices do not disrupt the hierarchy but instead reinforce its dominance by regulating normal access to power and visibility. In the case of *bacha posh*, girls temporarily adopt masculine identities thrust upon them by society to gain mobility and recognition, yet this access remains conditional and reversible (Nordberg, 2014). The return to femininity forces Rahima back into systems of control, leaving her with a fractured sense of identity that cannot fully return to its former state. This negative transition often results in long-term psychological effects, where experiences of dislocation manifest themselves as lifelong trauma (Felman & Laub, 1992; Rubin, 2002; van der Kolk & Fisler, 1995). Both Rahima and Sheikiba feel distressed by the questioning of their gender and find it hard to be involved in this fragile gender switching of roles.

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The practice of *bacha bazi* exposes another dimension of gendered violence, where young boys get feminised and exploited within these same systems of power (Mahmood, 2005). Positioned within the intersecting hierarchies of age, class, and gender, they exist in conditions of extreme vulnerability where bodies become sites of consumption, and once they develop autonomy, they are discarded. Across both practices, gender is not an expression of identity but a mechanism of control. This imposed instability blurs the boundary between identity and performance, resulting in psychological fragmentation, dissociation, and enduring trauma (Ozer et al., 2003; van der Kolk & Fisler, 1995). Gender is shown not as an explicit personal identity but as a social arrangement that shapes access to authority, mobility, and recognition by reinforcing existing inequalities. The state, the family, and cultural traditions function together to maintain these practices as purely religious mandates and socio-economic systems of control (Mahmood, 2005; Masten, 2014). Conditions such as poverty, illiteracy, and the pursuit of social mobility therefore compel families to adopt these roles for their children as survival strategies in a society structured around the exploitation of women (Evans & Kim, 2010; Herman, 1992).

Rahima's narrative illustrates the difficult choices many families make within their restrictive social conditions. Her mother's decision is not rooted in ideology but in the desire to provide her child with greater freedom and recognition in a society that privileges sons over daughters (Felitti et al., 1998; Nordberg, 2014). The preference for male children thus reflects a broader socio-political logic, where a woman's worth is tied to her reproductive capacity alone (Mahmood, 2005). Shekiba's parallel story extends this outline, revealing how such conditions persist even across generations. While both women endure many forms of gendered constraint, their experiences open rooms for resistance, where the body becomes a site of memory, identity and reinterpretation (Hashimi, 2014; Hirsch, 2008). The forced oscillation between their masculine and feminine identity and roles produces a condition that may be understood as a socially imposed gender hermaphroditism. Here, the identity of the cross-dresser remains unstable, as individuals are required to move between gender and familial roles without fully belonging to either. Masculinity for them functions as a temporary social position that provides an outlet for their desire for independence when necessary but gets withdrawn once its purpose has been fulfilled.

IV. Discussion

The Pearl That Broke Its Shell (2014) weaves together the lives of Rahima and her great-great-grandmother, Shekiba, through a polyphonic narrative that connects their past and present. Across both these timelines, vulnerability is not depicted as an inherent trait but as a condition shaped by social circumstances. The *bacha posh* practice initially appears as a form of power cross-dressing, gradually reveals itself as a conditional arrangement that gets withdrawn once its purpose is fulfilled. Shekiba's reflection captures this tension: "It seemed like a hundred years ago that she'd walked about the palace grounds with cropped hair and men's slacks… only a daughter could know what it is to cross the line, to feel the freedom of living as the opposite sex" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 431). This moment does not signal liberation but highlights the temporary nature of such access. The experience becomes less a transformation than a rehearsal of freedom that cannot be sustained. The withdrawal from this role constitutes a central rupture in the narrative. Traumatic memory, as theorised in stress and coping frameworks, often resists linear narration and re-emerges through fragmented recollection (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Rahima's response to her forced return to femininity reflects this disruption: "I was no longer who I had been. The boy in me was fading, and I didn't know how to be the girl they wanted" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 339). This moment marks a dislocation of identity, in which the imposed transition creates a sense of estrangement from both past and present selves. According to Butler's (1990, pp. 179–190) theory of performativity, gender is not an inherent trait but results from repeated social actions that become naturalised through cultural repetition. The "boy" she refers to is no longer merely a social role but a psychologically meaningful aspect of selfhood. Hashimi therefore demonstrates that performative identities may become affectively internalised. The trauma experienced by Rahima arises not from performing masculinity but from being compelled to relinquish an identity that has become emotionally real. The novel thus extends Butler's theory by revealing the psychological consequences of enforced gender transitions.

From this standpoint, the characters' trauma is influenced by their social roles within Afghan society (Masten, 2014). Gilson (2014, pp. 55–61) which suggests that vulnerability is not merely a deficit to be overcome but a relational condition through which subjects encounter structures of dependence and power. Rahima and Shekiba's experiences illustrate this dynamic, revealing how vulnerability is produced through patriarchal institutions by generating forms of ethical awareness and resistance. Both Shekiba and Rahima attempt to narrate their experiences through storytelling as a way of negotiating fractured identities, aligning with the emphasis on recovery as a process for trauma linked to the restoration of voice and agency (Herman, 1992, p. 133). Trauma remains unresolved forever but also creates opportunities for resistance. This space of traumatic injury is not static but evolves through intergenerational acts of recollection and reinterpretation. Storytelling here emerges as a feminist practice of achieving independence and resistance over blind subjection. Through Shekiba's story, which gets passed down to Rahima, Hashimi constructs an intergenerational archive of resistance that is "so powerful, so monumental, as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch, 2008, p. 106). While Hirsch (2008) theorizes postmemory as the transmission of inherited trauma, Hashimi presents memory as an active process of reinterpretation. Rahima does not simply inherit Shekiba's experiences but reworks them to understand her own condition. The novel as a narrative transforms postmemory from a

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model of transmission into a form of feminist self-recognition. Rahima's awakening is shaped less by external intervention than by the revival of this inherited voice. Within this structure, *bacha posh* becomes more than cultural practice. Rather, it marks a condition of gendered liminality, where identity is repeatedly crossed and re-imposed, leaving lasting psychic effects. Hashimi reframes this wound as something to be resolved and reworked. Memory helps the characters to make sense of generational and gendered suffering and sustain a sense of self, enabling characters to reassemble fractured identities.

Afghan society, as represented in the novel, is equipped with rigid gender binaries that assign authority to men and obedience to women. These expectations are adopted early in a woman's life, shaping her inability to access power, mobility, and self-determination. Rahima's father, her absent brothers, and the family's fixation on producing a son collectively sustained this order by embedding patriarchy within everyday life. The narrative shows how social traditions make this gendered suffering appear normal and inevitable. Here, *bacha posh* as a tradition is repositioned as a metaphor for fractured girlhood and enforced conformity. Practices such as marital coercion, the liberty of male violence, and the public punishment of women reveal the depth of existing misogyny. At the same time, these conditions become moments of reflection and understanding, allowing the characters to recognise and question the forces that restrict them. Through shared memory and gradual acts of self-recognition, Rahima and Shekiba assert forms of presence within an arrangement that seeks to erase them. Through her portrayal of women's experiences, Hashimi invites readers to reflect on the social and historical forces that structure vulnerability, exclusion, and resistance. Vulnerability is shown as a lived reality shaped by unequal social relationships, where violence and exclusion become part of the ordinary frame of daily life. It becomes a condition shaped by both lived experience and imposed roles, particularly for girls like Rahima. Her father's lament- "If I had a son this would not be happening! Goddamn it! Why do we have a house full of girls! Not one, not two—but five of them!" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 5) reveals a world in which daughters are devalued while sons embody honour and continuity of lineage. This domestic sphere emerges as a space marked by unequal power relations, where family and care are frequently intertwined with surveillance, obligation, and control. The *bacha posh* practice reflects this contradiction. The novel simultaneously reveals the unequal distribution of gendered possibilities. Rahima gains mobility, education, and public visibility only when she is recognised as male after being a *bacha posh*. The narrative depicts that performativity does not occur within a neutral social field, but certain performances are rewarded while others are restricted. Hashimi consequently shifts the discussion in the narrative from gender construction to gender power, showing how patriarchal systems regulate identities and how they may be successfully performed. While the cultural tradition offers temporary access to mobility and recognition, this access remains conditional and is withdrawn when it no longer serves its purpose after the female puberty. Rahima's experience as a *bacha posh* expands her sense of possibility of freedom, but the expectation blanks out the moment she resumes a conventional female role, creating a profound disruption in her understanding of herself. Her declaration- "I was more than just a girl; I was a *bacha posh*!" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 151) captures the loss of a self that cannot be sustained forever. This imposed movement between identities produces lasting psychological effects. Rahima's mother, though caring, becomes complicit in this system, which Hashimi describes as a "co-conspirator" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 238), navigating survival through silence.

The novel brings about a parallel contradiction between domestic authority and state power, most importantly in restrictions on female education. Characters like Abdul Khaliq embody the form of a militarised masculinity where marriage becomes a transaction, and women are absorbed into systems of power as symbolic femme fatales. The psychological aftereffects of being a *bacha posh* extend beyond individual experience. Memory here functions as a site of cultural signature, where trauma is carried through mutually personal and collective histories. This enforced shift from masculinity to femininity drastically fractures the individual identity by producing forms of dislocation that affect both self-perception and social belonging. These incidents are connected to wider social conditions that shape and maintain unequal forms of power. The narrative also exposes how mainstream religious discourse gets manipulated to legitimise gender hierarchy. Resistance to power or hierarchy is vigorously met with punishment, hence revealing how authority is maintained through ideology and force. Under the conditions prevalent in Afghanistan, this religious authority becomes closely linked to the regulation of everyday life. The narrative gradually broadens its scope, connecting individual experiences of suffering to the larger patterns of societal inequality. It questions how control over women's bodies is ultimately institutionalised through emotional conditioning and physical coercion. Through its interwoven narratives presented in the novel, Hashimi creates a space where trauma, memory, and resistance coexist. The text leaves many conflicts unresolved and focuses on the continuing processes of witnessing, remembering, and reinterpreting experience. As both a narrative device and a cultural metaphor, the *bacha posh* practice here embodies these unresolved contradictions. While it appears to grant access to male privilege, it remains fragile and reversible on a greater scale. The temporary crossing of gender boundaries does not dismantle the hierarchy completely but reinforces its limits, turning moments of empowerment into a deeper experience of loss. In a way, the narrative shows that systems of power function not just by imposing restrictions but also by conditionally granting and withdrawing the power exertion in the society.

The study examines how vulnerability is structurally produced through the absence of institutional support, systemic misogyny, and the cultural valorisation of silence and endurance projected by women. Within this power frame, resistance does not appear as spectacle but as a persistence and quiet acts of remembering or reclaiming space. In

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Hashimi's novel, this resistance unwraps through intergenerational memory, introspection, and moments of limited power. Violence is not sensationalised, but it emerges through the loss of assertion of voice, enforced silence, and the denial of subjecthood. Everyday practices such as the imbibing of *bacha posh* identity into the fragment of society or the normalisation of child marriage demonstrate how trauma becomes embedded within the routine social practices, transforming exceptional violence into an ordinary feature of everyday life (Herman, 1992; van der Kolk, 2014). The dual-timeline structure in the novel reinforces this condition by revealing how gendered suffering persists across generations. The parallel narratives of Shekiba and Rahima do not simply repeat history but reinterpret it, positioning memory as both inheritance and critique. Intergenerational memory reinforces identity through the same silence across many decades. Rahima's understanding of herself develops through her engagement with Shekiba's story, which helps her recognise the connections between her own struggles and those experienced by earlier generations of women. The narrative portrays gender as something negotiated through everyday life by changing responses to social demands and personal circumstances (Butler, 1990). The enforced transitions between masculine and feminine roles produce instability, where the identity is continually reconfigured daily. Hashimi resists framing her characters as heroic figures, but her characters reveal their strength lies in a refusal to disappear within systems that seek to silence them. Trauma, thereby, is not presented as an individual wound but as a condition sustained by broader social and political conflicts. Vulnerability therefore functions here as a collective historical condition whose effects continue to be portrayed across generations.

The narrative of the novel brings forth this tautness through its portrayal of the many lives shaped by patriarchy, historical conflict, and psychological rupture. The knotted stories of Shekiba and Rahima accentuate the continuity of gendered violence across many generations, while also highlighting the continuation of resistance through memory. The memory that is mentioned here is the gendered memory of a fractured self, which is accentuated by the female hermaphrodite who is, in effect, a cross-dresser concerned with the after-effects of this cultural shock inflicted upon them. The *bacha posh* practice summarises this contradiction of gender-role disruption, and it appears to offer access to freedom which reinforces the very system that necessitates it. As Rahima reflects, "But they had raised me as a boy, only to cast me back into the world of girls. What kind of world expects a child to change her gender like changing clothes?" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 215). Living as both a girl and a boy allows Rahima to see how gender roles get created and maintained through everyday social expectations, a point that resonates with Butler's (1990, p. 191) understanding of gender as a socially constructed phenomenon. For Rahima, masculinity functions as a temporary role shaped by necessity, and its withdrawal produces a psychic rupture that destabilises her sense of self. Her forced marriage marks a further extension of this condition where she speaks: "Everything was decided for me; from the time I was to leave to whom I would belong. I was being handed over, like a parcel, like something bought and sold" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 237). Here, the body of the victim is reduced to an object within systems of exchange, reflecting broader structures of control.

In the novel, trauma extends beyond isolated incidents, shaping relationships, memories, and everyday life over time, but hinges on Rahima's recollection-"I tried to remember the days when I was still a boy, but they had become dreamlike, misty... I wasn't sure who I was anymore" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 281)- which captures this fragmentation. Memory does not fade but becomes unstable, reflecting a dissociation that complicates self-recognition (van der Kolk & Fisler, 1995). Shekiba's experience offers a parallel form of embodied trauma here. Her disfigurement marks her as socially abject, thereby stating: "They said I would curse the water I carried, that my face could spoil the milk... I became a creature of ill omen" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 96). Her body becomes a site onto which cultural anxieties are projected, reinforcing her exclusion. This same condition allows for an unintended rupture in normative gender expectations, positioning her outside conventional roles. Even within these restrictive circumstances, Rahima and Shekiba strive to retain a sense of resistance by telling their own stories. Storytelling becomes a way of reflecting on the past by giving meaning to difficult experiences without neatly resolving them. Hashimi's treatment of recovery is more ambivalent than Herman's (1992) therapeutic model might suggest. While storytelling allows women to articulate previously silenced experiences, the structural conditions that produce this trauma remain largely intact. The novel henceforth questions whether complete recovery from the trauma is possible within the ongoing systems of patriarchal domination. Narration of inflicted trauma becomes a pathway to closure rather than a strategy for survival. The transmission of Shekiba's story enables Rahima to situate her suffering within a larger history of inflicted trauma that has been going on for generations. She recollects: "The more I learned of Shekiba, the more I saw her in myself. Her strength, her fire, it was in me too. I was not alone" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 311). Through this process, the memory becomes a means of connecting individual experiences to a larger history of suffering and survival. Moments of gender inversion explicitly expose the instability of these structures. When Shekiba assumes the role of a guard, she experiences a temporary shift in power where she could exercise her inner masculinity. She is seen to justify this by saying: "For once, I was not the cursed girl. I was the guard, respected, watched. They feared me" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 177). This episode underlines how access to a dominant authority is shaped by social perceptions of gender, not by any inherent difference in physical ability.

Silence here operates as a central mechanism of control within the novel, where the voices of the women are constrained only through prohibition and systematic invalidation of their speech. When Rahima protests against her forced marriage, she is told, "You are a girl, and your fate is not in your hands. It never has been" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 249). Her voice is unacknowledged and rendered ineffective, illustrating how power structures determine the limits of

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expression. Similarly, Shekiba's attempts to speak are pathologised: "They looked at me like I was a rabid dog… Speaking up was a disease" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 203). Here, dissent is reframed as disorder, reinforcing compliance. The female body, throughout the narrative, remains a contested space—regulated, disciplined, and redefined. Shekiba's reflection — "My face, my ruined face, saved me from the fate of other girls" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 122) reveals how deviation from normative femininity can disrupt expectations, allowing for limited forms of autonomy. In this sense, the body becomes both a site of inscription and a point of resistance.

Biological hermaphroditism in this context refers to a physiological condition of gender liminality in which an individual possesses both male and female sexual characteristics. In Hashimi's narrative, this notion is reworked as a socially constructed condition more than a biological reality. It emerges from the cultural structures that determine gender roles in Afghan society, where masculinity is associated with mobility, authority, and legitimacy. The characters' experiences suggest that gender is defined more by innate qualities than by the social expectations attached to certain roles (Butler, 1990). The transformation of the adolescent girls into *bacha posh* reflects this dynamic process. It serves as a pragmatic response to patriarchal constraints, granting temporary access to education, mobility, and economic participation. This shift does not disrupt the existing hierarchies, but it reinforces the primacy of masculinity by demonstrating that authority remains tied to male identity. Masculinity can be assumed as revealing the asymmetry embedded in gender relations. Rahima's marriage to a warlord exposes the continuity of this system. Her experience of marital rape, reproductive control, and surveillance is not episodic or individual but sustained throughout many households. She reminisces: "He took what he wanted when he wanted it. I learned to leave my body behind during those times" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 273). The statement presents dissociation as a response to trauma, where the body is experienced less as a source of security than as a reminder of pain and vulnerability. As Judith Herman (1992) observes, such disembodiment often accompanies prolonged trauma upon the bearer.

The metaphor of the pearl maintained in the title condenses this condition. Formed through irritation and pressure, it signifies a resilience that got shaped by multiple elements of constraint. Its emergence in its true form requires a rupture from the pod in which it is held. Rahima's reflection on her emergence reflects this when she says: "I wasn't the girl they had raised… I was something else. Something they could not name" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 371)—signals a movement beyond fixed categories. Similarly, Shekiba's assertion, voiced many generations ago, where she tells: "I have lived both their lives and mine" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 389), suggests a refusal to remain confined within the prescribed identities. The narrative therefore resists the need for legibility within patriarchal structures, presenting subjectivity as an entity that exceeds binary classification. Hashimi situates these joined intergenerational experiences within a broader pattern of inherited trauma and gendered constraint. The interwoven narratives of Rahima and Shekiba reveal how violence persisted and still lingers across generations, shaping identity through repetition and adaptation. The *bacha posh* situation, instead of providing consistent empowerment, therefore creates a state of embodied discontinuity where individuals shift between roles without a continuous connection. Here, gender becomes a site of negotiation that is shaped more by necessity than choice (Butler, 1990). Rahima's engagement of her own experiences with Shekiba's story illustrates this transmission. Gender-role reversal offers a momentary excuse, where its withdrawal reinforces the instability of identity. As Shekiba recalls, "It seemed like a hundred years ago…" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 431), this memory is etched into the cultural schema, functioning not as nostalgia but as a recognition of loss. Rahima's own response to enforced femininity reflects a similar rupture, aligning with trauma theory's description of psychic withdrawal under sustained pressure (Herman, 1992, p. 52). Rahima's fragmented self-perception- "The boy in me was fading…" (Hashimi, 2014, p. 339)—captures this instability. Her experience reflects not a singular event but an ongoing negotiation between imposed roles and personal identity by a series of events. These episodes indicate that recognition and denial shape subjectivity, that validation offers dignity, and that erasure deepens dislocation.

The aftermath of this enforced gendered transition underscores the cost of conditional autonomy. Once returned to femininity, Shekiba experiences not only the loss of her role but also a deeper sense of incompleteness shaped by social expectations. Across the novel, women's bodies become sites where power gets inscribed through regulation, objectification, and public scrutiny. Physical appearance itself becomes a mechanism of control, reinforcing that hierarchies are tied to gender and respectability. Despite these constraints, moments of solidarity and recognition emerge through shared experience and narrative exchange where women create limited spaces of agency. These acts, though fragile experiences, enable a reworking of identity and memory. The *bacha posh* condition, while not directly analogous to exploitative practices such as *bacha bazi*, produces comparable psychological effects through the sudden withdrawal of male privilege. This enforced oscillation between the roles results in a drastic identity fragmentation and internalised shame. This condition does not dissolve the immediate hierarchy but exposes its underlying logic, where identity is shaped, regulated, and finally withdrawn according to patriarchal need.

Recent trauma and memory studies have increasingly emphasised that embodiment is a crucial site through which historical violence gets transmitted and negotiated across generations (Craps, 2013; Bond et al., 2017; Gilson, 2024). Hashimi's representation of *bacha posh* here aligns with these developments by demonstrating how gendered identities are embodied, performed, disrupted, resisted and remembered within structures of patriarchal control. The novel therefore contributes to emerging discussions concerning the relationship between vulnerability, embodiment, and intergenerational memory in contemporary war and conflict literature.

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V. Conclusion

Hashimi's work contributes to broader thoughts on gender justice, agency, and the enduring effects of cultural violence. The experiences of both Rahima and Shekiba, though marked by incompleteness, function as forms of narrative resistance through which they reclaim presence within histories that marginalise them. Through the voices that thrive despite the characters' psychic fracture, the novel presents trauma as a static memory with a lived experience held within the physical body. Instead of treating trauma as an individual event, the story circles around it as cumulative and ingrained in daily routines that get frequently normalised under the pretence of tradition. Here, vulnerability is depicted as a state influenced by marginalisation and a lack of structural safeguards. Hashimi's portrayal invites a feminist rethinking of trauma in a society where women are denied autonomy across economic, political, psychic and bodily domains. Through storytelling and memory, Hashimi creates characters who negotiate these constraints by transforming vulnerability into a space from which resistance and voice can emerge. The novel's engagement with socially imposed gender hermaphroditism further deepens this critique. This enforced switch between gender roles exposes the mechanisms through which patriarchy regulates the identity of a female. Such transitions produce individual instability, affecting belonging, self-perception, and continuity of a confident self. In this sense, the narrative shifts attention away from binary classifications of gender and toward the conditions that compel individuals to inhabit multiple roles without recognition. *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* (2014) moves beyond the usual individual stories to offer a collective account of endurance shaped by societal inequality. While the narrative does not resolve the tensions it presents, it tries hard to foreground visibility as a necessary step in confronting gendered injustice. Hashimi suggests that this kind of storytelling enables women to challenge silence and preserve experiences in the future that patriarchal systems attempt to erase. The study concludes that the gendered experiences in the novel cannot be contained within fixed categories of assertion. They reveal a condition of enforced instability where identity is forcefully fluctuated by the shifting roles imposed by accepted normative arrangements. This duality aligned here syncs with the idea of gender hermaphroditism that does not offer temporary liberation of gender roles but exposes how resistance can only play a key role in liberating these norms.

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Call for Papers and Special Issue Proposals

Aims and Scope

Theory and Practice in Language Studies (TPLS) is a peer-reviewed international journal dedicated to promoting scholarly exchange among teachers and researchers in the field of language studies. The journal is published monthly.

TPLS carries original, full-length articles and short research notes that reflect the latest developments and advances in both theoretical and practical aspects of language teaching and learning. We particularly encourage articles that share an interdisciplinary orientation, articles that bridge the gap between theory and practice, and articles in new and emerging areas of research that reflect the challenges faced today.

Areas of interest include: language education, language teaching methodologies, language acquisition, bilingualism, literacy, language representation, language assessment, language education policies, applied linguistics, as well as language studies and other related disciplines: psychology, linguistics, pragmatics, cognitive science, neuroscience, ethnography, sociolinguistics, sociology, and anthropology, literature, phonetics, phonology, and morphology.

Special Issue Guidelines

Special issues feature specifically aimed and targeted topics of interest contributed by authors responding to a particular Call for Papers or by invitation, edited by guest editor(s). We encourage you to submit proposals for creating special issues in areas that are of interest to the Journal. Preference will be given to proposals that cover some unique aspect of the technology and ones that include subjects that are timely and useful to the readers of the Journal. A Special Issue is typically made of 15 to 30 papers, with each paper 8 to 12 pages of length.

A special issue can also be proposed for selected top papers of a conference/workshop. In this case, the special issue is usually released in association with the committee members of the conference/workshop like general chairs and/or program chairs who are appointed as the Guest Editors of the Special Issue.

The following information should be included as part of the proposal:

- Proposed title for the Special Issue
- Description of the topic area to be focused upon and justification
- Review process for the selection and rejection of papers
- Name, contact, position, affiliation, and biography of the Guest Editor(s)
- List of potential reviewers if available
- Potential authors to the issue if available
- Estimated number of papers to accept to the special issue
- Tentative time-table for the call for papers and reviews, including
    - Submission of extended version
    - Notification of acceptance
    - Final submission due
    - Time to deliver final package to the publisher

If the proposal is for selected papers of a conference/workshop, the following information should be included as part of the proposal as well:

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- A brief description of the technical issues that the conference/workshop addresses, highlighting the relevance for the journal.
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- Getting submissions, arranging review process, making decisions, and carrying out all correspondence with the authors. Authors should be informed the Author Guide.
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