Absence is the Presence: Missing Agent as the Agent of Oppression and Resistance in Ahmad Farhad's Poetry

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- poetic expression,
- oppression,
- resistance
- ideological silencing

Abstract

Poetry has always been considered as an expression of emotion. The current work aims to explore the rational side of poetry. This study is an attempt to explore the careful structural patterns employed in poetic expressions which are used to address crucial social and political issues. This paper tries to bring into light the use of missing agents in Ahmad Farhad's Poetry as a tool to show oppression by power structures and resistance of the oppressors. To analyze the data, six selected tools are applied from James Paul Gee's toolkit. The combination of Urdu passive constructions and James Paul Gee's toolkit is used to explore the oppression and resistance in Ahmad Farhad's poetry. Findings represent that passive constructions and missing agents are exercised to draw attention to power dynamics, ideological silencing, and rebellion because of societal inequalities. This study sheds light on the complicated relationship between language, ideology, and social critique in the context of poetic expression

1- Introduction

Poetry has generally been regarded as an artistic expression of emotions; however, contemporary linguistic approaches emphasize its rational, ideological and structural dimensions (Fairclough, 1992, 2001). Poetic language is not only aesthetic but also functions as a discourse tool of encoding power relations, resistance and socio-political critique (Halliday, 2014). This study explores how linguistic structures, specifically passive constructions with missing agents, are strategically employed to represent oppression in Urdu poetry.

Ahmad Farhad is a contemporary well-known poet who is recognized for two reasons; one is his popular poem 'ye apni marzi se sochta hai, ise utha lo'' یہ اپنی مرضی سے سوچتا ہے اسے اٹھا لو' and second his abduction but the focus of the paper is his poetry only. His poetry gained particular attention due to its alignment with lived socio-political realities, yet academic analysis of its linguistic mechanism remains unexplored. The researcher is determined to explore the linguistic feature of missing agent in his poetry and how this particular trait helps in constructing the themes of oppression and resistance in his poetry.

Ahmad Farhad's poetry diverges from the dominant romantic trends represented by poets such as Tehzeeb Hafi, Ali Zaryon, Umair Najmi. His poetic creations reveal the themes of state violence, silencing, oppression and ideological control and builds a discourse of resistance, and it is created very tactfully and covertly – an approach consistent with what Scott (1990) describes as 'hidden transcript of resistance'. This instigated the researcher to look for the structural techniques used by the poet. Resistance against power structures takes into consideration the actions taken by oppressors and the researcher tries to unravel those ways through which the poet narrates oppression without addressing the oppressor directly.

In linguistics, the concept of 'agent' refers to the doer of an action who initiates the action by his/her consent and this willingness differentiates it from 'actor' who can also perform action but there is no consent involved (Foley, 2009). So, in the example 'The car ran over the dog', car is an actor but not agent and therefore, every agent is an actor but not the other way round (Saeed, 2015).

So, when a writer tries to strengthen the action and weaken the doer, he usually uses passivization. In case of action being done by the powerful circle, he removes agent from the syntactic constructions and lets the readers decode the agent themselves. The current work is an attempt to explore the use of 'missing agent' to generate the discourse of oppression and resistance in poetic domain.

This study investigates how missing agents in Urdu passive and imperative constructiosna function as implicit representations of authority, oppression, and resistance in Ahmad Farhad's poetry. By integrating Urdu syntactic analysis with James Paul Gee's (2011) discourse-analytical toolkit, this research highlights poetry as a site of deliberate linguistic design rather than purely emotive expression, reinforcing the view that literary texts actively construct social meaning rather than merely reflecting emotion (Widdowson, 1995).

2- Literature Review

Poetry is one of the most popular literary genres that deals with diverse dimensions and vicissitudes of society. Many poets have touched people's heart across the world through

their poetic genius (Haq, 2020). Poetry as a form of resistance is not something new, it has been used by Iqbal's poetry which became influential device, political mobilization and ideological underpinning for the creation of Pakistan (Shaheen at al. 2023).When we try to explore the research done on poetry, it can be found that research works done on poetry remain mainly thematic and qualitative in nature either it's on Iqbal, Jalib or Faiz (Shaheen at al. 2023; Salah, 2021; Haq, 2020)

All languages follow specific constructions to transform messages and the two most common structures are active and passive voice (Ahmad & Ahmad, 2024). The main goal of this paper is to find out the use of 'missing agent' in Farhad's poetry which is more likely to happen in passive constructions. Urdu is inclined to take accusative case in passive formations (Kidwai, 2022) and a noun or pronoun that assists as the object of a sentence, and is not ruled with any case marker, assumes to take accusative case (Zeb, 2019).

Urdu language has the tendency to usually drop agent in passive sentences and they take auxiliary "Gaya" which is not used in Urdu active sentences and can be recognized as 'be' passives in Urdu (Ahmad & Ahmad, 2024). Another possible and considerable passive construction is passivization in Urdu imperatives; Urdu imperative constructions are passivized by adding both the past participle-ya یا and the passive auxiliary verb ja: +y: جاےor جیے at the end of the root verb دیجیے' لجیے' کجیے (Ahmad & Ahmad, 2024).

2.1 Research Objectives

This work aims to achieve the following objectives.

i. To identify how does 'missing agent' act as an agent of oppression in Ahmad Farhad's Poetry

ii. To explore how missing agents function as implicit representations of oppressive power constructions

iii. To determine the applicability of discourse-analytic tools to poetic texts.

2.2 Research Questions

The current study attempts to find out the answers to the following questions.

i. How does 'missing agent' act as an agent of oppression in Ahmad Farhad's Poetry?

ii. How is the resistance against power structures voiced by the oppressed?

iii. How do discourse-analytic tools can be applied to poetic tools?

3- Research Design

The work follows a qualitative research design and employs James Paul G's selected tools for critical discourse analysis of Ahmad Farhad's Poetry. Out of 27 tools of James Paul's toolkit, following selected tools are found relevant and suitable to find out the answers of proposed research questions.

Tool #2: The Fill in Tool: This tool refers to the unvoiced part and how the unsaid part can be inferred with the help of the overtly said part in any text.

Tool #7: The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool: Language is not only for saying things, but it also performs many functions. This tool focuses on multi-functions of language along with conveying information.

Tool #9: The Why This Way and Not That Way Tool: Grammar is the building block of language and has various ways to assemble language structures. This tool explores the reason for constructing language patterns in a specific way and tries to figure out why the writer didn't opt any other way.

Tool #14: The Significance Building Tool: This tool suggests the importance of unraveling the use of words and grammatical devices to amplify or lessen the significance of certain things.

Tool #17: The Relationships Building Tool: This tool deals with the use of words and grammatical devices in order to build, sustain or change relations among people, social groups and institutions.

Tool #18: The Politics Building Tool: This tool highlights the use of words and grammatical devices in order to build a viewpoint that how social goods are and how they should be distributed in society.

In a nutshell, it can be said that words and grammatical devices are used for various purposes which range from sentence structures to performing diverse functions which include individuals as well as social groups and power structures.

4- Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in critical discourse analysis. The data set consists of four complete poems by Ahmad Farhas, selected due to their thematic focus on oppression, silencing and resistance.

4.1-Data Selection

- Total poems analyzed: 4
- Total verses analyzed: 52

4.2-Selection criteria

- Presence of passive or imperative constructions
- Absence of Grammatical Agents
- Thematic relevance to oppression and resistance

The poems were sourced from verified public recitations by the poet, ensuring authenticity, as no officially published collection is currently available.

4.3-Analytical Framework

The study employs six tools from James Paul Gee's (2011) discourse analysis toolkit, selected for their relevance to uncover implicit meanings and power relations in texts.

- **Tools 2- Fill in Tool:** To infer suppressed agents and unspoken power relations

- **Tool 7 -Doing and Not Just Saying:** To analyze how language performs social functions
- **Tool 9 -Why This Way and Not That Way:** To justify syntactic choices
- **Tool 14 – Significance Building Tool:** To examine emphasis and backgrounding
- **Tool 17 – Relationships Building Tool:** To decode social hierarchies
- **Tool 18 – Politics Building Tool:** To interpret ideological positioning

The justification for selecting these tools lies in their ability to capture implicit agency, ideological silencing and resistance embedded within grammatical choices.

5- Data Analysis

Data is analyzed qualitatively while applying James Paul Gee's tools to analyze Ahmad Farhad's Poetry under two main categories: Missing Agent as Agent of Oppression' and 'Missing Agent as Agent of Resistance'.

5.1- Missing Agent as the Agent of Oppression

The qualitative analysis is conducted poem/ghazal wise as Farhad's poems seem to follow a pattern where the concept appears hidden and implied in the begging but becomes visible and prominent in the end such as in poem 1.

5.1.1- Poem 1 (Complete Poem is attached in Appendix)

1کہا گیا ہے سنا گیا ہے کوئی نہ بولے ۔

2زباں درازوں کو مشورہ ہے کوئی نہ بولے ۔

1-It has been said, it has been heard, no one should speak

2- Outspoken people are advised that no one should speak

Extract (1 & 2) are obvious examples of passive construction where the agent is missing and the focus is solely on the action; what is being said is evident but who is saying is not mentioned. Same structure is used in (2) of the extract, where the outspoken people are being advised to be quite but who is advising, suggesting or warning is not explicitly mentioned here. The use of passive auxiliary 'gaya'گیا' is a clear indication of passive voice (Ahmad & Ahmad, 2024).

If we apply Paul's selected tools here, we can see that 'Fill in tool' Tool 2 helps us to understand and interpret the unsaid and unvoiced part; if something is being said then there is definitely someone who is saying it. It can be an individual, a group or an institution. Though this missing agent comes into existence in the last stanza where the poet clearly discloses the agent and resolves the mystery by referring all oppressed actions to the ruler who wants everybody to be devoid of words and voices.

If we link it with Tool 7 which emphasizes that language not only informs but also performs action, it can be seen that this whole poem 1 is not only informing that how power structures are oppressing and subjugating the people but it is also depicting that how this tyranny is affecting the environment of the city and psychology of the suppressed. It is also performing the function of voicing the unvoiced.

The use of passive constructions and missing agent technique seem to accompany Tool no. 9, 14, 17 and 18 as all these tools emphasis on the use of specific word patterns and grammatical devices, reasons behind particular preferences (Tool 9), and impacts of these choices on amplifying certain elements (Tool 14), on maintaing relations among social groups (Tool 17) and on distribution of assets among society (Tool 18). This poem uses passive constructions largely without using agents and this construction is used to keep the agent mysterious and hidden. Therefore, any other structure would not have been that Jhelpful (Tool 9). The choice of passive sentences helped the poet to magnify the action and to mystify the agent (Tool 14). This poem depicts the society into two categories (Tool 17); the powerful and the powerless. To talk about dominant power structures is a realization of being deprived of the basic rights and an indication of the need of equal distribution of resources among various social groups (Tool 18).

Throughout the poem 1, the poet keeps the agent mystifying and intriguing either through missing agents (1,2, 11, 12,), stative verbs (3, 7, 8, 17), personification (4) , active construction with implied agents and patients (15, 16) and in the end discloses the agent.

Note: The digital numbers in bracket refer to the line number of complete poem given in Appendix.

19۔ عجیب لکنت پسند حاکم سے واسطہ ہے

20۔ جو چاہتا ہے جوسوچتا ہے کوئی نہ بولے

19- (we) are associated with a strange ruler who likes stammering

20- He wants, he thinks that no one should speak

5.1.2. Poem 2

This poem 2 is the reason of Farhad's popularity, though it was written few years ago but it got all the rage in current times.

1۔ یہ اپنی مرضی سے سوچتا ہے اسے اٹھا لو

2۔ اٹھانے والوں سے یہ جدا ہے اسے اٹھا لو

1- He thinks with his own will, abduct him.

2- He is different from who abduct, abduct him

Poem 2 portrays another aspect of oppression that people who think, speak against tyranny and give their opinion are abducted by unknown agent. The poet, Ahmad Farhad, continues the use of missing agent in this poem as well. As 'ise' 'اسے' is used as 3rd person objective pronoun in Urdu so the phrase 'ise utha lo' 'اسے اٹھا لو' is in imperative passive construction (Kidwai, 2022). If we examine 1 & 2 closely, it can be noticed that each of them have two sections, one is in active construction 'Ye apni marzi se sochta hai' and second part 'ise utha lo' carries passive and imperative structure and it is used throughout the poem.

3۔ اسے بتایا بھی تھا کہ کیا پوچھنا ہے کیا نہیں

4۔ مگر یہ اپنی ہی بولتا ہے اسے اٹھا لو

3- Though he was told, what to ask and what not

4- Still he speaks at his own, abduct him

If we look into the next extract of the same poem, it is worth noticing that the structural patterns remain the same. Line no.3 and 5 are exhibiting oppression in the same patterns of passive voice; how the power dynamics play the role to mold people's behavior and 4, 6 are depicting the treatment disobedient people receive. In line no 3, agent is completely missing whereas in 5 the use of 'hum' makes the agent mysterious and perplexing.

5۔ اسے کہا تھا جو ہم دکھائیں بس اتنا دیکھو

6۔ مگر یہ مرضی سے دیکھتا ہے اسے اٹھا لو

5- He was told to see what we allow him to see

6- But he sees by his own will, abduct him

When we see these extracts of Poem 2 through the lens of Paul's selected tools, we see that fill in information (Tool 2) is not required as such because the tussle between the powerful and powerless is quite obvious. As per Tool 7, these lines are performing various functions; they are informing about the points of disagreements between individuals and the ruler, unraveling power dynamics, uncovering the ideologies of oppressor. The consistent use of passive construction reinforces Tool 9 that there is always a reason to pick a particular way of saying thing and that selected tool of 'missing agent' helps to zoom in action and zoom out the actor (Tool 14).

The use of language, choice of words and structural patterns clearly indicate that the society is divided into a relationship of the ruler and the ruled (Tool 17) which gives the glimpse of the inner desire of the subjugated group to have equal rights (Tool 18).

5.2- Missing Agent as Agent of Resistance

5.2.1 Poem 3

1۔ ساری آوازیں دبا دو سادے بندے مار دو

2۔ آپ کی مرضی ہے آقا جتنے بندے مار دو

1- Suppress all voices, kill all people

2- It's up to you sir to kill as many people as you want

Poem no 3 uses 'missing agent' accompanied with imperative structures; imperatives are used to tell or ask someone to do something through order, request or instruction. Line 1 seems to be the voice of the tyrant to order someone to suppress voices and kill all people but 2 changes the meanings entirely and becomes the voice of the victim who is accepting the state of helplessness on his part. This whole poem follows the same structure of missing agents and imperative where the poet becomes the voice of the powerless social group and tries to raise the voice of resistance wrapped up in the voice of helplessness.

3۔ خامشی کی لہر آہٹ ہے کسی طوفان کی

4۔ اتنی آوازیں اٹھیں گی جتنے بندے مار دو

5- The wave of silence is an indication of a storm

6- As many voices will rise as many people you kill

This voice of resistance becomes strong, vivid and clearly audible in the last lines where the poet is consistent in his use of missing agent and connects the last point (4) to the starting point (1); no matter how brutally the oppressor is trying to snub the voices and killing the people, he is not going to be successful in this aim as the current silence is pointing towards a tornado of voices.

James Paul Gee's toolkit becomes very relevant to this poem overall structure in general and to the selected lines in particular. There is a lot of overgeneralization like 'sari awazain', 'saray banday' which makes it difficult to interpret the missing information (Tool 2) that to which voices and people the poet is referring. Similarly, it is important to unravel the word 'aqa'; whether it is used for an individual, a group or an institute. The selected poem is performing the functions of accepting helplessness, being weak and vulnerable, showing resistance and even warning the opposite forces (4,5). All these functions reinforce Tool 7. Choosing imperatives as the core construction wires the ideas and instructions the poet inculcates throughout the poem. The construction of imperative (Tool 9), the selection of strong words, the tool of missing agent and the narrative of resistance and retaliation endorses that the selected words and grammatical devices build a significant massage (Tool 14), and these elements are interlinked and their relationship helps in decoding the relations between people i.e. the dominator and the dominated (Tool 17).

5.2.2 Poem 4

1. کافر ہوں سر پھرا ہوں مجھے مار دیجیے

2. میں سوچنے لگا ہوں مجھے مار دیجیے

1- I am unbeliever, I am stubborn, kill me

2- I have started thinking, kill me

The poem no 4 is also another piece of art with reference to its pattern, structure and choice of themes and words. The complete poem represents the idea of resistance wrapped up in self-blame and self-accusation. The poem opens with a self-blame that I am unbeliever and rebel, so kill me but to whom the speaker is addressing is unknown to us. Mujhay 'مجھے ' is a pronoun which is at the receiving end of the action of killing. So the radeef 'mujhay maar dijyee ' 'مجھے مار دیجیے behaves as a passive where the receiver of the action is 'mujhay' 'me' but who is asked to do this action 'the agent' is missing.

3. پھر اس کے بعد شہر میں ناچے گا ہو کا شور

4. میں آخری صدا ہوں مجھے مار دیجیے

3- After that, the noisy silence will dance in the city

4- I am the last voice, kill me

Here, the poet manifests resistance by calling himself 'the last voice' and after he is being killed, there will be silent noise which will dance over the city which implies that he is the last one to resist against the cruelty and after him there will be complete, deep and eternal silence. The structure becomes very complicated here as the 'agent' of the proposed action of murder is not disclosed.

These extracts seem to align with James Paul Gee's toolkit again. There are many questions which arises from these poetic extracts that why the writer wants himself to be killed. Why

the simple act of thinking is enough to kill someone. Answering these questions can fill in the gaps (Tool 2) and can help us understand the complete scenario. The language used in this poem shows a complete paradox; the act of being killed is said by using the expression of politeness 'dijyee'. So the choice of words and patterns enhancing the underlying themes of resistance and struggle (Tool 7 & 14). The concept of being killed even for the act of thinking rightly portrays the relation of the individual with the surroundings which may include other individuals, societal groups, power structures or institutions (Tool 17). The way the poet asking or instructing the 'supposed agent' to kill him indicates that he prefers to die rather than living as per others' commands (Tool 18).

6. Discussion and Findings

The data analysis is inclined towards the following findings.

1- 'Missing agent' is a frequently used technique in Ahmad Farhad's poetry. This style seems to be opted deliberately as it helps to convey the crucial themes of oppression and resistance. Missing agents occur systematically in the following forms.

- Passive constructions
- Imperative clauses
- Future action predictions

2- The skill of employing 'Missing agent' is found in various ways;

a) Sometimes the use is very evident and easy to find in obvious passive constructions with the use of passive participle 'gaya' ___ such as in the following example.

کہا گیا ہے سنا گیا ہے کوئی نہ بولے

b) At some places, the 'missing agent' is inculcated into the construction along with the use of objective pronoun 'ise' and passive participle 'ya' as shown below

اسے بتایا بھی تھا کہ کیا پوچھنا ہے کیا نہیں

c) 'Missing agent' is also used in combination with future action prediction as the underlined section of the following extract

اتنی آوازیں اٹھیں گی جتنے بندے مار دو

So, the absence of agents functions as discursive mask, enabling critique of authority while avoiding explicit naming.

3- There is consistent use of 'missing agent' in imperative constructions in all four poetic extracts

کوئی نہ بولے

اسے اٹھا لو

بندے مار دو

مجھے مار دیجیے

Imperative structures with missing agents simultaneously convey"

- Command of the oppressor
- Ironized acceptance by the oppressed
- Embedded resistance

4. Readers reconstruct agency through shared socio-political knowledge, validating the effectiveness of this linguistic strategy.

The use of 'missing agent' in various constructions in Farhad's poetry is listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Missing Agents in Various Constructions

Various Constructions	Passive Participle گیا	Passive Participle **یا**	Missing agent in Future action's predictions	Imperative Constructions
Examples	کہا گیا ہے سنا گیا ہے	اسے بتایا بھی تھا	اتنی آوازیں اٹھیں گی	کوئی نہ بولے اسے اٹھا لو بندے مار دو مجھے مار دیجیے

The findings demonstrate that Ahmad Farhas's poetry employs missing agents not as grammatical omissions but as intentional ideological devices. By suppressing agency, the poet foregrounds systemic violence rather than individual performers, thereby transforming grammatical absence into political presence.

Gee's Fill-in-Tool reveals how readers actively participate in meaning construction, supplying agents based on contextual knowledge. The Why-This-Way tool confirms that passivization is a deliberate choice that protects the poet while intensifying critique. Furthermore, the politics and Relationships Building tools illustrate how language encodes unequal power distribution and exposes authoritarian control without explicit confrontation.

Significantly, the same structure that conceals oppression also enables resistance. Imperatives such as مجھے مار دیجیے undermines power by dramatizing the absurdity of suppression. Thus, missing agency functions dually; as a marker of silencing and as an instrument for opposition.

7- Conclusion

In the light of findings, it can be concluded that Farhad's poetry has extensive use of the 'missing agent' as a technique to enhance and intensify the themes of oppression and resistance. This usage helps him to show the presence of elements even in their existence. This linguistic element helps the poet to create an environment that is mystifying, perplexing and captivating. One thing which helps the reader to decode or interpret that missing agent is the shared knowledge of the societal, political and ideological context.

This linguistic and syntactic choice is very much supported by Paul's selected tools which reinforce the idea that language is a pivotal part of society and discourse. According to him, we need to fill in the gaps in order to understand complete discourse (Tool 2) and the use of 'missing agent' instigates the reader to build the connection between what is said and what is unsaid. He advocates the idea that when a writer picks a particular pattern, there is always a logical reason behind it (Tool) which strengthen the researcher's argument that poetry also takes up rational, meaningful and tactful linguistic structures.

This study establishes that missing agents constitute a central linguistic strategy in Ahmad Farhad's poetry, enabling the articulation of oppression and resistance through grammatical design. By suppressing explicit agency, the poet constructs a discourse that is politically charged yet syntactically covert.

The integration of Urdu syntactic analysis with discourse-analytic tools confirms that poetry is not merely emotive but structurally strategic and ideologically grounded. Missing agents invite readers to engage critically in social realities, transforming absence into a powerful form of presence.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited to the use of 'missing agents' in Ahmad Farhad's poetry with reference to the themes of oppression and resistance.

Future research can be done on the different outcomes of 'missing agents' in other poets' works as well. Since linguistics and syntactic patterns are under-researched domains with reference to poetic realm, various other dimensions can be investigated e.g. complex predicates, serial verbs, light verbs etc.

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