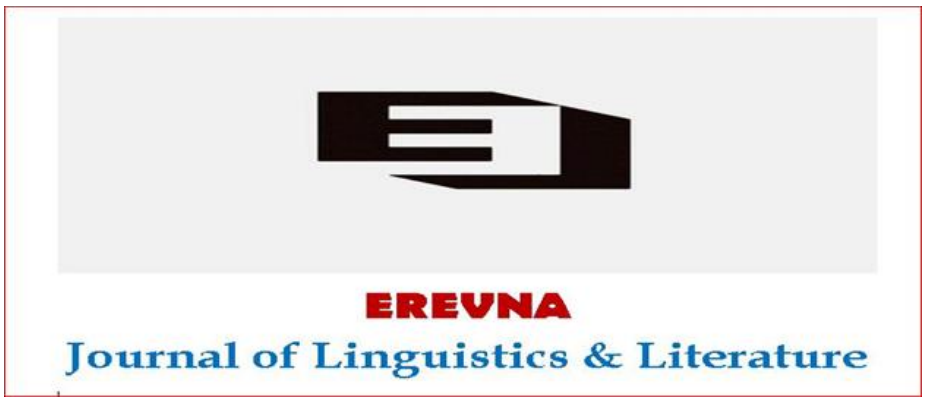

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Table of Contents

Campy Representation of Blacks in Blaxploitation Films **Rabia Shahbaz, Dr. Amer Akhtar & Rida Rehman**	**1-16**
Things Fall Apart: Ecology, Culture and Collapse: Environmental Disruption and the Tragedy of Okonkwo **Dr. Salma Naz**	**17-28**
Absence is the Presence: Missing Agent as the Agent of Oppression and Resistance in Ahmad Farhad's Poetry **Zakia Mushtaq**	**29-41**
Cross-linguistic Influence in Chinese Consonant Acquisition: A Case Study of Pakistani Students from a Third Language Perspective **Muhammad Awais & Ali Hamza**	**42-56**
The Ecology of Evaluation Stories: Good and Bad Climate Stories in Weather Reporting **Muhammad Saleem & Naveed ur Rehman**	**57-77**

Campy Representation of Blacks in Blaxploitation Films

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- Camp aesthetic
- Race

Abstract

As a postmodern aesthetic, Camp thrives on glamour, excess, and artifice, using these qualities both to resist and to reinforce dominant discourses. With its affinity for the obscene, the marginalized, and the rejected, Camp has long served as a site of ideological negotiation. While previous scholarship has explored its political dimensions in relation to gender and sexuality, this article examines the Campy representations of Blackness in Shaft, Superfly, Training Day, and American Gangster. It investigates how mainstream cinema deploys Camp aesthetics of excess to stereotype, commodify, or distort the image of the Black "Other." Using Sonja Foss's framework of visual rhetoric, the study analyzes how Camp operates as a visual and rhetorical strategy within Blaxploitation and crime films to shape the perception of Black identity and masculinity.

1. Introduction

The representation of Blackness in American cinema has always been mediated through style, performance, and spectacle. From the rise of Blaxploitation films in the 1970s to contemporary crime dramas, visual excess and stylized portrayals have played a central role in shaping how Black masculinity and identity are perceived on screen. Blaxploitation cinema emerged as a cultural response to Hollywood's long history of racial marginalization, attempting to reclaim the Black image through independent power and visual assertiveness. Yet, this reclamation often relies on exaggeration and hyper-stylization, elements that blur the line between empowerment and caricature. The exaggerated visual and performative dimensions that define Blaxploitation films such as *Shaft* and *Superfly* intersect significantly with what Susan Sontag and subsequent scholars have theorized as Camp aesthetics.

This study explores how Camp, with its reliance on excess, artifice, and performance, operates within cinematic representations of Blackness. It investigates how Blaxploitation and later crime films—*Training Day* and *American Gangster*—deploy Camp aesthetics to both challenge and reinforce stereotypes about race, masculinity, and power. While Camp has traditionally been discussed in relation to gender and sexuality, particularly in queer and feminist contexts, its intersection with Blackness and racial discourse remains underexamined. By situating Camp within the framework of Blaxploitation, this article examines how exaggerated stylization, theatricality, and excess are used to construct and commodify Black identity in American cinema.

1.1 Aim of the Study

The present study attempts to discuss the political nature of Camp through the intersection of race, Blaxploitation, and blackness to contribute to the debate on the contribution of campiness towards the construction and commodification of Black identity in Hollywood cinema.

1.2 Research Questions

i. What Camp characteristics are employed in the representation of Blacks in the selected films?
ii. What attributes are assigned to the Black characters through Camp portrayal?
iii. What role does Camp play in constructing Blackness in the selected films?

1.3 The Intersection of Camp, Blackness and Blaxploitation

Susan Sontag is one of the first scholars who endeavored to theorize Camp as an aesthetic in her seminal essay *Notes on Camp* (2018). She establishes Camp as a sensibility, an ability distinct from an idea, that has the potential to forge something with non-normative appeal rather than mass appeal. Since this sensibility is not natural, one has to contrive it. Artifice is the second characteristic of Camp aesthetic, which complements contrivance. Camp aesthetic relies on exaggeration and excess as something that is built into its very strategy. The foundation of this aesthetic lies in artificiality, which, as Sontag notes, takes on a double

meaning: “It is not the familiar split-level construction of meaning on the one hand and a symbolic meaning on the other. It is the difference, rather, between the thing as meaning something, anything, and the thing as pure artifice” (1).

Dissimulation, innate to artificiality, resides in the aesthetics of Camp, but this duplicity is not malicious or sinister in nature. It is, as Sontag writes, “festive, vitalizing, typically affectionately nostalgic and intensely experiential; behind the straight public sense in which something can be taken, one has found a private zany experience of thing” (45). Sontag describes it as a mode of aestheticism, “a way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon,” not in terms of beauty but in terms of stylization (1). Its most recognizable virtue is its “visual stylistic dimension”, outrageous and over the top to such an extent that it renders itself a spectacle. There is a passionate, exuberant quality to the extravagant aesthetic of Camp, as captured in the statement, “It’s too much, which means it’s just right” (32).

Sontag points out Camp’s relation to the serious, asserting that “Camp cannot be serious because it is too much” (26). Camp “dethrones the serious” precisely because it is playful and anti-serious. The performative nature of Camp has a “stagey feel,” a “definite performative edge in presenting things in a way that they are not” (Shugart and Waggoner, 2008, p. 152). Camp’s performative dimensions, therefore, “epitomize the metaphor of life as theater and being as playing a role” (Sontag, 2018, p. 53).

Sontag’s attempt to elaborate on Camp as an aesthetic led to critical debates on its ideological implications. Because Camp relies on excess, artifice, and artificiality, it becomes “apolitical” (2). Sontag’s view of Camp as depoliticized provoked responses from later scholars like Moe Meyer, who defined Camp as “the total body of performative practices and strategies used to enact a queer identity, with enactment defined as the production of social visibility” (2). Mark Booth similarly emphasizes its performative aspect, arguing that Camp “subverts conventional morality not just with epigrams and persiflage but with whole Camp performance” (1983, p. 58).

This ideological turn makes Camp a powerful tool to resist or perpetuate dominant ideology. The political thrust of Camp aesthetics lies in its violative behavior toward societal norms. As Sontag explains, Camp “contains a large element of artifice,” defined by its “love for the exaggerated, the ‘off’, of things-being-what-they-are-not” (2018, p. 7). Scholars like Katrin Horn (2017) and Shugart and Waggoner (2008) further explore Camp’s potential to transgress conventions of gender and sexuality, while also warning of its appropriation by mainstream media.

In light of these debates, this article situates Camp within the aesthetic and ideological fabric of Blaxploitation and its successors. While scholarship has largely confined Camp to discussions of gender and sexuality, introducing categories like pop Camp, gay Camp, lesbian Camp, and feminist Camp (Robertson, 1996), this study explores the underexplored relationship between Camp and Blackness. It argues that in films such as *Shaft*, *Superfly*, *Training Day*, and *American Gangster*, Camp aesthetics serve both as a mode of stylization and a means of commodifying racial identity. By examining this intersection, the article seeks to uncover how Camp’s excess, theatricality, and performative artifice function as ideological strategies that both construct and confine Blackness within American visual culture.

1.4 Blackness

The idea of Blackness in this article will function to define the visuality of the Black body as a social construct; and the expression of Black culture in a way that strengthens the hegemony of White culture. "White Americans construct Blackness" (Johnson, 2003, p. no. 3). This social construct aids in perpetuating Whiteness as inherently superior to Blackness. Blacks find it hard to function in a white-dominated society that judges them on the basis of their color and culture. "Race as a constitutive, cultural fiction has always been a consequential element of American history and social life, and anti-Black racism, white supremacy, and the Racial Contract are foundational and systemic features of American life" (Gillispie, 2016, p.no. 43). The discursive media practices play a vital role in keeping the Blacks marginalized and socially alienated. Thus, working their way to perpetuate the ideology of racism.

The cinematic representation of Blacks in mainstream films tends to focus on their skin color, hair, and distinct facial features to ark their separation from the rest of the cast. The representation is significant because it always keeps Whiteness standing in opposition to Blackness. The depiction of slaves and slavery was "a part of the broad cultural hegemony structured into the fabric of dominant cinema at all levels, its production and content over determined by Hollywood's profit-making strategies" (Guerrero, 2012, p. no. 25). This made-up quality and the projection of the idea of Blackness is scrutinized through the exaggerated Camp aesthetics in the backdrop of the selected films from the Blaxploitation film genre.

The "blackness" of African Americans has been treated as something "queer" in the heteronormative structures; and the term "queer" here, does not imply what it implies in the Queer theory, nor this article is interested in discussing the sexual orientation of Blacks in terms of gender. The aim of this article is to move away from Queer theory to study the politics of Camp aesthetics to perpetuate the racist ideology; through campy representations of the African American culture, the Black vernacular, the ghettos, the black bodily images, the drug addiction, and the violence of the black gangsters as represented in the mainstream media, and it can be a new site to study the ideological implications of Camp aesthetics.

1.4 Blaxploitation

Blaxploitation films are defined as movies made between 1970 and 1975, by both Black and white film directors alike, to exploit the black film audience (Lawrence, 2007, p. no. 29). The Blaxploitation film genre emerged in the 1970s, with the intention of producing films for Blacks to exploit the Black audience (Lawrence, 2007, p. no. 29). The aim being high, Blaxploitation films attempt to change the representation of Blacks on screen. The films leave the audience awestruck, as never before the Black men and women appeared on screen the way they were presented in Blaxploitation films. Blaxploitation films actually transcend generic boundaries (Clark, 2013). Clark's assertion illustrates that utilizing the term Blaxploitation as an all-encompassing label is reductionist because the films were made across a number of genres. The films like *Shaft* (1971) *Superfly* (1972) *Training Day* (2001) and *American Gangster* (2007) were produced with an intention to give voice to the Blacks and to present Black culture on screen in its true colors. Nonetheless, the films are critically

acclaimed, and Black audiences look forward to these films with enthusiasm as featuring Blackness as it is.

The features of Blaxploitation are well defined, but Clark's assessment of Blaxploitation genre problematizes the use of the term to categories all the films made during 70s', and it helps organize the design of this study (Clark, 2013, p. no. 42). As this film genre knows no boundaries, each new film can be studied as a variation or an addition to the existing generic corpus. That's why Blaxploitation must be studied something different from the existing film genres while at the same time adding something to the traditional Hollywood films.

2. Research Methodology

This study employs Sonja Foss's visual rhetoric analysis as its methodological framework to examine how visuals communicate meaning more effectively than verbal messages. Foss defines visual rhetoric as "the study of visual imagery within the discipline of rhetoric," (Foss, 2004, p.no. 05) encompassing visual literacy as the ability to read the underlying meanings of images and understand the creative choices, color, form, and composition, that shape communication. Visual rhetoric views artifacts such as paintings, sculptures, or films as consciously designed symbols that rely on human intervention and are presented for communicative purposes. According to Foss, rhetorical scholars analyze the nature, function, and evaluation of such artifacts to understand how they construct meaning: the nature refers to the literal components of the image, the function to the emotional or persuasive response it seeks to evoke, and the evaluation to how effectively it achieves this purpose. In this research, films are selected as visual artifacts due to their cultural richness and evolving meanings over time. As complex cultural texts, films reflect and refract the societies from which they emerge, continually generating new interpretations. Their layered, symbolic, and affective dimensions make them ideal for developing a visual rhetorical framework that deepens rhetorical awareness and analytical insight.

3. Data Analysis and Discussion

3.1. Campy Games in *Shaft, Superfly, Training Day* and *American Gangster*

Camp aesthetic is easily recognizable, by virtue of its "visual stylistic dimensions", and because there is a passionate, exuberant quality to the extravagant aesthetics of Camp aas captured in the statement, "it's too much, which means it's just right" (Sontag, 2018, p. no. 23). Following the fashion trends of the 1970s, John *Shaft* opts for a heavier, yet tidier mustache and Priest goes for Horseshoe mustache and mutton chop sideburns. This excessively ostentatious feature gives a striking feel to Black protagonist who is concerned about the rugged display of overt masculinity. The showy mustaches and sideburns sponsor playfulness and connote several meanings about the bearer. These features over-emphasize the appearance of Black heroes when on screen, even more than their characterization. The exaggerated styling and funky looks leave no room for the audience to reflect upon the masculinity or heroism of a Black hero rather the ostentatious stylization goes against the grain of Blaxploitation which intended to depict a socially and politically independent powerful hero (Diawara, 2012, p. no. 16).

No matter how religiously Young Blood Priest follows the 70s" mustache and sideburns or John *Shaft*s" obsession for his appearance and style, he will remain a Black. Irrespective of what fashion he takes up, his Afro hair always reminds the audience of his Blackness. The Blaxploitation film genre intended to project their own image of "Blackness", an image that must be wholly independent of Hollywood projections of Blackness. The Campy extravagance of mustache and sideburns makes them a part of spatial narrative where the black characters must have been the part of spatial narration. This contained the attributes of Blacks to mere looks and appearances, establishing that Blacks are nothing more than the outrageous display of playfulness through mustaches and sideburns.

The audience is introduced with a tall man striding down the streets with extreme confidence in the opening scene of *Shaft*. John *Shaft* appears on the screen all snug and comfy in his tweed coat, turtleneck and sports jacket with exaggerated lapels. He is obsessed with leather which is reflected time and again in his belt and cuffs which give a gaudy touch to a nude and plain outfit. The aesthetic of Camp is reflected in an elaborate, over the top use of leather and detailed dressing, as, "Camp is art that is "too much", the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate and the naïve". Detective *Shaft* maintains his campy looks while relying on beiges and browns and large scaled combos of blues and blacks. Stella Bruzzi (2012) writes, "*Shaft*s wardrobe represents his equivocal social position, simultaneously comfortable in the white dominated establishment (see for instance, his sharp tweed suits) and the Black dominated urban street" (400). The stylized Afro look of John Shaft and Campy exaggeration personified over-the-top use of colors ends in narcissism. The Camp aesthetics employed in stylization of both Afros, contribute to creating an image of Blackness obsessed with the desire to merge in the mainstream. The overtly narcissist attitude of both the protagonists is in fact a compulsion to adopt Americana, to get recognition as a civilized man.

The Young Blood priest chooses a funk style based on boho patterns and paisley prints for the swishing maxi coats, floor length overcoats and trendy jackets. The sharp edged felt hat and snap brimmed hats gives Priest an air of "excessive clothes horse" revealing his obsession for style and clothing. The costume functions as the important signifier, that transfers to the spectacular, the success and desirability of the protagonists who wear them (Bruzzi, 2012, p. no. 109). It is primarily the gaudy clothing which introduces the Pusher Man to its audience. The conspicuous consumption of garish combinations and rapidly changing outfits best matches the affluence of the drug dealer who can afford the luxuries of life. The outrageous display of gaudy clothes is one way to use Camp aesthetics to show off Blackness.

The incongruous desires of Black males to display masculinity through mustaches is questioned through the desire to look spick and span. It is a common assumption that males do not care about their appearances but in case of Blacks in the film, the overtly narcissistic behavior projects a gender subversion for Black males. Once again like *Shaft*, clothes in *Superfly* put up a show in the film even more than the person who wears them. *Superfly* becomes a costume film when flashy ensembles come in the way to narrative progression and other thematic concerns. The campy clothing not only makes Black males distinct but reduces them to mere caricature of Blackness. The exotic stylization results in depicting Blackness as something vain because authentic masculinity does not depend on clothing and style. The extreme reliance of Black males on fashion and clothing signify that Blackness has nothing to hook upon except fashion and clothes.

The ultimate gangster looks bestowed to Denzel Washington in *Training Day* and *American Gangster* is stylized and exaggerated to the extent of making it exclusively Camp. Unlike movies like *The Equalizer* and *Inner City* where Denzel Washington is hardly recognizable because of his baldness and bulky appearance; *Training Day* and *The American Gangster* improvise the Denzelness of Denzel Washington, making him easily recognizable as quintessential Denzel. The appearances are contrived for the Black male so much so that the appearance alone can bring him near Italian, Irish or Cuban gangster. "These men become gangster when they look like gangster. The need to conform to the already established looks of a gangster that must be identifiable for the audience is distilled into devices like nicknames, shadows, silhouettes and most importantly styled to excess" (Bruzzi 94). The smoking habit of Alonzo Harris goes to extreme, his tattoos are stylized through leisurely long shots, making Alonzo instantly identifiable with Leo; the Hollywood gangster of *Millers' Crossing*.

What actually sparks up the flashy ensemble of Alonzo Harris is the excessive use of metal and the gaudy sheen of all black dress. While flaunting an oversized metallic pendant, Alonzo makes an attempt to defy the conventional uniformed look of narcotic cops and most importantly he ridicules the cross signed pendant and its significance. The way it loosely hangs from his neck shows how lightly he takes his religion and moral values. The ethics of the Black cop are no more than the flashy show of metallic pendant. The defiance makes him vain, the vanity in man signifies "evil and degeneracy" (Bruzzi 92). This vanity overshadows the true essence of Blackness, making the point the Blacks lack the capacity to conform or blend with in the crowd.

Sontag acknowledges that "history of Camp taste is part of the history of snob taste" (56). This is particularly important about the Camp aesthetics in American Gangster contrives an over-the-top professional look for Frank Lucas, coupled with the stylized look of a dedicated drug lord who lives by the philosophy which says, "the loudest one is the weakest one in the room" (American Gangster 1.45-2.05). So many screen gangsters invite comments about their appearance, show themselves off, and are obsessively consumed by their own image (McArthur 76). The American Gangster swindles into an infinite number of seasonal fads. The obsession for clothing goes unchecked when the drug lord changes 64 costumes within the time limit of 2 hours and 55minutes.

The exaggerated stylization enhances vanity, projecting them as somebody who stands apart from the community. Here Camp aesthetics do more harm than good by reducing Blackness to mere vanity that signifies evil and degeneracy. Thus, associating negativity with Blackness. The extravagantly opted fashion and style by American gangster and the narcotic cop makes him one of a kind for the audience; and the film wants to make them believe that Blackness with all its pretense is superficial with nothing extraordinary to boast about but crime and perversion.

Sontag makes an assertion about Camps' association with artifice rather than the natural. It revels in artifice because a double meaning of things is always possible but "it is not the familiar split-level construction of a literal meaning on the one hand and a symbolic meaning, on the other. It is the difference between the thing as meaning something, anything, and the thing as pure artifice". Early in the essay Sontag makes an assertion about Camps" location in artifice rather than in the natural. She observes that Camp is a quality discoverable in objects and the behavior of persons (Sontag, 2018, p. no. 54) and that the way of Camp is not in terms of beauty… but in terms of the degree of artifice, in terms of stylization (55).

On the basis of these assertions, the study suggests that Camp not only lies in characters, but the made-up plots and the use of gaudy props and elaborate use of camera angles can be an extension in Camp aesthetics.

The spirit of extravagance is the hallmark of the Camp. The essence of Camp is the love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration. Camp is a vision of the world in terms of style – but a particular kind of style. It is the love of exaggerations (8). When it comes to the Campy representations of Blacks in *Shaft* and *Superfly*, the films rely on exaggerated camera angles and long shots for the depiction of Blacks' urban space, their attire, drug consumption and violent nature of Blacks. The slow downward movement of camera in the opening scene of *Shaft* works to give reverence to the lone detective in a way trying to create an image for *Shaft* as larger than life persona. The plot of the film *Shaft* is all made up, as it creates a larger-than-life persona for detective *Shaft*, bestowing him a lot of physical strength paired with deductive reasoning. The ostentatious display of guns and power contributes to outwit any other character in the film. The slow camera movement that pans over *Shaft* in the very first scene accentuates his clothing and thus contributes to conveying the stylized look of the detective.

The films employ movement in long shots to talk about the whereabouts of John Shaft and Young Blood Priest. The unusually long walks of John Shaft in the streets and Priests' drive in his Cadillac towards uptown gives an opportunity to the audience to witness the Black urban space which is downtrodden and unkempt. The long shots, which last for almost 3 minutes, highlight the Harlem streets brimming with dirt, filth, and crime. The exaggerated long shots have been used to depict Harlem as a place for drug trafficking and drug junkies, and high angle long shots in the opening scene of *Superfly* conspire to project ghettos as a residing place for robbers. All these exaggerated camera angles are used to bring home the point that the Black world is a place for muggers and drug hustlers. The excessive use of zoom and prolonged movements in both the films reinforce the stereotypical images associated with Black urban space, that it lacks vigor and energy; it is bleak and dilapidated. The quick montages are bent upon providing every uncensored minor detail of the ghettos by offering a voyeuristic pleasure to the audience unfamiliar with the ghettos and a sense of identification for those familiar with it. Hence, the films commodify Black culture to increase the demand in the market.

The film *Shaft* overplays sex right from the opening credits to the intimate sexual scenes of John Shaft with his white and Black girl friend. The extreme long shot in *Shaft* focuses on the black bodies indulged in sexual pleasure, thus focusing on black sexuality. *Superfly* retains this exaggeration by screening a frontal nude image of the Black male body, sex in a bubble bath when mirrors accentuate the curves of entwined black bodies. According to Sontag "Camp is the attempt to do something extraordinary. But extraordinary in the sense, often, of being special, glamorous. (The curved line, extravagant gestures). Not extraordinary merely in the sense of effort" (28). The explicit sexual scenes in the film *Shaft* and *Superfly* offer a panorama of Black bodies available for consumption on the screen.

Exaggeration being the basic tenet of Camp aesthetics is overpitched in the films to create an "oversexed" image for John Shaft and makes Young Blood Priest a "Pusher man". Black onscreen male is sexually obsessed is the recurrent image which the films perpetuate in the media. The film destroys every menial effort of Blacks to counter the sexually impotent image of Blacks, while focusing on the portrayal of Black sexuality as hypersexual or sex brutes. Both films go overboard to deliberately subvert the sexuality of Black males as *Shaft*

patently creates slip ups through subverting gender roles. The sexual vignettes in *Shaft* subvert the Black male sexuality by assigning the detective a role of comforter which associate most with a female. Thus, all efforts remain a repressed discourse because the sexual images lack modesty as depicted in *Superfly*, make Black male body available for gaze. The Black male body is exposed to the gaze of the spectators, "the racial inconsistencies of the exposure and depiction of black male bodies is tied to the inherent dehumanization of the Black man in the society" (Diawara, 2012, p. no. 56).

Alonzo Harris exudes an unchecked sexual desire that ultimately bestows him a volcanic identity. The bestial sexuality is impossible to contain even if it makes Jake uneasy. His spontaneous kisses to his mistress which create a kind of disgust in Jake. Above all the use of explicit sexual language throughout the film accentuates his identity as a hypersexual Black detective. His ogling tendency frames Alonzo as a Black man having pathologized masculinity and robust sexuality. The instance where he ogles two women and relies on filthy language to exert his masculine power over the two women, "I will lock you up, I will give you ten kids" (*Training Day* 1.07- 1.55) puts a stash over his bestial nature.

The widely recognized "Sydney Poitier Syndrome" revealing a good boy in a totally white world, with no wife, no sweetheart, no woman to love or kiss, helping white man to solve the Whiteman's' problem" (Gurrero 789) starts to crumble and gives birth to Black machismo "portraying the sexploitative, aggressive Black macho image, served up for consumption by young Black audience" (978). The films manipulate camp aesthetics to screen Blackness through instances of graphic language and explicit sexual titillations. Exaggeration being the hallmark of Camp aesthetics supersedes to present Black male on screen as "sex machine", where a priest is presented as a "Pusher Man" with no moral inhibitions. A detective cop strengthens the image of Black male as a man with erotic sexuality; this image makes him a mere caricature; a sexual beast who lacks any romanticize relationship with his mistress. All the Black males have been presented as automated sexual beings with no respect for women but fulfilling their carnal desires as animals. Camp aesthetics pull up to present Black sexuality as something that functions as an arraignment of their wild nature.

Superfly works meticulously to present every detail of drug distribution and consumption in the alleys of Harlem. The frequent use of montage assists the director to pack a lot of information about the drug junkies and drug dealers involved in the business. The highly stylized nature of Camp has a "stagey feel", which one can sense in the protagonist of *Superfly*, as Young Blood Priest tries to outnumber other drug lords in the film through an outrageous display of money showcased through his gaudy clothing, customized Cadillac and over the top interiors of his house. Although the film depicts drug being consumed by every stratum of society, but Blacks being the main source of its production and distribution have been over emphasized through montages. The cocaine snorting hero snorts generously and his excessive consumption of drugs presented on the screen relies on Camp aesthetics to represent Blacks as drug traffickers and drug junkies. The thrill of cocaine usage is put into words in the title song of *Superfly*, "*I've gotta Jones/running through my bones*". The films relied on the exhaustive premise of drugs and drug hustlers to increase the market value of the films.

The four-minute photo montage packs a lot of drug processing and assembling in the film *American Gangster* to enhance the pleasure and excitement of drug usage and distribution in Blacks. The photo montage encapsulates some sign and symbols of the pleasurable drug

consumption by whites and Blacks thus presenting Blacks as the main provider of drugs (American Gangster 1.07-2.55). Ridley Scot packs as much as he can in the small shots making heroin smuggling, drug lords and drug junkies the focus of the plot. The camera pans unusually close when needles cringe into black bodies; Blacks look weird snorting cocaine and waiting impatiently to get high at the over dosage of Blue Magic. *Training Day* does not drift a lot when it comes to extreme close-ups and askew angles to present the narcotic Black cop and his evil mind games. The camera zooms in and out to show the gears churning in Alonzo's head. The wide camera angle emphasizes the sitting posture of the boss at ease and all powerful in his own space, condescending, cynical, and loves to patronize. The camera movement from angled to medium shots builds the momentum of Alonzo's evil plans, his sadistic attitude, and the way he extends violence towards Jake. The full figure framing helps exaggerate the effect of violence in *Training Day;* thus, aggravating the effect of violence particularly in relation to Black man.

For Gurrero "Blacks have given themselves immersed in dominant cinema ideology locked into such a prison of distorted symbols and images that the very attempt to extricate ourselves only leads to more confusion" (Guerrero, 2012, p. no. 90). Blaxploitation is no different from any other genre of Hollywood when it comes to the representation of Blacks in films.

Shaft and *Superfly* present a 1970s' version of violence. The audience does not witness the graphic representation of violence on the screen in the form of blood gushing out of the wounds or dead bodies, there are no gunshots screened explicitly in these films, nor we can find any explicit representation of torturous bodies as in Reservoir Dogs. The killings are discreetly conveyed by approaching an abstract approach to violence. This kind of violence looks absurd in contemporary times when a street brawl starts abruptly, and fistfight lasts for 5 long minutes in *Superfly*. The humdrum of background sounds aggravates the absurdity of street brawls, "insulated within reactionary plots, wielded by cartoonish, quip sprouting heroes and fueled by rock music soundtracks and eye boggling special effects" (Kendrick, 2009, p. no. 102). The films go over the top using the old premise of violence to increase the viewership of the films. A superficial stylized depiction of violence is another strategy of the mainstream media to use Camp to commodify Blackness. Thus, giving an image that a black hero lacks vigor and vitality to fight like a white hero and even when he fights, the fight gives comic relief to the audience. Another implication to present such laughable violent scenes is to prove that Blacks lack the sense of presenting visually aesthetic violence on screen and eventually come up with farcical violence.

The graphic violence in *American Gangster* is exaggerated to the level of Camp. The aestheticized campy violence is hard to stomach when it comes to heartless killings on the street, blood gushing out of the wounds, and reaches off limits when the gangster pour gasoline and sets a man ablaze (*American Gangster1.45 2.55*). The extensive stylistic elaboration of violence becomes a spectacle when a man was shot dead by three bullets in the name of revenge killing. Violence that smacked of sadism, fights that involve choking or kicking, extreme forms of torture and scenes that show the response to that violence (Prince 40), dominates Training Day, as the savagery of Alonzo Harris goes out of control.

The film presents an over-the-top aesthetic, "the art of 20th century, that is art whose goal is not that of creating harmonies, but of overstraining the medium and introducing more and more violent, and unresolvable subject matter" (Sontag 36). The intensity of graphic violence goes out of bounds when Alonzo choked a junkie almost dead by inserting a pen in his throat (*Training Day* 1.16-2.07). The hot-headed cop and his violent behavior cause fear and dread

in the audience when confronting with the multitudinous images of blood and gore and the rampant images of man biting another man, killings in front of innocent child. This all suggests that Black man is least bothered about his relationships and never cares to think that the unbridled violence is consuming his relationships. This exaggerated violence projects Blackness as violent, brutal and heartless scoundrels.

The selected Blaxploitation films project stylized violence to aid narrative progression. The rise and fall of the gangsters and the detective in all the films depend on the Black male action and plans and they are bound to fall if act against the White man; meaning there by their services must facilitate whites only then the violence is justified otherwise they appear as feral on the screen. Graphic violence when coupled with explicit language has a knockdown effect on the audience. The poignant physicality of the Blacks' campy violence is enough to "other" them as gangsters in the mainstream media. The black soul that inhabits the black body is shown perverted to the extent of enjoying the moment of death as a spectacle. This portrays a horrific picture of Black males as heartless and sinister kind ever born on earth.

Sontag makes an assertion about Camps' association with artifice rather than natural. It revels in artifice because a double meaning of things is always possible but "it is not the familiar split-level construction of a literal meaning on the one hand and a symbolic meaning, on the other. It is the difference rather between the thing as meaning something, anything and the thing as pure artifice" (34). Early in the essay Sontag makes an assertion about Camps' location in artifice rather than in natural. She observes that Camp is a quality discoverable in objects and the behavior of persons (54) and that the way of Camp is not in terms of beauty… but in terms of the degree of artifice, in terms of stylization (28). On the basis of these assertions the study suggests that Camp not only lies in characters, but the made-up plots and the use of gaudy props can be an extension in Camp aesthetics.

The Young Blood Priest uses crucifix in the most flamboyant way to lick and snort drugs. This weird use of cross sign ridicules his name of Priest and at the same time puts a question mark on the morality of Black hero making fun of the revered sign itself. The exaggerated use of props goes to the extent of using oversized chrome lights, side mounds, and the patterned vertical grill in the customized Cadillac. These gaudy exaggerations try to assert that Priest has no other way to establish his identity but through overt display of wealth and affluence. The edgy and muscular Chevy Monte Carlo establishes the same thing for Alonzo Harris; the exaggeratedly modified car overturns the meaning of the car which was once considered an icon of style, taste and elegance. The bold frontal restyling, customized sunroof, flow master exhaust and hydraulics have an ostentatious appeal for the onlooker. The Dayton tires with Bullet caps bestow it a notorious look as if the car becomes a partner in crime with the Black narcotic cop. The outrageous sound, brisk movements and volatile speed contribute to the narrative progression and goes parallel with the mood swings of the detective cop, Alonzo Harris. The car of substance gives an impression of the two cars in one; having the tendency of embracing every notoriety within itself be it drugs or illegal money and weapons.

Similarly, various settings in the film *Shaft*, highlight the gaudy décor of Black living as in tiffany lamps in the house of *Shaft*s' girlfriend, the floral patterns in the curtains and the sewerage pipes catch the attention of the viewer going through the middle of *Shaft*s' office. The use of all these gaudy props establishes the fact that Blacks lack any refinement of taste, and no matter what, they cannot harness their aesthetic tendencies towards sophistication.

The over-the-top décor leaves the audience with awe, instigating an opinion about Blacks who can rely only on exaggeration to assert themselves. *Superfly* gives life and tenacity to the otherwise dead alleys of Harlem. The restaurants uptown and their interiors are given special attention with the intention of presenting the taste and life of Blacks in Harlem. The disco bars and Priests' house is altogether different from the dilapidated streets of Harlem. The settings in *American Gangster* offer an opportunity to witness the artifice of Camp aesthetics thoroughly. The ostentatious ornamentation of elite restaurants, dance clubs and health clubs offers an opportunity for the audience to witness Blackness as something other than the run-down workplaces and dirty slums. This time black gangsters flaunt their wealth through swanky white empires which have an air of affluence.

The ghettos which are considered as the epicenter of Black culture and are always shown as a place of downtrodden in films are given a new meaning in *Superfly* through Camp aesthetics. The penthouse says out loud about the luxurious life of a black cocaine dealer, but the point is made through Camp aesthetics which suggests that money cannot change the tacky taste of Blacks. The ways things are literally thrown away in the penthouse suggests that YoungBlood Priest can afford the expensive sculptures but cannot even borrow the sense of placement. The sheer difference between the outside and the gaudy interiors gives the idea that Blacks can only enjoy luxury through unfair means. A bootlegging business is a must if they need to get over the dumpsites of Harlem.

The ghettos or the Black city space is given so much importance in films that the ghettos become a character itself. The interiors and exteriors where Blacks reside are overemphasized to highlight the culture and precisely Blackness. This Blackness is commodified through the artifice of Camp aesthetics. Blaxploitation films work no different from mainstream Hollywood films in depicting exaggerated pictures of Harlem slums and alleys. The films are obsessed with depicting every minor detail of Black living, and probably that's the reason why the cityscape, the ghettos and the Black urban spaces constitute the spatial narration of the films. The black spaces emphasize dirt, filth, poverty and degradation, in a way revealing the inferior nature of their inhabitants, i.e. Blacks.

The "Urban films" is the euphemism for representation of Blacks who occupy the inner city which means ghettos and ghetto means Blacks. The trips offer a voyeuristic pleasure to the audience unfamiliar with the ghettos and a kind of identification for those familiar with them. The city enables events so much so that it becomes a character itself (Massood, 2011, p. no. 567). This one-dimensional picture of Black urban spaces featured in Shaft and Superfly reinforces the stereotypical images shown in mainstream Hollywood films. Yvonne. D. Sims calls them a non-realistic representation of Harlem, the images that do not pose challenge for the audience to accept the nuanced and complex Blackness presented on American screens (89).

The bleak picture of excessive drug consumption and violence in these films makes the Blaxploitation genre controversial. Contrary to their assertion of giving voice and true representation to Blacks, they portrayed Blacks as coldblooded brutes. To increase the visuality of the films on the box office, the films distorted the black culture through artifice; thus, commodified Blackness by using Camp aesthetics strategically.

The detective Shaft and his all made up character prepare the audience to watch for a Black hero who is sexually potent, has some invincible strength and remarkable deductive reasoning. The plot bends upon showing the hyper masculinity of the detective, "he

maintains his position as an individualist, in keeping with Hollywood's repression or containment of the collective" (Gurrero 897). The individuality which Shaft tries to maintain amongst the burglars and the mafia gangsters becomes 'stagey' and sort of farcical. This comes with the revelation that Shaft lacks real power when confronted with whites. He has to go by the books when helping Blacks and should mainly work to support the whites otherwise the license for his job can be confiscated. The composed and confident face of a detective that he is holding up, becomes only an image when in sexual vignettes he takes up the role of a comforter and nurturer. The Camp aesthetics give it a stagey feel in order to tone down the expanse of Blackness.

The *American Gangster*, creates an over-the-top persona for the gangsta; Frank Lucas. The fictitious world created for Frank Lucas goes over the board to present the real life of the drug lord Frank Lucas. An extremely refined and cultured man with excessive mannerism is essential to glorify the downfall of the gangster who commits sins with bravado. He illuminates the life of a gangster, "who escapes from obscurity to wealth, power and fame" by using corporate strategies to "organize or perish" (Gardaphe 678). Sontag says, "Camp is the glorification of character" (32). The "Camp eye appreciates the unity, the force of the person", the character of American Gangster is unrealistically exalted in *American Gangster* in an effort to show the grandeur of his downfall. Frank Lucas character is commendable as a businessman, but that upright Black businessman is a threat to White power and Richie; who is of the opinion that with his imprisonment "things can return to normal" *(American Gangster 1.75 2.55).* There exist real gangsters, but this Gangster is primarily a creation of imagination. The real city produces criminals; the imaginary city produces gangsters; he is what we want to be and what we are afraid we may become" (Gardaphe 89).

Camp is the triumph of epicene style, says Sontag in her notes. She further elaborates that all styles that are artifice are ultimately epicene. The convertibility of man and woman, person and things are epicene (34). The Camp aesthetics in *American Gangster* bends upon presenting a gangsta having some feminine qualities; extreme mannerism, tidiness, detailing in clothing and impeccable presentation of things give him a feminine quality. Things get weird on Lucas' side when he gets annoyed at the Alpaca rug being stained by his brother. He even knows all the tips and tricks of a woman to get rid of the stain. Here Camp taste draws on a mostly unacknowledged truth of taste. What is most beautiful in most virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine (Sontag 11). This is necessary to bring down the impact factor of Black bootlegger and present Blackness as epicene. The racial attitude of Camp aesthetics in this particular Blaxploitation film is enough to taint Blackness as something not pure in its crude form.

To create a larger-than-life figure, *Training Day* opts artifice as part of Camp aesthetic to portray a tough guy as narcotic cop. Apparently, Alonzo is a stereotypical hard-core cop but in actual he is anything but stereotypical. The narcotic cop takes things on his way or highway. The narcissist attitude of the Black cop enjoys violence. The film tactfully uses Camp aesthetic to rebrand Blackness into something that revels injustice; his version of law supports street justice. Thus, it not only signifies evil but the capacity of Blackness to corrupt anything around as Alonzo tries to bring Jake in his evil plans.

The Priest is ironically presented as drug lord lacking moral values to the extent of degradation and even when a black man is detective like John Shaft, he lacks power and is obliged to work under the constant surveillance of white man. The exaggerated stylization and obsession with clothes feature Black heroes as vain; puts a question mark on their

masculinity and makes them overly narcissistic. The over-the-top interiors, gaudy props and stylized violence perpetuates Blackness as having an erotic taste, devoid of any sophistication. These campy representations give an impression as if both the Blaxploitation films are complying with the trajectory of Hollywood films. The Camp aesthetic serves the purpose of projecting Blacks not merely distinct but reduces Blackness to superfluous vanity that signifies "evil and degeneracy" (Bruzzi, 2012, p. no. 92). Camp as an aesthetic is strategically employed in these films to commodify Blackness. The spatio temporal boundaries in the films are highlighted to divert extra attention towards the cultural differences that exist and reflect in Black spaces. This gives strength to white supremacy and bestow them some more power to overemphasize the gloom of black cityscape and the interiors.

Camp being a site of political thought and action through the performance of its aesthetics may also be a mode of resistance and raises the propspects of the black character's campiness in the selected works as a sign of their rebellion. However, the lack of a clear moral high ground prevents me from seeing these characters as symbols of black resistance. The genre's bias against the blacks in that Hollywood is white dominated and the genesis of the Blaxploitation era in propping up these deviant personalities as black role models, as notable Black scholar bell hooks points out, to further the racist attitudes towards the blacks in the society. That Hollywood was propping up these figures as instances of quintessential blackness that was inherently deviant, a bad role model for the black youth to aspire towards and a cautionary tale for the whites.

4. Conclusion

Camp aesthetics, with its deliberate artifice and exaggerated style, transforms the representation of Black masculinity in Blaxploitation and contemporary crime films into a spectacle of excess. Through flamboyant fashion, stylized camera work, and heightened depictions of sex, drugs, and violence, these films commodify Blackness, reducing it to a visual performance of vanity and vice. The exaggerated moustaches, flashy clothing, and gaudy accessories that once symbolized empowerment are reconfigured into tools of caricature, stripping the Black hero of political or social depth. *Shaft, Superfly, Training Day,* and *American Gangster* deploy Camp aesthetics not to liberate but to contain, turning individuality into excess, power into spectacle, and masculinity into artifice. The overstated sensuality and violence that define these characters reinforce stereotypes of the hypersexual, narcissistic, and morally corrupt Black male. In this sense, Camp aesthetics does more harm than good: it amplifies visibility but at the cost of authenticity, transforming Blackness into a consumable image curated for mainstream gaze.

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Things Fall Apart: Ecology, Culture and Collapse: Environmental Disruption and the Tragedy of Okonkwo

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Keywords

- Ecocriticism
- Slow violence
- Aristotelian tragedy
- Indigenous ecology
- Cultural collapse
- Environmental justice

Abstract

This article attempts to examine the intersection of ecological disruption, cultural fragmentation, and Okonkwo's personal tragedy within Achebe's Things Fall Apart through McKee's textual analysis. While the novel has been already studied from historical, psychological perspectives, little attention has been paid to the ecological stance to the downfall of Igbo society and its protagonist, Okonkwo. The study draws on ecocriticism from theorist Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, and Rob Nixon along with Aristotle's theory of tragedy. While dealing with the multidimensional reading of this novel through McKee's textual analysis, this study examines Okonkwo's tragic flaw within broad environmental and cultural disruption. It argues that Achebe presents the land, agriculture, and spiritual ecology as a core to Igbo identity and the environmental uncertainty, colonial intrusion, and Okonkwo's individual weakens collectively lead to both the individual and societal downfall. By examining Nixon's theory of slow violence, the study demonstrates how environmental degradation, spiritual dislocation, and the loss of indigenous epistemologies under colonial stress act as insidious but eroding forces throughout the novel. By intersecting Ecocriticism and Aristotelian tragedy, this study shows that Things Fall Apart transcends traditional form to become a multilayered ecological and cultural tragedy that resonates with modern discourses regarding environmental justice, indigenous ecological morality, and the human toll of cultural and ecological dislocation. As per McKee's methodology of textual analysis, this study regards Things Fall Apart as a document of culture that represents and influences particular conceptions of identity, environment, masculinity, and colonial disruption.

1. Introduction

Things Fall Apart (1958) by Chinua Achebe is a masterpiece of African literature that is famous due to the representation of precolonial Igbo culture and the destabilizing influence of European colonialism. The novel has been interpreted in terms of postcolonial, cultural and psychological perspectives, but there has been comparatively little concerning the role of the environmental factor and the ecological upheaval in a relationship with the cultural and personal disintegration that is established in the novel. This research fills that huge gap by investigating the overlap of environmental instability, colonial invasion, and tragic collapse of the novel's protagonist, Okonkwo.

Achebe structures Igbo society as a multifaceted system with land, farming, spirituality, and identity being strongly interwoven. There is native ecological consciousness that runs through the book manifested in references to the growing of the yam, seasonal changes in weather, and the sacredness of the land. But this ecological balance is fragile and it can be battered not only by climatic moods such as droughts and crop failure but also by socio political shocks, especially the arrival of European missionaries and colonialism. It is here that Okonkwo emerges whose stern masculinity and hate of softness are also portraying in pictures of what Aristotle in *Poetics* refers to as hamartia or better yet tragic flaw.

This paper is built upon my earlier MPhil work on Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, where Okonkwo was explored as a tragic hero in Aristotelian terms. That work had centered on classical tragic structure and individual failure, whereas this work further extends the analysis by incorporating ecocriticism and indigenous environmental ethics to investigate how ecological disruption and cultural disintegration are intertwined with Okonkwo’s fate.

Under Aristotelian theory, tragedy occurs when a character's fall is not caused by fate or evil alone but by an inherent vice compounded by outside forces (Aristotle, 1902). Achebe borrows and amplifies the tragic concept in describing Okonkwo's overbearing pride, rigid masculinity, and refusal to change as catalysts for his isolation and death (Naz, 2019). This work, however, maintains that Okonkwo's demise can only partially be explained by hamartia. Instead, his own tragedy occurs alongside more general ecological decline and cultural disintegration, implying that personal and environmental catastrophe are intersected.

To explore this connection, this paper uses an ecocritical approach, referencing the work of Glotfelty (1996), Buell (1995), and Nixon (2011). Ecocriticism puts the relationship in the material world and the world of literature in such a way we can examine the manner in which writing constructs, criticizes, and deconstructs the ecological awareness. Nixon's (2011) notion of slow violence, which accounts for the incremental, frequently imperceptible destruction of ecological and cultural systems, serves as a key model for the fragmentation of Igbo society and the decline of Okonkwo himself.

Using ecocriticism and Aristotelian tragedy together, this interdisciplinary analysis shows that Achebe writes a tale in which ecological and cultural disintegration coincide with personal corruption to bring individual and national ruin. It is a novel that can be read as a postcolonial critique, as well as an ecological tragedy; it is an ethnic study in a genre, relevant to contemporary discussions of environmental justice, indigenous epistemologies, and the human price of cultural and ecological displacement.

1.2. Research Questions

i. How does Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* depict ecological disruption as a force contributing to the tragedy of Igbo society?

ii. In what ways does the connection of ecological imbalance and colonial invasion contribute to the personal and social downfall of Okonkwo, beyond the scope of Aristotle's hamartia?

1.3. Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study are:

i. to examine ecological disruption as a force contributing to the tragedy of Igbo Society

ii. to analyze the intersection of ecological disruption and colonial intrusion affecting the personal and social downfall of Okonkwo beyond the scope of Aristotle's concept of Hamartia?

In a review of ecocriticism and Aristotelian tragedy, this criticism argues that Achebe has created a multi-faceted history with nature out of balance, culture decentered and individual imperfection uniting to form personal and societal crisis. The novel thus does not operate simply as a critique of postcolonialism but rather as an ecological tragedy and thus falls into the current debate on environmental justice and indigenous knowledge systems as well as the human cost of cultural and ecological displacement.

2. Literature Review

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) has been studied comprehensively in postcolonial, cultural, and historical contexts. Achebe has received acclaims among the critics in his introduction of the precolonial Igbo society, the harmful influence of European colonialism, his questioning of the problem of identity, masculinity and cultural decimation. However, as these socio-political and psychoanalytic elements have dominated the critique, there is underdeveloped understanding of the ecological nature of the novel the most outstanding being the degree of environmental fragility causes the tragedy of Okonkwo and his Igbo society.

Various studies have been conducted on Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* from different positions. Irele (2000) and Gikandi (1991) underscore Achebe's attempts to reclaim distorted African historical and cultural narratives by colonial representation. According to Irele, Achebe executes the challenge of Eurocentric views of African primitivism as he confirms the degree of sophistication and the self-government of the native communities. Similarly, Gikandi (1991) highlights the insider viewpoint of Achebe who records indigenous knowledge systems and dense social weave of Igbo life. It is upon such foundation that researchers have been examining the opposing pronunciation of gender ideals and masculinity by Achebe. Cobham (1990) argues that Okonkwo's strict adherence to patriarchal values and aversion to weakness lead to both individual and family breakdown. Obiechina (1975) provides a similar reading, highlighting how Okonkwo's misapprehension of masculinity destroys him. These writings underscore how Achebe advocates against the

traditional gender system but they serve to eliminate these issues to the level of some macro environmental or ecological debate.

Another considerable amount of criticism also situates *Things Fall Apart* in Aristotelian tragedy. Chinweizu et al. (1980) and Palmer (1972), Naz (2019) contend that Okonkwo is the classical tragic hero, as delineated by Aristotle's Poetics: a character of social class whose ruin is caused by an irreparable flaw (hamartia), evoking the pity and fear of the audience. Okonkwo's over-pride, refusal to be weak, and opposition to social change are mirrored in the tragic path of peripeteia (reversal of fortune) and anagnorisis (recognition). But although these readings capture the inner tragedy of Okonkwo, they hardly address the ecological aspect of Achebe's novel.

In this respect, a new field, ecocriticism, has provided the critique about how Achebe writings respond to the problems of the environment. According to Cheryle Glotfelty (1996), ecocriticism involves the study of the literature and physical world, which makes scholars to doubt how texts generate ecological consciousness. Buell (1995/2005) builds this approach by maintaining that land, nature and ecological processes are not merely backdrops but rather active, ideological processes that shape human experience. His writing focuses on literature being a mirror and critical of the way the society relates to the environment particularly when the environment is in a state of an ecological crisis or cultural transformation. Nixon's (2011) theory of slow violence is especially applicable to postcolonial ecocriticism. Nixon speculates that ecological degradation, land dispossession, and displacement of peoples in the Global South represent a type of violence that plays out slowly, frequently imperceptibly, but one which has ruinous impacts on oppressed communities. In *Things Fall Apart*, Igbo ecological knowledge erasure, interference with the ancestral relationship to the land, and ecological destabilization tied to colonial incursion fall within Nixon's conceptualization of slow violence.

Though more general ecocritical work on African literature is developing—like Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's Postcolonial Ecocriticism (2010) and Byron Caminero-Santangelo's Different Shades of Green (2014)—streamlined ecocritical examination of Achebe's writing is still scarce. Santangelo (2014) highlights the fact that African environmental fiction often intersects ecological with cultural survival and social justice, situating land as both material and spiritual basis for identity. Recent scholarship, such as Iheka's (2018) on indigenous environmental ethics, demands closer readings of African works that express traditional ecological knowledge systems. Iheka's position is that for such communities as the Igbo, ecological awareness is inextricable from religious and cultural practices, and colonial derangement triggers not merely material loss but strong cultural and environmental estrangement. In spite of these advances, relatively little research has been done on how Achebe combines ecological, cultural, and individual breakdown within a tragedy. The convergence of environmental destabilization, colonial incursion, and Okonkwo's tragic flaws constitutes an underdeveloped critical landscape. Finally, although much great scholarship has shed light on the cultural, historical, and psychological importance of *Things Fall Apart*, the novel's ecological facets—specifically how these relate to the tragic form and the failure of individual and society—need to be explored by scholars. Through the shared gaze of ecocriticism, indigenous environmental ethics, and Aristotelian tragedy, this research presents a fresh critique of Achebe's classic novel, making an original contribution to ongoing discussions on environmental justice, cultural survival, and the nuances of human-environment relations in African literature.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs Alan McKee's (2003) textual analysis as its principal method of research. Textual analysis, as McKee explains, is a method of gathering and interpreting data regarding the ways in which individuals make sense of the world using texts. The method is suitable for the study of culture and literature since it can provide an in-depth reading of texts to elicit meanings, beliefs, and cultural assumptions embedded therein. As per McKee's methodology of textual analysis, this study regards *Things Fall Apart* as a document of culture that represents and influences particular conceptions of identity, environment, masculinity, and colonial disruption.

Through a close reading of the novel structure, character development as well as environmental issues, the research seeks to comprehend the way Achebe novel has presented both individual and group experiences with environmental and cultural deterioration.

The context and theory as focused on by McKee serves to empower the study to tie ecocriticism with Aristotelian tragedy to an express framework of analysis and illuminate the dynamics between culture, environment, and identity in the novel by Achebe.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

This research takes direction from an interdisciplinary paradigm that unites Ecocriticism and Aristotle's Classical theory of tragedy. Collectively, these theoretical lenses offer a three-dimensional framework for the analysis of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, placing the individual fall of Okonkwo within the wider context of ecological disturbance, cultural breakdown, and colonial incursion.

3.2. Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism, defined by Cheryl Glotfelty (1996) as being about the relationship between literature and the physical environment (p. xvii), goes beyond anthropocentric postures and reminds us that human identity, culture, and ecological systems are highly interdependent. Ecocriticism challenges scholars to look at how the literary works negotiate the ecological awareness, illustrate the ecological issues of justice, and dramatise the unstable connection between society and nature. Buell (1995) broadens this view further by adding the idea of the environmental imagination, underscoring the fact that nature in literature does more than serve as passive setting, instead serving as an active, formative force. Land, ecosystems, and environmental conditions may help shape narrative form, character, and social critique, at least in times of ecological disaster or cultural change, for Buell.

Nixon's (2011) concept of slow violence is a valuable critical framework for this research, particularly within the postcolonial African context. Nixon outlines "slow violence as a type of environmental devastation that is incremental, usually unseen, and disproportionately harms marginalized groups" (p. 2). This violence is expressed through land eviction, ecological degradation, spiritual dislocation, and cultural displacement—processes that are progressive but have devastating effects.

In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* Achebe depicts instances of slow violence in the decline of Igbo society's spiritual link to the land, ecological uncertainty, and the gradual incursion of colonial frameworks. A critical analysis of Achebe's work using an ecocritical perspective exposes how land is more than just a backdrop but also the very core of cultural identity,

social order, and existential security. Yam production, cycles of the season, and the sacredness of ritual space represent an indigenous ecological morality that gets disrupted under environmental duress and colonialism

3.3. Aristotle's Theory of Tragedy

Aristotle's Poetics (trans. Butcher, 1902) offers the classical theory of tragedy. The tragic hero in the perspective of Aristotle is often a person of nobility whose error is brought about by a vice or due to a misjudgment hamartia rather than by fate or fortune. Although this fall creates the effect of pity and fear, it results in catharsis, which gives definition to the audience and completes the emotional experience. Critical to Aristotle's tragic form are the devices of peripeteia (turnabout of fortune) and anagnorisis (point of recognition or insight), which between them drive the action toward a certain and usually calamitous ending. The fall of the tragic hero, while based on individual weakness, is also in some way expressive of larger social, moral, or philosophical issues. Okonkwo is the classic tragic hero. His hamartia excessive pride, rigid masculinity, and obsessive fear of weakness are used to make him rise to the top in the Igbo society initially and to make him alienated and self-destruct in the end (Naz, 2019).

Achebe complicates this classic pattern but puts the personal failures of Okonkwo in the realms of more environmental, cultural, and colonial crises. Thus, the tragedy of Okonkwo is personal and social, the collapse of an entire ecological and a cultural system. The overlap between ecocriticism and Aristotelian tragedy offers a distinct prism with which to examine the intricate failure that is presented in *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe successfully manages to make his story where environmental unsteadiness, culture destruction, and personal failure are interrelated. Okonkwo's collapse is not the result of internal character defects alone but rather the destabilization of Igbo ecological regimes and cultural practices subject to the forces of colonial invasion and environmental disruption.

Through the intersection of these frameworks, this research demonstrates that Achebe overwhelms the parameters of a traditional Aristotelian tragedy. The novel is, instead, made into a space for the examination of ecological disturbance, cultural disintegration, and the human toll of environmental and colonial violence. Okonkwo's individual downfall mirrors the ecological and social disintegration of Igbo society, making his tragedy at once deeply individual failure and metaphor for the wider environmental and cultural destabilization unleashed by colonial modernity. This combined method directly responds to the research questions of the study by shedding light on how ecological disturbance causes the tragedy of Igbo society and how the combination of environmental instability and colonial incursion is responsible for Okonkwo’s destruction beyond the confines of classical hamartia.

4. Data Analysis, Findings, and Discussion

4.1. *The Environment and Cultural Ecology in Things Fall Apart*

Igbo society created by Achebe is built in the framework of a detailed ecological and cultural complex, in which the elements of nature and spiritual culture are interrelated. The land, especially as a source of yam production, is not merely a resource of the physical kind, but the source of stability, prosperity and masculinity as well. Effective production of yams portrays not only the ability of a farmer but also communion with the rhythms of the land “since the yam is the king of crops, it belonged to a man” (Achebe, 1958, p. 22). Such a

rhythm of agriculture determines the social position, gender roles, and unity within the community. Besides the agricultural efficiency, Achebe pays attention to spiritual ecology, that is, the respect of the sacred places, the adoration of ancestors and the natural order. The sacred grove, family estate, and the egwugwu (ancestral spirits) shows the Igbo conception that there is no way human life can be independent of the spiritual force of the nature. The breach of this spiritual ecology, whether by the personal sin or the alien colonial powers, leads to the destruction of social fabric.

Deteriorated environment preserves the symptoms of the more serious social disintegration. Unsuccessful harvests, catastrophes in nature, and symbolic incineration of the compound belonging to Okonkwo when he is exiled are the examples of failures in the ecological balance that can be put in parallel with the break of Igbo culture (Achebe, 1958; Santangelo, 2014). The appropriation of land by the missionaries, the creation of churches, and the destruction of sacred places represent the ecological alienation in which the theory of slow violence created by Nixon (2011) dwells.

4.2. Ecological Collapse, Hamartia, and Colonial Disruption

The environmental and spiritual changes that Okonkwo fails to see are caused by his *hamartia*, his pride and stubborn manifestations of masculinity (Aristotle, 1902; Achebe, 1958). Being trapped in the agricultural success and masculine tradition, he is unprepared to handle the ecological and cultural destabilization surrounding him (Achebe, 1958; Nixon, 2011). His suicide is an ultimate break with land and community, showing how individual tragedy is indicative of the wider breakdown of ecology and society (Caminero-Santangelo, 2014; Achebe, 1958). His personality, including his dependence on agricultural prosperity and patriarchal culture, does not allow him to manage the ecological and cultural destabilization he faces (Achebe, 1958; Nixon, 2011). His suicide marks the ultimate divorce with land and community, and how individual loss in nature signals mass ecological and social destruction (Santangelo, 2014; Achebe, 1958).

The *hamartia* described by Aristotle of Okonkwo—the excessive pride, fear of loss, and inability to be adaptive against the changes of time—turns out to be lethal in this unbalancing environment (Aristotle, trans. 1996; Achebe, 1958). He was fearful of change and we see this as he states, “the white man has put a knife to the things that held us together and we have fallen apart” (Achebe, 1958, p. 124); this is both an individual and cultural crisis. His failure to adapt correlates with the destabilization of the ecology, and both end up collapsing (Nixon, 2011; Santangelo, 2014).

The story presented by Achebe indicates that the self of Okonkwo disintegrates in the same way as the disintegration of the environment and society (Achebe, 1958). The symbolic meaning of the land is underlined several times. As an example, when Okonkwo is banished to his native home after an accidental murder of a member of the clan, this language is used in reference to ecological and spiritual loss (Achebe, 1958). Okonkwo does not reject his environmental social origin, but environmental as well; he loses the ground upon which his masculinity and honor depended (Caminero-Santangelo, 2014; Achebe, 1958).

In addition, more ecological alienation is marked by the appropriation of land by the missionaries to build churches and schools (Achebe, 1958). It is the same as the concept of slow violence used by Nixon—the gradual loss of relationship with ancestral lands, which undermines cultural unity and care of the environment (Nixon, 2011).

The baptism of the *osu* (outcasts) would be a sign that something is amiss in Igbo society (Achebe, 1958). These social changes cannot fit into the strict masculinity of Okonkwo (Achebe, 1958). His cruelty toward his family, his disrespect to people who convert to Christianity, and his self-destruction in the end are all results of his inability to understand personal identity within a world that is changing (Achebe, 1958).

The Aristotelian design of tragedy can be seen against the line of Okonkwo; his peripeteia (turning around of fortunes) comes in the form of his exile—he loses his attainment (Aristotle, trans. 1996; Achebe, 1958). His recognition comes too late when he realizes that the world of the Igbo that he strived to save is completely changed (Achebe, 1958). The fact that his suicide is a serious abomination in Igbo cosmology also is an indicator of a last break with land and tradition as well as identity (Achebe, 1958; Santangelo, 2014). Further, Achebe incorporates nature symbols into the description of psychological and cultural decay of the main character (Achebe, 1958). The fire in the compound of Okonkwo after his exile, which symbolizes purification and destruction, predicts his personal collapse and destruction of the whole ecology (Achebe, 1958). Equally, deteriorating harvests and unstable environment are similar to the weakening control that Okonkwo had on his place in society (Achebe, 1958; Nixon, 2011).

Referring to the tragedy of Okonkwo to this ecological environment, Achebe stresses the close connection between the environmental, cultural, and individual destruction. The event of the suicide of Okonkwo is not an act of personal tragedy but a combination of environmental, religious and social decay. According to Santangelo (2014), in African literature land frequently serves to signify more than financial support—it represents ancestral link, spiritual harmony, and social identity. The demise of Okonkwo, therefore, signifies the breakdown of these bonds. Achebe's criticism goes beyond the personal flaw to more pervasive systemic upsets. Colonialism's effects on the environment—land seizure, cultural displacement, spiritual alienation—multiply internal fissures in Igbo society. Okonkwo's fall becomes a symbol of environmental and cultural depletion under colonial brutality.

According to McKee’s method of textual analysis, operating as both an ecological and cultural destabilizer, colonial interference divides the fragile balance between the Igbo people and their surroundings. Okonkwo's failure to reconcile his identity with these changing cultural and environmental facts reflects his more general aversion to change. According to Igbo cosmology, his suicide is a dreadful abomination and subsequently it becomes symbolic of divisiveness not only against his people, but also against ancestral ways and sacred relationship with the earth.

The decline of Okonkwo allows Achebe to establish a powerful catharsis that transcends individual tragedy into the environmental and post-colonial ethical downfall of the society that can no longer afford the colonial savagery and the barbaricism of the European encroachment. Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* has managed to harmonize charm by intermingling ecological unsteadiness with the Aristotelian paradigm of tragedy, consequently re-conceptualizing the fall of Okonkwo both in the sense of the failing of a personality, as well as the failing of an ecology. The case of Okonkwo is the example of self-destruction due to rigidity of manhood as well as indifference toward the ecology which symbolizes the rupture of the connection with the land, the culture, and the sense of belonging to the community.

Reading the major tragic patterns against the background of environmental catastrophe of post-colonial world, Achebe introduces the death of the main character of the novel Okonkwo as the personal and at the same as the philosophical warning. The novel thus requires reflection on the frailty of indigenous ecologies, cultural belonging and human adaptation to colonial and ecological disruptions.

4.3. The Convergence of Ecological and Personal Collapse

The analysis shows that the ecological undertone in the novel asks readers to rethink environmental language outside Western paradigms. Findings show that Achebe enunciates an indigenous environmental ethic that makes land holy, identity place-based, and environmental desecration a matter of existence crisis. The author describes hamartia in individuals and fairness in societies by portraying the rigid masculinity of Okonkwo, his financial success in farming, and downfall. The sensitive ecological consciousness is evident in Achebe when the land is discussed as life giving and fragile. It is yam whose potency is as masculine as it can be and brings in plenty, which is subjected to dry spells and starving along with being abandoned by earth. Similarly, the Igbo culture flourishes in rhythm with the ecological cycles but falls apart when the same is disturbed ecologically, spiritually, and at cultural levels.

The result demonstrate that Okonkwo's individual fall is strongly linked to this confluence of ecological and colonial pressures, but it also goes beyond Aristotelian concept of hamartia (Aristotle, 1902). While his hyper-pride, strict masculinity, and inability to change meet Aristotle's notion of tragedy, Achebe's account shows that the tragedy of Okonkwo cannot be reduced to personal weaknesses (Achebe, 1958). The ecological destabilization—exacerbated by colonial occupation—makes possible a world in which traditional indicators of honor, masculinity, and social cohesion break down (Nixon, 2011; Santangelo, 2014). Okonkwo's suicide, conventionally both personal failure and cultural taboo, is a symptom of a greater crisis: a disconnection from land, community, and self, fueled as much by individual decision as by the breaking of the ecological and spiritual bonds that underpinned his world (Achebe, 1958). His sorrow—"the white man has set a knife to the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (Achebe, 1958, p. 124)—betrays the way outside interruptions break down the systems of interaction on which individual and group identity rely. Achebe expands the tragic model to include structural and environmental causes, showing how environmental collapse and the advent of colonial forces lead to both Okonkwo's ruin and the general breakdown of Igbo society (Nixon, 2011; Santangelo, 2014).

Findings reveal that Achebe has depicted how Okonkwo has refused to adapt to cultural adjustments, as well as to ecological sensitivity. Even though it is quite obvious that the environment is unstable as characterized by bad harvests, spiritual loss, and social breakdown, Okonkwo is still attached to outdated idea of power of dominance using his physical strength and control through agricultural invasion. The fact that he is not willing to admit greater changes in his surroundings indicates not only mental inflexibility but also an ecological blindness.

The complementary relationship between the flaw of Okonkwo, and the environmental upheavals is quite clear in the story. His trampling of tradition, bloody struggle against reform and final suicide can be likened to the natural degradation and loss of culture sterilization of environment by colonialism. Okonkwo is a symbol of the clash of man against

himself and his stubbornness as well as the environmental constancy, and Achebe has portrayed tragedy here as his personal and that of the system.

5. Conclusion and Implications

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) has long been hailed for its portrayal of cultural collapse in the face of colonialism; yet reading the novel ecocritical with Aristotelian tragic theory discloses richer dimensions in the novel's environmental awareness as well as the tragic demise of protagonist Okonkwo. Achebe creates a world where nature is a participant, gathering the definitions of Igbo identity, religious orientations, and their organization. The socio-cultural fabric of Umuofia is permeated by the environment as it is reflected through practices on the farms, the sacred woods and in the cult of such gods as the Earth goddess Ani. The fact that the people rely on agriculture produced things especially yams is an indication of their attachment to season and land. Nature, in this case, is not a background only but the primary entity dictating life, routine and survival.

Okonkwo's personality, though, is characterized by a clear distance from these environmental principles. His preoccupation with hyper-masculinity, brawn, and prestige results in a utilitarian conception of nature—its value being as a resource only to dominate, not as a power to be in concord with. In the beginning of the book, Achebe portrays Okonkwo's stern work ethic: "Okonkwo was as stubborn as iron. He never manifested any feeling in public, unless indeed it was the feeling of anger. To be fond of anybody was a sign of weakness; the only thing to prove was strength." (Achebe, 1958, p. 28). This stiffening reflects upon his attitude to nature. Although traditionally the wisdom dictates that yam farming is defined by the subordination to seasonal rhythms and natural balance, Okonkwo describes farming as the sphere of war in which aggression is superior and dominance reigns. His ego is closely connected with success in farming, however, he refuses to respect ecological humility, without which he would be able to live peacefully with nature. Achebe develops this motif through the episode of Okonkwo's banishment after inadvertently murdering Ezeudu's son: "It was a sin against the earth goddess to slay a clansman, and a man who did so must run from the land." (Achebe's 1958, p. 124). This event demonstrates that the actions of Okonkwo take beyond the spiritual and environmental boundaries that annihilate the balance of his bond with Ani and natural order of society. His exile is not merely a social punishment, it is ecological and spiritual exile, something that makes him even more tragic by alienating him to the foundational rhythms of his culture.

The downfall of Okonkwo fits the requirements of Aristotle in terms of tragedy, as the hero, Okonkwo, through his hamartia, overconfidence, inflexibility and contempt of weakness sinks into the disappointment (Naz, 2019). But Achebe goes further and exposes Okonkwo to the tragic paradigm with the incorporation of ecological disconnection in the hamartia. He does not give in, emotional and ecological, and thus the deconstruction of his integrity and the integrity of society happens. The ecologic part of this tragedy is increased by the advent of the European missionaries and colonialists, the presence of which is a doubled disturbance, economic and cultural. Introduction of alien governance, Christianity as well as capitalist ideologies weaken the local knowledge systems and spiritual culture; earth spirituality and ecological alienation is strengthened. This environmental and cultural disintegration is artistically depicted by the reinstatement of Okonkwo in a foreign land when he finds things changed in Umuofia: "He also mourned his clan which was disintegrating

and falling apart and also mourned the warlike men of Umuofia which had turned into women." As things fall apart, some rooms are dark; some people are dark. (Achebe 1958, p. 183). Trying to lament the cultural weakness, which he reads in the signs, Okonkwo is revealed to be incapable of recognizing the broader environmental and spiritual crisis that is emerging. His figurative downplaying of softness to femininity and weakness is his distorted vision of earth and the feminine values present in Igbo cosmology- a universe that treats Ani as both giver and taker away of environmental balance. The fact that the ultimate thing Okonkwo does as to uphold the stand against nature and society is committing a suicide is another confirmation that he was completely rooted out of society and nature. Suicide is an abomination in Igbo culture which breaks the bond of the individual to the earth and ancestors. His death thus indicates the total eco-spiritual severance: "It is cowardly to have a man who kills himself. It is a sin against the Earth, and a man, who so does, cannot be buried by his clansmen." (Achebe, 1958, p. 207)

This ecological breach is a symptom of the complication of the bigger community. Depreciation of native ritual procedures, periods of cultivation, and religious connections to earth depicts that colonialism means a break in the form of completeness between the male gender and nature. In his personal way, Achebe himself goes beyond the individual tragedy and takes the reader into examining ecological displacement, cultural absolutism and environmental cost of the colonial intrusion. This confounding of several none of which can be used at all escapes its point, and that is to ascertain that, the tragedy of stammering, of Okonkwo, lies in three-folds: psychological rigidity, sense of cultural immovability, and division with nature, combine to lead to both personal destruction and communal catastrophe. *Things Fall Apart* becomes a lesson by Achebe about the dangers of ecological and spiritual imbalance caused either by domestic strains or the overseas colonialists.

Future researchers might study the role of ecological motifs in other African texts with the focus on the theme of postcolonial identity. Additionally, Gender, Ecology, and Power: A closer interrogation on the ways in which Achebe ties patriarchal system, environmental unsteadiness and societal disintegrations could lend subtle readings to gendered environmental governance in the African discourse. These directions would not alone broaden the ecocritical application of African literature but would also aid in more expansive interdisciplinary discussions between the areas of ecology, culture, identity, and justice.

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

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Keywords

- passive constructions,
- missing agent,
- 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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Cross-linguistic Influence in Chinese Consonant Acquisition: A Case Study of Pakistani Students from a Third Language Perspective

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- Pakistani Learners of Chinese
- Third Language Acquisition
- Phonological Transfer
- Cross-Linguistic Influence （CLI）
- Consonant Errors

Abstract

For Pakistani learners of Chinese (with Urdu as their L1 and English as L2), their Chinese acquisition process shows a typical case of third language acquisition (TLA). However, existing research has mainly focused on L3 teaching, while cross-linguistic influence (CLI), especially at the phonetic level, remains under-researched. Moreover, studies targeting Chinese as the target language and particularly concerning Pakistani learners' phonetic acquisition are still lacking. This study concentrates on Chinese consonants as the main primary focus, examining the transfer effects of Urdu (L1) and English (L2) on the acquisition of Chinese consonants. A range of methodologies were employed: first, a questionnaire survey was conducted to obtain learners' linguistic background information in English (L2) and Chinese (L3); Second, recorded the participants pronouncing 22 Chinese consonants, collected the audio data, and analyzed their pronunciation accuracy: finally, interviews were made with the some most representative participants to cross-check the results of the audio data analysis, thereby minimizing the researchers' subjective preconceptions in data interpretation. The results show that Urdu employs both positive and negative transfer effects on Pakistani learners' Chinese phonetic acquisition, while the influence of English is mainly negative. The two languages jointly exacerbate negative transfer effects in terms of voicing characteristics; on the other hand, regarding aspiration characteristics, their influences oppose each other, with the positive transfer from Urdu Mitigating the interference from English. Furthermore, the internal similarity within the target language's phonetic system is also a primary driver of specific confusion-based errors.

1. Introduction

Research on language transfer goes back to the 1940s and 1950s. Under the sway of behaviorist theory, most researchers at that time thought that language transfer was an obstruction caused by learners' existing Ingrained native language habits on second language acquisition, and these obstruction was considered one of the primary reasons for limited second language proficiency (FRIES C C, 1947). A Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis given by Lado demonstrated that similarities between the native language and the L2 would result in positive transfer, while dissimilarities would result in negative transfer (LADO R, 1957). Therefore, early definitions of language transfer were rested entirely on comparing similarities and dissimilarities between the native language and L2, with particular reference to the influence of the native language on L2 learning, which was often perceived negatively. Later, scholars such as Odlin, Jarvis, S., & Pavlenko reformulated the meaning of language transfer as "cross-linguistic influence", which signifies the influence of a learner's knowledge of one language on their knowledge or use of another language (ODLIN T, 1989). This definition encompasses multilingual acquisition and clarifies that the effects of language transfer can be both positive (facilitating) and negative (impeding), becoming wildly accepted in academia. Thus, L2 acquisition researchers started to examine how all the language systems in a learner's mind (whether the native language, L2, L3, and so on) Have simultaneous interaction and competition during language production, giving rise to the concept of "third language transfer" (He Yin, 2024). There are several Cross-linguistic influencing factors in L3 transfer, such as language avoidance, "reverse transfer" from the L2 to the native language, languages perceived similarities, transfer between interlanguage systems, and specific factors of learners such as age and language proficiency (Tammy Wang, 2013). Although unanimity has been reached regarding the interaction between native and non-native sources of cross-linguistic influence, but the predictive variables for its strength and directionality remain unresolved. Currently ,There is no conclusive evidence representing that one factor is more important or influential than another (Li Lu, 2023), leaving ample room for more in-depth and scientific research. Most studies on language transfer in L3 acquisition concentrate on lexical/morphological and grammatical transfer. There is a lack of studies addressing phonetic transfer ((He Yin, 2024), and research on Chinese phonetics as a L3 is markedly lacking. Therefore, this paper will explore this under-researched gap by examining Pakistani learners of Chinese with a bilingual background (Urdu L1, English L2) and examining how their prior languages (Urdu and English) effect their acquisition of Chinese consonants. This paper will start by outlining previous research in this field and mentioning relevant theoretical frameworks to give readers a foundational background. Subsequently, various research methods will be used to examine the specific characteristics of Chinese consonant acquisition by Pakistani learners and the cross-linguistic factors effecting this process.

From the standpoints of phonology, grammar, syntax, and morphology, Urdu, English, and Chinese show notable differences, which make them belong to different language families. Specifically, Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family, while Urdu and English are belong to the Indo-European language family. Chinese syllables are basically comprise three fundamental elements: consonants (known as initials, appearing at the beginning of a syllable), vowels (known as finals, positioned at the end of a syllable), and tones (known as the most important element borne by the vowel, normally including four main lexical tones).

The main elements of Chinese syllables can be more clearly understood as shown in the following picture.

This study focuses on Chinese consonants (initials), seeks to investigate whether the phonological characteristics of Urdu (L1) and English (L2) among Pakistani learners cause a learning effect on their acquisition of Chinese (L3) consonants. As the physical embodiment of language, Chinese phonetics performs the role of conveying meaning in communication. Therefore, attaining expertise in the fundamentals of Chinese phonetics, especially the fundamental knowledge of consonants, bears significant importance.

1. Literature Review

Research on third language (L3) phonological acquisition appeared as a very young subfield in the late 20th century and has only recently become a major focus of research (Cabrelli Amaro, J., & Wrembel, M, 2016). A growing body of evidence now supports the view that the general experience of bilingualism among trilingual learners can positively influence the perception and acquisition of an L3 phonology (KOPE?KOVá R, 2016). For example, to know the sources of "accent" in second or third language oral production, Llisterri and Poch-Olivé arranged three acoustic analyses comparing bilingual (Catalan L1–Castilian L2) and monolingual (Castilian L1) university students learning English or French. They exerted a influence of their L1 and/or L2 on their output of the respective target languages (English or French). Their results indicated that both groups of learners appeared to rely almost wholly on their L1 to articulate specific phonological features in the L2 or L3, with little evidence of L2 influence noticed in the bilingual case (Listerri, J., & Poch-Olivé, D, 1987). This resulted in the proposal of an "L1 Transfer Hypothesis." To address the same issue, Llama et al. compared 18 L3 Spanish learners with L1 English and L1 French, investigating their Voice Onset Time (VOT) and aspiration patterns in phonological output. The study's results shown that despite typological dissimilarities between the participants' L1s and the target language Spanish, both learner groups typically followed the phonological patterns of their L2 instead of their L1. This result indicated that L2 status is a significant predictor of the source of cross-linguistic influence in L3 phonological output, providing an "L2 Transfer Hypothesis" (Llamas, R., Cardoso, W., & Collins, L, 2008). The inconsistent results regarding stronger influence from either the L1 or L2 in the above two studies were later explained by Williams and Hammarberg's longitudinal case study of learner SW. Their study found that in the starting stages of learning Swedish, SW consciously used their proficient L2 German phonology to minimize L1 English influence. However, over time and with growing L3 proficiency, characteristics of L1 English phonology Progressively and subconsciously permeated their Swedish output (Williams, S., & Hammarberg, B,1998, 2005). This observation uncovered that the source of cross-linguistic influence can

dynamically change with the learner's proficiency level and learning stage, showing a important clue for addressing the apparently contradictory results in different studies. Apart from the research on forward transfer from L1 or L2 to L3, some researchers have also discovered reverse influence from the L3 on previously acquired L1 or L2 languages. For example, Wei Xiaobao examined the reverse impact of L3 learning on the preexisting phonological awareness development of bilingual children, result found that improvement in L3 English reading skills also improved L2 Chinese phonological awareness (Wei Xiaobao, 2018). Notwithstanding these findings, other studies indicate this reverse beneficial effect is not universal. Research on L3 combinations from non-cognate language families reveals that L3 phonological acquisition can also be effected by negative transfer from the L1 and/or L2 (Wang Sheng, 2018). Concurrently, the scope of research on L3 phonological transfer is expanding. Except focusing on L3 vowel acquisition, more researchers are using Voice Onset Time (VOT) of L3 stops to investigate learners' acquisition of the new language and cross-linguistic influencing factors (Liu Jiaqi, Zeng Ting, Zheng Yongyan, 2022). Some other researchers also have examined the influence of international students' L1 and L2 on their acquisition of L3 Chinese phonology, providing significant insights for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language practices (Wei Siwen, 2021). This paper also using the above content as a reference point, to examine the characteristics of Pakistani Chinese learners in acquiring Chinese consonants and to investigate which factors show cross-linguistic influence.

2. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

The main objective of this study is to provide an initial understanding of the characteristics showed by Pakistani students in the acquisition of Chinese consonants and the related cross-linguistic influencing factors. In order to accomplish the above stated research objectives, the following research questions are proposed:

i. What are the similarities and dissimilarities among the consonant systems of Urdu, English, and Chinese?

ii. Do these similarities and dissimilarities cause transfer (as noted by Kellerman (1983): “Not everything that looks transferable is transferable” (p. 113))?

iii. What are the specific language transfer factors?

iv. In terms of transfer effects, does the Urdu (L1) or English (L2) exert a stronger influence, or is there "dual interference"?

3.2. Research Methods

This study mainly employs the following four research methods to examine the characteristics showed by learners in the acquisition of Chinese consonants and the related cross-linguistic influencing factors:

1.Questionnaire Survey: The questionnaire method is used to collect learners' language background information in both Chinese and English.

2.Contrastive Analysis: A systematic comparison of the similarities and dissimilarities among the consonant systems of Urdu, English, and Chinese is conducted to give a theoretical basis for pinpointing potential transfer phenomena.

3.Audio Data Collection: A word list containing 22 Chinese consonants is designed, and participants are requested to read aloud and record the word list. The audio data are subsequently analyzed via perceptual listening and judgment to investigate learners' consonant errors, the causes of these errors, and the possible transfer influences from Urdu (L1) and English (L2).

4.Interview Method: Semi-structured interviews are conducted to cross-check the findings from the audio data analysis, thus reducing the researcher's subjective bias in data interpretation.

3.3. Participants

The study comprised 10 participants, including 3 males and 7 females, who were all beginner-level learners of Chinese from the Confucius Institute at the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad. The mean age was 20.6 years (SD = 1.71), with an age range of 19–23 years. Both in terms of acquisition order and dominance, Urdu was their L1, English their L2, and Chinese their L3. Their L2 (English) proficiency was at an advanced level (mean years of English learning = 15.8, SD = 1.9), while their L3 (Chinese) proficiency was at a beginner level (mean months of Chinese learning = 2.55, SD = 0.55). Additionally, the participants stated speaking an average of 3–4 foreign languages (SD = 0.52; range: 3–4). Their self-assessed pronunciation proficiency in L2 (English) was 6.8 (SD = 1.14; rated on a scale from 1 to 10), and self-assessed pronunciation proficiency in L3 (Chinese) was 1.5 (SD = 0.53; rated on a scale from 1 to 10).

3.4. Instruments

This study used four methods: questionnaire surveys, comparative analysis, recorded data analysis, and interviews. The questionnaire was conducted to collect language background information on Chinese and English. By collecting participants' language learning history and acquisition order, the questionnaire ensured that their multilingual knowledge and usage patterns met the requirements for research participation. The comparative analysis method was basically used to contrast Urdu, English, and Chinese consonants based on their place and manner of articulation, aimed to establish a theoretical foundation for examining potential transfer phenomena. The recorded data analysis method was arranged to examine the actual acquisition characteristics of Chinese consonants by learners and to analyze whether the results of the trilingual comparison is the same as the learners' real acquisition patterns or the transfer influence from prior languages—consistent with Kellerman's (1983) said that "not everything that looks transferable is transferred" (p. 113). The interview part focused on reasons for phonetic errors in Chinese consonants acquisition. The inclusion of interviews helped minimize researcher subjective bias in interpreting the survey findings.

3.5. Data Collection & Data Analysis Method

First, all the participants completed a language backgrounds questionnaire. They were notified that their participation was on voluntary basis, all responses would be kept strictly confidential, and communication among participants was prohibited during the process. The questionnaire typically took about five minutes to complete. Second, a contrastive analysis of the consonants in the three languages (Urdu, English, and Chinese) was conducted,

categorized according to place and manner of articulation. The Chinese consonant data were obtained from HSK Standard Course Level 1 by Jiang Liping (2014), English consonant data from Zhang Xuhong (2011), A Contrastive Analysis of Chinese and English Consonant Systems and Phonological Processing, and Urdu consonant data from Lü Jie (2016), A Contrastive Analysis of Chinese, Hindi, and Urdu Consonants. Then, recorded data of a word list of 22 Chinese consonants were gathered. All participants reported no history of hearing disorders and showed normal speech perception ability. The recordings were collected in the form of an assignment to ensure concentrated and careful pronunciation from the students. Subsequently, two native Chinese speakers are requested to evaluate the recordings and list the pronunciation errors. Finally, interviews were conducted with five representative participants who showed typical mispronunciations, focusing on the reasons behind their phonetic errors in Chinese. The incorporating interviews helped minimize researcher subjective bias in the interpretation of the results.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. A Comparison of the Consonant Systems of Urdu, English, and Chinese

In Urdu and English, there are consonants that are identical or similar in pronunciation to the consonants in Chinese. Some consonants are present in Chinese but are not exist in English or Urdu, while Urdu and English also have certain consonants that do not exist in Chinese. The following is a systematic comparison of the consonants in Chinese, Urdu, and English, analyzing their similarities and dissimilarities, followed by the data organization and analysis.

The Chinese phonetic system consists of 22 consonants, with 21 consonants serve as initials appearing at the start of a syllable, while one nasal consonant, ng[ŋ], appears at the end of syllable. Urdu possesses a considerably larger consonant range than Chinese, both in terms of quantity and in the diversity of places and manners of articulation, with a total number of 39 consonants. The number of English consonants lies between that of Chinese and Urdu, amounting to 28. The following tables clearly organize the consonants of Chinese, English, and Urdu, arranging them according to their place and manner of articulation.

Table 1

Plosive Consonants Comparison Table

Languages	Place and Manner of Articulation																							
	Bilabial				Alveolar				Retroflex				Velar				Uvular				Glottal			
	Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced	
	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated
Chinese	[pʰ]	[p]			[tʰ]	[t]							[kʰ]	[k]										
Urdu	[pʰ]	[p]	[bʰ]	[b]	[tʰ]	[t]	[dʰ]	[d]	[ʈʰ]	[ʈ]	[ɖʰ]	[ɖ]	[kʰ]	[k]	[gʰ]	[g]		[q]				[ʔ]		
English		[p]		[b]		[t]		[d]						[k]		[g]								

1. Plosive consonants

There are six plosives consonants in Chinese (b[p], p[p^h], d[t], t[t^h], g[k], k[k^h]), while Urdu has eighteen (پ[p], پھ[p^h], ب[b], بھ[b^h], ط/ت[t], تھ[t^h], د[d], دھ[d^h], ٹ[ʈ], ٹھ[$ʈ^h$], ڈ[ɖ], ڈھ[$ɖ^h$], ک[k], کھ[k^h], گ[g], گھ[g^h], ق[q], ع[ʔ]), and English has six (p[p], b[b], t[t], d[d], c, k[k], g[g]). From the above comparative analysis, it can be observed that all six Chinese plosives are found in the Urdu consonant system, while the English consonant system possesses [p], [t], and [k] but is devoid of consonants [p^h], [t^h], and [k^h]. As Urdu functions as the national language of Pakistan and holds a comparatively higher status, and since that Urdu and Chinese both have identical bilabial plosives, it can be hypothesized that Pakistani learners of Chinese should theoretically confront no difficulty in acquiring Chinese bilabial plosives. So it can be suggested that the (positive) transfer influence of Urdu is comparatively stronger in learning Chinese plosives. It should be noted that Urdu possesses voiced plosives [b], [b^h], [d], [d^h], [g], [g^h] corresponding to the voiceless plosives [p], [p^h], [t], [t^h], [k], [k^h], and English also has voiced plosives [b], [d], [g] corresponding to the voiceless plosives [p], [t], [k]. These voiced plosives can trigger transfer effects in the acquisition of Chinese voiceless plosives [p], [p^h], [t], [t^h], [k], [k^h].

Table 2

Fricative Consonants Comparison Table

Languages	Place and Manner of Articulation																													
	Labiodental				Apical				Alveolar				Retroflex				Dorsal (front)				Dorsal (back)				Uvular				Glottal				Laminal			
	Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced	
	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated
Chinese		[f]				[s]								[ʂ]		[ʐ]		[ɕ]				[x]														
Urdu		[f]		[v]		[s]		[z]																		[χ]		[ɣ]		[h]				[ʃ]		[ʒ]
English		[f]		[v]		[s]		[z]		[θ]		[ð]																		[h]				[ʃ]		[ʒ]

2. Fricative Consonants

Chinese has six fricatives (f[f], s[s], sh[ʂ], r[ʐ], x[ɕ], h[x]), Urdu has nine (ف[f],و[v],س/ص/ث[s],ز/ذ/ض/ظ[z], خ[χ], غ[ɣ], ح/ہ[h], ش[ʃ], ژ[ʒ]), and English also has nine (f[f], v[v], s (as in "sin")[s], z[z],th(as in"thin")[θ], th (as in"this")[ð], h[h], sh[ʃ], s (as in"vision")[ʒ]) fricatives. From the above comparative analysis, it is apparent that Chinese f[f] and s[s] have completely phonetically identical corresponding fricatives in both the Urdu and English consonant systems. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that there is no notable difference in the strength of transfer influence from Urdu or English in these two fricatives acquisition. However, the other four Chinese fricatives ([ʂ], [ʐ], [ɕ],and [x]) do not have identical equivalents in the consonant systems of either Urdu or English.

Table 3

Affricate Consonants Comparison Table

Languages	Place and Manner of Articulation															
	Apical				Retroflex				Dorsal (front)				Laminal			
	Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced	
	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated
Chinese	[ts^{h}]	[ts]			[tʂ ^{h}]	[tʂ]			[tɕ^{h}]	[tɕ]						
Urdu													[ʧ^{h}]	[ʧ]	[ʤ^{h}]	[ʤ]
English		[ts]		[dz]										[ʧ]		[ʤ]

3. Affricate Consonants

Chinese has six affricate consonants (z[ts],c[ts^{h}],zh[tʂ],ch[tʂ^{h}],j[tɕ],q[tɕ^{h}]), Urdu consonant system possesses four (͡ʧ[ʧ],͡ʧ[ʧ^{h}],͡ʤ[ʤ],͡ʤ[ʤ^{h}]), and English also has four (ts as in "seats"[ts],ds[dz],ch[ʧ],j/dge[ʤ]). From the above comparative analysis, it can be apparent that among Chinese affricates, only the [ts] consonant has an identical affricate in the English consonant system. The other five Chinese affricates ([ts^{h}], [tʂ], [tʂ^{h}], [tɕ], and [tɕ^{h}]) have no identical or similar equivalents in either Urdu or English. Therefore, it can be inferred that in learning [ts], the transfer influence from English holds a primary position.

Table 4

Nasal Consonants Comparison Table

Languages	Place and Manner of Articulation															
	Bilabial				ALveolar				Dorsal (Back)				Velar			
	Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced	
	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated
Chinese				[m]				[n]				[ŋ]				
Urdu				[m]				[n]								[ŋ]
English				[m]				[n]								[ŋ]

4. Nasal Consonants

There are three nasal consonants in Chinese ([m], [n], and [ŋ]), Urdu and English also have similar nasal consonants. It is important to note that nasal consonant [ŋ] in Urdu and English shares the same manner of articulation, but there is a minor difference in the place of

articulation. This minor difference does not modify the actual pronunciation or meaning of [ŋ]. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that when learning this nasal consonant, there is no significant language transfer between Urdu and English.

Table 5

Lateral, Flap, Trill, and Semivowel Consonants Comparison Table

Languages	Place and Manner of Articulation																			
	Lateral				Trill				Tap/Flap				Semivowel							
	Apical				Apical				Retroflex				Bilabial				Palatal			
	Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced		Voiceless		Voiced	
	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated	Aspirated	Unaspirated
Chinese				[l]																
Urdu				[l]				[r]				[ɽ]								[j]
English				[l]				[r]								[w]				[j]

5.Lateral, Flap, Trill, and Semivowel Consonants

The lateral consonant [l] in Chinese has identical consonant in both Urdu and English. Therefore, it can be deduced that in learning lateral consonant [l], there is no significant positive or negative transfer effect between Urdu and English. Additionally, trills, flaps, and semivowel consonants present in Urdu and English are not fall within the scope of this study, as Chinese lacks similar consonants.

4.2. Summary

Through a comparative analysis of the consonant systems of Chinese, Urdu, and English founded on place and manner of articulation, the following conclusions can be inferred:

1.The consonant characteristics of both Urdu and English wield a similar level of transfer influence on the acquisition of Chinese consonants. For example, plosives such as b[p],d[t],g[k]; fricatives such as f[f],s[s]; nasals such as m[m],n[n],ng[ŋ]; and the lateral consonant l[l] present in the consonant systems of all three languages with virtually identical phonetic characteristics. Therefore, these can be provisionally classified as the consonants that are easiest to learn.

2.But in certain cases, one of the two languages may wield a stronger and more symbolic transfer influence on learning specific Chinese consonants. For example, the aspirated plosives in Chinese (p[p^h],t[t^h],k[k^h]) have fully identical counterparts only in the Urdu consonant system, while the affricate z[ts] possesses completely identical phonetic features only within the English consonant system. Even though these consonants do not have direct equivalents in both Urdu and English concurrently, learners can still depend on the phonetic system of one language to facilitate positive transfer. Thus, these consonants can be provisionally classified as being of moderate difficulty.

3.Some Chinese consonants do not have fully similar counterparts in both Urdu and English in terms of phonetic characteristics. These include fricatives such as sh[ʂ],r[ʐ],x[ɕ],h[x], and affricates such as c[ts^h],zh[tʂ],ch[tʂ^h],j[tɕ], and q[tɕ^h]. These consonants significantly different from the learners' existing phonetic systems in terms of place or manner of articulation. Therefore, learners often need to build new articulatory habits from square one and are more vulnerable to interference from their native language or other previously acquired languages. These can be provisionally classified as the most challenging consonants to acquire.

However, do seemingly auditorily identical, similar, or corresponding consonants Inevitably lead to transfer effects? As Kellerman (1983) said, “Not everything that looks transferable is transferable” (p.113). This indicates that phonological transfer is not only determined by superficial similarities in phonetic form but is also constrained by multiple constraints, such as learners’ psychological cognition and language awareness. Thus, to reach a more scientific and representative conclusions, it is important to further verify these provisionally judgments through empirical studies, for example, by analyzing recorded speech data or arranging interviews.

4.2.1. Analysis of Recorded Data, Interview Results, and Discussion

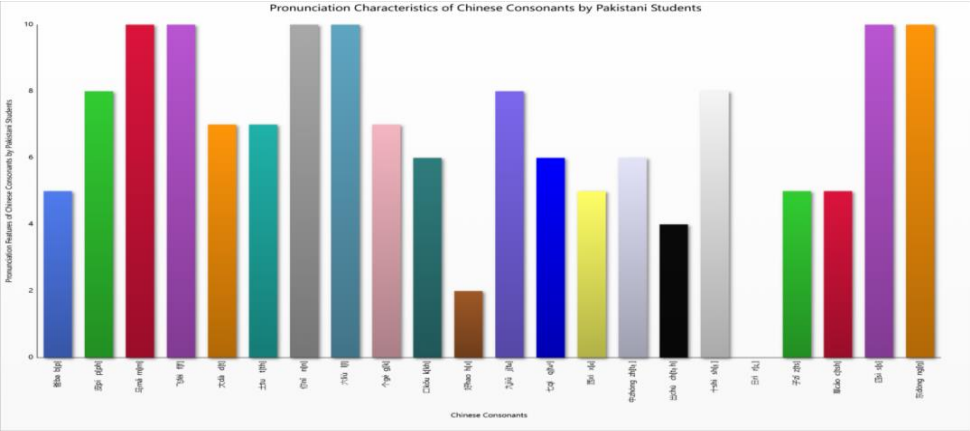

***Figure 1*: Pronunciation Characteristics of Chinese Consonants by Pakistani Students**

Based on the evaluation of audio recordings of 22 Chinese consonants from 10 Pakistani learners, the following articulatory error patterns were observed:

i. The consonants b[p],d[t],g[k], and z[ts] are consistently pronounced as their voiced equivalents [b], [d], [g], and [ʒ]/[z] respectively.

ii. The aspirated consonants like p[p^h],t[t^h],k[k^h],c[ts^h],ch[tʂ^h], and q[tɕ^h] are pronounced with insufficient or weak aspiration.

iii. The consonant h[x] is systematically mispronounced as [h] or [χ].

iv. The consonant r[ʐ] is produced as a trill sound.

v. Systematic articulatory confusion is noticed between the consonant pairs zh[tʂ]/j[tɕ], ch[tʂ^h]/q[tɕ^h], and sh[ʂ]/x[ɕ].

Identical written form is a primary factor influencing pronunciation. Both Chinese Pinyin and English use the Latin alphabet as their orthography, while in daily life, Latin letters are also commonly used to write Urdu (e.g., in text messages). Phonetic comparison is unavoidable in the process of language learning, and similarity in background act as the basis for such comparisons. Error patterns one to four concern cases where the writing symbols are the same but the pronunciations are not exactly identical. A defining characteristic of Urdu and English is the distinction between voiced and voiceless sounds, while Chinese mainly distinguishes between aspirated and unaspirated sounds. In this context, Chinese exhibits a one-to-one correspondence with both Urdu and English.

Particularly in error feature one, both Urdu and English possess a transfer influence resulting in the voicing of Chinese voiceless consonants b[p],d[t],g[k], and z[ts]. Interviews showed that students make such errors due to the following reasons: 1.The same written forms yet different phonetic features result in voicing phenomena; 2.In Urdu and English, these consonant are voiced, whereas in Chinese the same consonant forms are voiceless. For example, students often pronounce (爸father) bà [pä^{51}] as [bä^{51}]. Thus, it is clear that both languages lead to negative transfer in this aspect.

In error feature two, Pakistani learners of Chinese often produce insufficient airflow when pronouncing the aspirated consonants p[p^{h}],t[t^{h}],k[k^{h}],c[ts^{h}],ch[ʈʂ^{h}], and q[tɕ^{h}], tend to pronounce them as unaspirated sounds. For example, representative examples include pronouncing (突sudden) tū[t^{h}u^{55}] as dū[tu^{55}] and (口mouth) kǒu[k^{h}oʊ^{214}] as [koʊ^{214}]. Interviews show that this error is mainly caused because the written forms of these aspirated consonants in Chinese are identical to those of unaspirated consonants in English, while the main difference is found in the aspirated feature of the Chinese consonants. This shows that English may create negative transfer in this aspect. It is important to note that this error was only found in the recordings of four students, while the other six students did not demonstrate it. This is probably because Urdu comprises aspirated consonants with identical phonetic features, showing that Urdu may create positive transfer in this aspect.

In Error Feature Three, the Chinese fricative consonant h[x] inherently exhibits multifaceted phonetic characteristics, falls under the category of "multi-phoneme" consonants in Chinese. For example, in many words, it is pronounced as [χ] or [h]; however, there is no clear criteria for when or in which words a specific allophone should be used. This consonant is one of the most difficult consonants to acquire. In this survey, the word used for analysis was (好 Good) hǎo [xɑʊ^{214}], and around 80% of the participants pronounced it as [χ] or [h]. The reasons for this may be: first, the written form is identical to that in English, but differences in the place or manner of articulation may cause the errors; second, the notably complex allophonic variations of h[x] make it difficult to decide which language's consonant system influences the transfer effect in this aspect.

In Error Feature Four, the Chinese consonant r[ʐ] is a retroflex voiced fricative without aspiration. However, the consonant denoted by the same written form in both Urdu and English is [r], which is predominantly characterized as a trill. On the contrary, the Chinese r[ʐ] possesses no trill quality whatsoever. Analysis of the audio data reveals that 100% of the participants featured similar pronunciation errors in this aspect. In this case, Chinese shows in a one-to-one correspondence with both Urdu and English, with no clear discrimination in the strength of transfer influence from either language.

Error Feature Five refers to the Perceptual Assimilation Model, which proposes that phonetic confusion in the target language is influenced by perceptual equivalence of speech sounds. Learners are inclined to analogize the phonetic sounds of the target language with acoustically similar phonemes from their preexisting phonetic experience. Based on interview data, it was observed that learners compared similar consonants in the target language, causing to the assimilation of zh[tʂ]/j[tɕ], ch[tʂʰ]/q[tɕʰ], and sh[ʂ]/x[ɕ], respectively. Perceptual assimilation is caused by the close articulatory positions or methods of the target language sounds themselves and does not create any cross-linguistic phonetic transfer.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of pronunciation errors among Pakistani learners of Chinese language, the following conclusions can be recapitulated from the standpoints of transfer influences from Urdu and English:

5.1. Transfer Influence of Urdu

The influence of Urdu possesses a distinct bidirectional nature, comprising both positive and negative transfer influence. Positive transfer influence is mainly manifested in the acquisition of aspirated consonants. Since Urdu has consonants with phonetic features same to those of Chinese aspirated stops/affricates (e.g., [pʰ],[tʰ],[kʰ]), it offers an accurate pronunciation model for most learners, significantly permitting the acquisition of these phonemes and minimizing errors related to insufficient aspiration.

Urdu's Negative transfer influence mainly observed in two areas: voicing effects and the pronunciation of r[ʐ]. Firstly, because the Urdu consonants corresponding to the letters b, d, g, and z are voiced, learners often voice the corresponding voiceless consonants in Chinese. Secondly, the Urdu trill consonant [r] shares the same written form (text form) as the Chinese retroflex fricative r[ʐ], but their articulation methods are different. This difference leads to a systematic error where learners pronounce r[ʐ] with a trilled quality.

5.2. Transfer Influence of English

The influence of English is largely asymmetrical and negative. It conflicts with Chinese in two main phonetic features: voicing and aspiration, thereby impeding with learning. In English, the corresponding sounds for letters like b, d, and g are voiced consonants, which directly causes learners to voice the corresponding voiceless consonants in Chinese. Meanwhile, although English plosives (p, t, k) are aspirated voiceless sounds in word-start position, their aspiration strength is usually weaker than in Chinese. Additionally, their written forms are identical to those of the unaspirated Chinese consonants b[p],d[t], and g[k]. This notable difference between form and phonetic feature makes some learners to produce Chinese aspirated sounds (such as p, t, k) with insufficient aspiration or to mispronounce them as their unaspirated counterparts.

5.3. Comprehensive Impact and Internal Confusion

Common Negative Transfer: Regarding the voicing bias (error feature one), the consonant system characteristics of Urdu and English are consistent, both contradicting those of Chinese. Therefore, they jointly produce a strong negative transfer.

Unclear Transfer Influence: The variation in producing Mandarin h[x] (error feature three) shows an unclear transfer source. This is due to the elemental complexity of its allophony in Chinese, coupled with the existence of phonetically similar sounds ([h] or [χ]) in both Urdu and English, making it difficult to identify a dominant transfer origin.

Perceptual Assimilation: The confusion between zh/j, ch/q, sh/x (error feature five) drives primarily from their internal phonological similarity within the Chinese consonant sound system. This represents a clear case of perceptual assimilation and is not directly caused by cross-linguistic transfer from Urdu or English.

In summary, Urdu generates both positive and negative influences on the phonetic acquisition of Pakistani learners of Chinese, But the impact of English is mainly characterized by negative transfer. The two languages coincide in their influence regarding the feature of voicing, thereby strengthening negative transfer. In contrast, their effects differ on the feature of aspiration, with the positive transfer from Urdu partially counteracting the interference from English. Furthermore, the internal phonetic similarities within the target language system also serve as a significant factor contributing to specific confusion errors.

6. Teaching Recommendations

In teaching, teachers should masterfully leverage the similarities among the three languages to mitigate the negative learning effect on Pakistani students' learning of Chinese consonants.In teaching Chinese consonants, teachers should fully exploit students' existing phonetic knowledge to create a positive learning effect. Specifically, they can utilize:

- Consonants are common in all three languages (e.g., m[m], f[f], etc.)
- The resemblance between Urdu aspirated consonants and Chinese aspirated consonants (e.g., [p^h] to [p^h])

These points can effectively help students in learning the Chinese consonants. In terms of articulation, the focus should be on distinguishing aspirated and unaspirated consonants, and, when necessary, the teacher should clarify the difference between voiceless and voiced consonants. Teachers can use demonstration techniques (as described in Zhao Jinming's Introduction to Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language), such as slowing down the speech rate, expanding mouth movements, or using a piece of paper to demonstrate airflow when teaching aspirated sounds. By using a clear demonstration method, students can observe and imitate, thereby learning correct pronunciation.

Teachers can also use the comparative method in teaching. Through the comparison, teachers can clarify key differences, for example:

- By comparing the phonetic systems of Urdu and English with Chinese, such as showing the phonetic difference between the Chinese r[ʐ] and the Urdu [r].
- By conducting intra-linguistic comparison within the Chinese phonological system itself, such as clarifying the characteristics of aspiration features between b, d, g, and p, t, k, and clarifying the distinctions in places of articulation among j, q, x, zh, ch, sh, and z, c, s.

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The Ecology of Evaluation Stories: Good and Bad Climate Stories in Weather Reporting

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Abstract

Language ecology views language as part of a dynamic system in which meanings emerge through interaction with social and environmental realities. This research aims to analyze how "good" and "bad" evaluative language in weather reports form opinions of people. The study used qualitative ecolinguistic examination based on Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) within the Six Stories We Live By framework (Stibbe, 2015). The study carries out the thorough textual analysis of 300 weather reports of five news agencies i.e. Al-Jazeera, British Broadcasting Corporation, Cable News Network, Deutsche Welle, and G News Network. Close reading was used as the primary analytical method, with repeated readings to identify and refine evaluative patterns in weather reports using Appraisal Theory. Findings suggest that CNN and BBC depend on highly dramatic, fear-provoking assessments that uphold disastrous ecological stories. Contrariwise, DW and GNN implement an ambivalent evaluation pattern of emphasis, which transgresses economic effects or institutional awareness but does not involve underlying environmental structures. Al Jazeera has a relatively reflective tone, which at times attributes unusual weather to being rare and institutionally relevant, which is directed to a more positive story. The result shows that CNN and BBC predominantly construct bad evaluative climate narratives, DW and GNN rely mainly on neutral institutional and economic evaluations, while Al Jazeera more frequently employs good, ecocentric evaluations that acknowledge climatic irregularity and collective responsibility. The findings have implications for Sustainable Development Goal 13 (Climate Action) through media evaluations that influence public perceptions of climate-related events.

1. Introduction

From historical, cultural, and developmental perspectives, language emerges before science. Scientific knowledge itself is shaped through language, as scientists rely on linguistic systems to categorise, describe, and interpret phenomena that are assumed to exist independently of naming (Harris, 2005). Since language shapes how reality is perceived and organised, it also plays a central role in how knowledge systems develop. This understanding provides the foundation for language ecology, which may be defined as;

> "Language ecology may be defined as the study of interactions between any given language and its environment. The true environment of a language is the society that uses it as one of its codes. Language exists only in the minds of its users, and it only functions in relating these users to one another and to nature, i.e. their social and natural environment. Part of its ecology is therefore psychological: its interaction with other languages in the minds of bi- and multilingual speakers. Another part of its ecology is sociological: its interaction with the society in which it functions as a medium of communication. The ecology of a language is determined primarily by the people who learn it, use it, and transmit it to others" (Haugen, 1972, p. 325).

Since Haeckel (1866) definition of ecology as the study of organism–environment relationships, ecology has developed into a core field of biology concerned with life at the supra-organismic level. It focuses on populations whose interactions form integrated systems with their environment. Although biolinguistics claims to deal with the biological foundations of human language (Bickerton, 2014).

As environmental crises intensify and climate anomalies become more frequent, the linguistic framing of environmental conditions has become a central factor in shaping ecological awareness. Environmental communication is not a neutral process; rather, it functions as a channel for the circulation of values, ideologies, and perceptual frameworks through which environmental realities are interpreted (Zhu, 2024). Daily weather reporting constitutes a significant yet often overlooked form of environmental communication. Such reports frequently employ evaluative language—terms such as *pleasant*, *severe*, and *life-threatening*—that extend beyond the mere description of atmospheric conditions. These lexical choices embed judgments and value positions. They influence how audiences perceive not only immediate weather events but also the broader environmental systems in which these phenomena are situated (Martin & White, 2005; Stibbe, 2021).

> "The dissatisfaction with everyday weather might also encourage people to fly abroad on low-cost airlines to chase the Sun. Travel companies and newspapers are quick to take advantage of (and further entrench) the evaluation sunny weather is good in order to encourage them to do so." (Stibbe, 2021, p. 93)

While extensive research has focused on the metaphorical and framing strategies in climate discourse, relatively little attention has been given to evaluation as a discursive mechanism in weather communication. Yet, evaluation—a key dimension in the appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005)—plays a crucial role in constructing emotional responses and assigning value to both human and nonhuman elements of the environment. Stibbe (2021), in his ecolinguistic framework The Stories We Live By, identifies evaluation as one of nine

central discursive strategies that underpin destructive, ambivalent, or beneficial ecological worldviews. The repetitive use of positive evaluative terms for ecologically problematic conditions (e.g., beautiful sunny days during droughts or fine weather amidst heatwaves) illustrates how language may normalize or even glorify climatic conditions that contribute to long-term environmental harm. "Evaluations are stories in people's minds about whether an area of life is good or bad. Appraisal patterns are clusters of linguistic features which come together to represent an area of life as good or bad" (Stibbe, 2021, p. 79). Appraisal is concerned with evaluation – the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned (Martin and Rose 2007, p. 63).

This article discusses a significant vacuum in the literature that describes ecolinguistic studies: the organizational examination of evaluative language in the casual exchange of comments about weather. Although metaphor and framing have been well-documented, the ideological work of the evaluation, the way in which it defines nature as being friendly or hostile, perfect or dangerous, have not yet been put under close examination within the framework of weather reports (Sullivan & Li, 2021). This paper, thus, reduces its scope of the analysis to evaluation as a discursive instrument, as it is used to build ecologies (or anti-ecologies) within the weather reports.

In this respect, evaluation is to be taken to mean the ascribing of value to environmental phenomena, either directly or indirectly. It takes the form of affective (emotional responses) dimensions and appreciation (attributions of value or importance) and tends to work behind the scenes of supposed objectively observed phenomena (Martin & White, 2005). As an example, the praising of sunny weather in British media is culturally normative, using such terms as stunning, lovely, or fine, even in the cases of climate pressure, such as heatwaves (Stibbe, 2021). These values laden terms are used to enforce human centric preferences and comfort largely to the costs of ecological sensitivity, resilience or consciousness. They are ideological clues which are discreet and potent in shaping the attitude of the people towards the environment.

The present paper draws on and develops the theories behind the debate of ecolinguistics through the analysis of the evaluative aspects of weather reporting and their correspondence with that of the greater narratives of ecology. More precisely, it would comprise such questions as whether language, through its use in weather reports, helps to advance anthropocentric worldviews, i.e. focus on human experience and economic comfort, or develop ecosophical sensibilities, i.e. care, justice, and interconnectedness with the environment (Naess, 1994; Stibbe, 2021). For the clarification of this question, the research will be seeking answers to the question of whether weather reporting restructure is a bet on maintaining an ecological form of ignorance or a site of ecological education in itself.

The available empirical studies have implied the possibility of local weather communication affecting climate knowledge. As in the case of Maibach et al. (2021), who discovered that weathercasters, who managed to incorporate the issue of climate change into the regular forecast, were more successful at building environmental awareness, even among climate skeptics. The observations support the pedagogical opportunities of weather talk, and consequently, of evaluative language as the means of creating an environment-related cognitive and emotional frame. Furthermore, as indicated by environmental psychology studies, public risk perception is largely determined by the presence of a theme in the media and of an evaluative tone (Chung, 2011; Wachinger et al., 2013). Introducing this

understanding to weather reporting, it becomes clear that the recitative evaluative language may be used as the strategic tool of either supporting the denial or developing ecological concern. Likewise, Stibbe (2021) explains;

> "When a company's profits go up, this is almost universally reported positively by the media in line with the cultural evaluation profit is good, no matter how ecologically damaging or unnecessary the products produced by the company. When the luxury car manufacturer Jaguar made a record profit, the BBC news website reported this with positive appraising items such as 'resurgence', 'increase', 'success', 'fantastic', 'highest', 'achieved', 'benefitting' and 'remarkable'". (p. 86)

Within the philosophical velocity of ecosophy, of which a personal and communal dedication to the environmental rationale (Naess, 1990; Stibbe, 2021), the given investigation examines whether appreciation and evaluation patterns in weather reports contribute to the subordination or any disruption of toxic ideologies of consumerism, anthropocentricism and environmental apathy. Of central interest is whether it is possible to reframe the evaluative framing of weather discourse in the process of creating empathies around ecological and nonhuman inclusivity and interdependence.

1.1. Research Objective

- To examine how evaluative choices in weather reporting contribute to the construction of ecocentric and anthropocentric worldviews.

1.2. Research Question

- How do evaluative choices in weather reporting shape ecocentric and anthropocentric worldviews?

The paper analyzes 300 articles on weather reporting existing in five major media organizations in the world and regions i.e. CNN (USA), BBC (UK), DW (Germany), Al Jazeera (Qatar), and GNN (Pakistan) between June 1, 2024 and July 31, 2025. The study uses a qualitative analytical methodology based on the model of ecolinguistics Stibbe (2015, 2021). This classifies the evaluative language offered in terms of their compatibility with the destructive, ambivalent and beneficial ecological discourses. Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) offers a systematic framework for analysing evaluative meaning in discourse. This states how language encodes attitudes, negotiates viewpoints, and amplifies or downplays significance. Through its three systems—Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation—it enables the identification of how weather reporting frames climatic events as good, bad, or neutral, and how such evaluations function as what Stibbe (2021) terms *evaluation stories*. As a result, this presents anthropocentric or ecocentric understandings of the natural world.

2. Literature Review

An interdisciplinary literature has increased in size arguing that there is no such thing as a neutral language used in environmental communication; language has been argued to be ideological in its purpose and can be applied in shaping environmental consciousness in relation to ethical orientations, perceptions of risk (Martin & White, 2005; Stibbe, 2021). In this linguistic ecology evaluation, in the sense of positive or negative evaluation, expression of feeling or of the appreciation of something, becomes a key resource of discursive

criticality. It systematizes perception of the environmental phenomena and consequently the way in which the phenomena are reacted to. Evaluative language does not, therefore, simply work as a stylistic feature, but also acts as a means of creating environmental ideologies, especially when it tries to approach weather reports as a genre in which judgments may be slipped into the descriptions that supposedly have been objective.

Whereas metaphor and framing have been received a significant amount of scholarly attention in relation to climate discourse (Lakoff, 2010), evaluation has not been explored yet despite being a central concept when it comes to narrative construction. As an example, in the case of New Zealand and conflicting attitudes to rivers (Tadaki et al., 2024) discusses how two mutually exclusive frames of river (taonga or resource) produce strikingly different expectations and policy impacts. Such comparative judgments are not merely linguistic but cultural, which determine the management of the environmental quality as well as the moral agency of societies. By confirming the necessity to prioritize evaluation as a means to consolidate the language of the environment and the concept of environmental justice, their findings will be regarded as a valuable contribution.

Environmental news from Aljazeera, BBC, CNN, DW, and GNN has been analyzed from a corpus-assisted ecolinguistic perspective to explore how anthropocentric and ecocentric viewpoints are constructed through language. The study demonstrates that news discourse often privileges anthropocentric perspectives. It emphasizes human impacts and immediate concerns, while ecocentric perspectives appear less frequently. These framing shapes readers' understanding of environmental issues and influences the prominence given to sustainability and ecological awareness (Saleem & Rehman, 2025).

Likewise, Johnstone and Stickles (2024) critically review what they call climate doomism, that is, an excessive focus on apocalyptic judgment in green media. Although referring to irreversible collapse or climate apocalypse sounds good to create awareness, it also causes emotional exhaustion, fatalism, and shrinkage in society. Such assessments discourage long-term stewardship of the environment unless one has a counter-weight of hope or agency. Hauser and Fleming (2021) are also inclined towards discouraging the use of militarized metaphor (e.g., climate war, nature strikes back), stating that these rhetorical tactics do encourage early-stage panic but deter eco-long-term devotion. Collectively, these studies signal on the moral stature of assessive calibration toward constructive environmental attitudes.

The importance of positive ecological assessment also could be attested to in the context of the multimodal study of environmental campaigns by Hidalgo-Downing, and O'Dowd (2023). They found that although drama metaphors (e.g. invasion of the oceans) might be the way to attract attention, only when evaluation leads to the sense of shared responsibility and systemic possibility, does change in behavior and ecoliteracy actually occur. The insights presented here are particularly pertinent to the area of the weather talk, as most of the alarmist names such as freak storm, killer heatwave, or merciless drought are frequently used without ecological references or constructive orientation.

Passing through practical to theoretical levels, Augé (2023) suggests another approach, which is what she terms as evaluative aptness, the controlled use of language so that communication can match ecosophy ideas of collaboration, difference, and sustainability. She juxtaposes expressions that are emotionally dense and system-specific (e.g., the Earth is a common home, the atmosphere is a protective veil) and those that are technocratic and

militaristic (e.g., the climate fight, defensive infrastructure) which effectively downgrade ecological systems to an object of operation by humans. The intervention by Aug and its application of weather discourse is especially helpful when one immediately thinks of comfort being promoted by humans at the cost of the complexity of the environment.

Indeed, comparative and corpus-based studies also indicate the role of evaluation in the determination of the ecological meaning across contexts and media genres. Döring (2018) demonstrates that evaluative decisions in reporting of disasters, such as when they are described as merciless floods or unprecedented droughts, contribute to spreading fear among the public and serve to conceal the structural reasons behind living in a vulnerable situation. Similarly, Jabeen (2024) states that the adverse judgement in environmental media will be devoid of systemic ecological facets on which there will be distorted perceptions of the environmental crises. According to Poole (2024), evaluation should be a part of eco-pedagogy in that it would allow students to question emotional and ideological premises of environmental texts and, thereby, create ecoliteracy. Further study explores the types of talk within the British English context and demonstrates how environmental issues are ignored most of the time in the form of jokes and careless attitudes, and, therefore, even the reality built upon the casual assessment can diminish the eco-severity (Wijitsopon, 2025).

The discourse produced around the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was examined through a corpus-based ecosophical analysis. It reveals a strong emphasis on economic progress and national development while ecological balance and environmental sustainability remain largely backgrounded (Faraz et al., 2024). On the same note, Faraz and Saleem (2024) assess the ecolinguistic features of the CPEC-related discourse through the corpus-assisted study and discover that the economic assessment always dominates over the ecological and social assessment. Out of the 14 development frames that they find, economic frame is frequent, whereas environmental sustainability is highly underrepresented. The results of their research show an evaluative imbalance of the reflection of the trends in a fashion on the weather: the condition of the environment is sacrificed to convenience and humanity at the cost of lifelong evolution. Sometimes, western criteria of media evaluation are simply brought to Pakistani environments and fail to integrate with local ecologies or local knowledge which leads to yet another form of ideological alienation. This underlines what Stibbe (2021) describes as the disappearance of the local ecological politics within globalized discourse.

At the policy level, Yang and Sun (2025) offer a case study of the strategic use of evaluation in use of the microblog by the Chinese government. By systematically invoking the positively charged expressions positive ecological assessments, including harmonious development, co-fate and mutual prosperity, the slogan Life Community of Humans and Nature gets institutionalized into discourse. Their results highlight the possibility of evaluation developing and becoming an instrument of institutionalizing ecosophical values.

A combination of these studies validates the point that evaluative language not only captures but plays an active role in the setting of ideologies in the environment. According to Stibbe (2021), evaluation is a significant clue on whether discourse upholds negative, ambivalent or positive ecological tales. There are empirical grounds to scrutinise evaluation especially in routine genres like weather reporting since ideological assumptions have a way of being naturalised by exerting repetitive effects. It takes a constitutive form in normalizing some aspects of environmental experiences (e.g., warm weather as comfortable) and marginalizing

others (e.g. the presence of drought as a systematic threat), thereby influencing how people think and how they may behave (i.e., politically).

In Pakistani context, the consequences of evaluative framing are even more dominant. Climate change in Pakistani media was examined through an ecolinguistic analysis of *Dawn* climate reports published between 2020 and 2025. The findings indicate that environmental issues are generally framed in scientific and impact-oriented terms, with limited emphasis on responsibility, systemic causes, and transformative ecological action (Saleem & Khan, 2025). Such words as deadly, crippling, catastrophic are all over the story, and it is mentioned that nature is an enemy or victim, but seldom as an interdependent system that needs care. In spite of the fact that their study focuses on semiotic approaches, it reveals the shortcomings of evaluative framing as a means to developing ecological consciousness.

Weather reports were examined from a linguistic-ecosophic perspective, showing that media discourse largely foregrounds immediate impacts and risks while marginalizing ecological interconnections, long-term responsibility, and sustainability-oriented meanings (Saleem & Rehman, 2025). In general, the analyzed literature strongly appeals to the requirement of the ecolinguistic research to focus on evaluation stories (Stibbe, 2021). The ideological work of evaluation in environmental discourse—especially in normalized genres such as weather reporting—demands critical attention. This study builds on that foundation to examine 300 weather reports from five influential news outlets: BBC, CNN, DW, Al Jazeera, and GNN. This study aims to analyze how "good" and "bad" evaluative language in weather reports contribute to the construction of ecocentric and anthropocentric worldviews. By focusing specifically on evaluation, this research seeks to expand the scope of ecolinguistic inquiry and contribute to a more ethically reflexive, ecologically grounded model of environmental communication.

3. Research Methodology

The present study follows a qualitative ecolinguistic approach that rests on the concept of Stories We Live By (Stibbe, 2015, 2021). Three hundred weather reports were manually selected as a purposive sample of five leading news outlets in the international and national news market, and those were: CNN (USA), BBC (UK), DW (Germany), Al Jazeera (Qatar), and GNN (Pakistan). These reports occurred during the period between June 1, 2024 and July 31, 2025 and they are regular everyday weather reports. The purpose of selection was to maximize the variety regarding the geopolitical, cultural, and linguistic settings and at the same time keeping the selection within the frame of regular weather reports. This study adopts a qualitative close-reading approach in which weather reports were analysed manually using Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005). Close reading was employed as the primary analytical procedure. Each weather report was read multiple times to ensure a systematic and theory-driven analysis. The first reading focused on understanding the overall meaning and narrative structure of the report. The second reading involved identifying evaluative language in line with Appraisal Theory i.e. resources of Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. A third reading was conducted to confirm and refine the initial coding. This iterative reading process enabled a nuanced interpretation of evaluative patterns. These linguistic evaluations were then interpreted through Stibbe's (2015, 2021) concept of

evaluation stories to examine how climate and weather are framed as good or bad. In line with Stibbe's ecolinguistic framework, evaluative expressions were analysed as evaluation stories that construct climate as 'good' or 'bad', enabling the identification of anthropocentric and ecocentric worldviews.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

Evaluation is one of the fundamental linguistic means existing to indicate approval, disapproval, urgency or significance. Stibbe (2021) claims that linguistically assessed events are part of the process shaping ecological relationships because some of them enhance and others deaden emotional involvement. Evaluation is another of the stories we live by in ecolinguistics because they reiterate the cultural standards imbedded in sentimental or critical language.

4.1. Evaluative Language in the Weather Reporting in CNN

CNN commonly uses evaluative terms of emotion whose bands are higher, i.e., disaster, devastated communities and shocking destruction which it uses to cover extreme weather reports. These expressions evoke an immediate emotional response and underscore the human cost of natural disasters, emphasizing suffering, loss, and unpredictability. Moreover, these evaluations tend to sever the link between natural events and anthropogenic causes. This contributes to a discourse of ecological disempowerment.

Table 1
Evaluation Stories in CNN Weather Reports

Report Excerpt	Evaluative Term(s)	Attitude	Engagement	Graduation	Ecological Implication
"Disaster struck the southern coast again…"	*Disaster*	Appreciation Reaction: *Impact*	Monoglossic (reporter's authoritative voice; no alternative perspectives)	High force (catastrophic framing)	Constructs climate as sudden catastrophe; human-centred risk foregrounded, structural and ecological causes backgrounded (Anthropocentric)
"…devastating entire communities overnight."	*Devastating*	Appreciation Reaction: *Impact*	Monoglossic	High force (totalising effect)	Focuses on human suffering; nature framed as destructive agent rather than part of socio-ecological

					systems (Anthropocentric)
"A violent storm lashes the Gulf region with deadly force."	*Violent, deadly force*	Appreciation Reaction: *Quality*	Monoglossic	Intensified force through metaphor and personification	Anthropomorphises nature as hostile enemy; reinforces human–nature opposition (Anthropocentric)
"The weather turned brutal, as temperatures soared…"	*Brutal*	Appreciation Reaction: *Quality*	Monoglossic	High force (moralised intensity)	Attributes moral aggression to weather; evaluates climate through human pain and discomfort (Anthropocentric)
"An unexpected cold snap freezes livelihoods."	*Unexpected, freezes*	Appreciation Reaction: *Impact*	Monoglossic	Moderate–high force (economic emphasis)	Highlights economic loss; omits climatic patterns and ecological processes (Anthropocentric)

Table 1 illustrates how evaluation stories in weather reporting are linguistically realized. Across all excerpts, evaluation is predominantly encoded through the Attitude system, specifically the subcategory of Appreciation, which is used to judge weather and climate phenomena as inherently bad through terms such as disaster, devastating, violent, brutal, and unexpected. These negative appreciations construct climate as a harmful and disruptive force, primarily in relation to its impact on human communities, livelihoods, and infrastructure. The Engagement system further reinforces this evaluative stance, as the reports are largely monoglossic, presenting these judgements as unchallenged and authoritative, with little inclusion of alternative scientific, ecological, or contextual voices that might reframe extreme weather within broader climate systems or human–environment interactions. Additionally, the Graduation system intensifies these evaluations through high-force lexical choices and metaphoric personification, amplifying emotional responses such as fear, urgency, and alarm. Together, these appraisal resources contribute to the construction of dominant evaluation stories in which climate is repeatedly framed as bad when it disrupts human life, thereby reproducing an anthropocentric worldview while marginalising ecocentric perspectives that would foreground ecosystem processes, long-term environmental balance, or shared human–nonhuman vulnerability.

4.2. Evaluative Language in DW Weather Reporting

In Stibbe's (2021) terms, this mode of evaluation reflects ambivalent (neutral) stories: it acknowledges environmental degradation and disturbance, but only in so far as it affects human functioning. Ecological systems are not evaluated on their own terms (e.g., biodiversity loss, ecosystem damage), but in monetary or demographic terms—thus promoting a weak form of ecological awareness that may inform but rarely transform.

Table 2
Evaluative Language in DW Weather Reports

Report Excerpt	Evaluative Term(s)	Attitude	Engagement	Graduation	Ecological Implication
"The floods caused a huge economic hit to the agriculture sector."	*Huge economic hit*	Appreciation Reaction: Impact	Monoglossic	High force (*huge*)	Frames nature primarily as an economic variable; ecological damage is subordinated to financial loss (Anthropocentric)
"Germany faced its most affected year due to extreme weather."	*Most affected*	Appreciation Reaction: Impact	Monoglossic	Superlative intensification	Emphasises human severity through comparison; lacks ecological agency or systemic climate explanation (Anthropocentric)
"Damage was estimated in the billions."	*Damage, billions*	Appreciation Valuation	Monoglossic	Quantitative intensification	Reduces climate impact to monetary metrics; ecological degradation rendered invisible (Anthropocentric)
"Insurance losses broke	*Losses, records broken*	Appreciation Valuation	Monoglossic	Extreme force (record-breaking)	Constructs climate as a threat to economic

previous records."					systems; reinforces risk-based, market-centred worldview (Anthropocentric)
"At least 1.2 million residents displaced due to prolonged drought."	*Displaced, 1.2 million*	Appreciation Reaction: Impact	Monoglossic	Numerical amplification	Human suffering foregrounded through statistics; ecological causes and non-human impacts omitted (Anthropocentric)

Table 2 demonstrates how economy-centred evaluation stories in weather reporting are realised through the combined operation of the Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation systems of Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005). Evaluative meanings are predominantly encoded through Attitude, specifically Appreciation, where climate and weather phenomena are repeatedly assessed as *bad* in terms of their economic and social impact, using expressions such as *huge economic hit*, *most affected*, and *damage estimated in the billions*. These valuations construct climate events primarily as financial and human crises rather than ecological processes. The Engagement system is largely monoglossic, presenting these evaluations as factual and uncontested, with no alternative ecological or scientific voices that might situate floods, droughts, or extreme weather within broader climate systems or long-term environmental change. At the same time, the Graduation system intensifies evaluation through superlatives, numerical quantification, and record-breaking comparisons, amplifying perceptions of severity while reinforcing a cost-based logic. Collectively, these appraisal patterns form dominant evaluation stories in which climate is understood as *bad* insofar as it disrupts economies, insurance systems, and human populations, thereby reproducing a strongly anthropocentric worldview that marginalizes ecocentric perspectives concerned with ecosystem health, biodiversity loss, and human–environment interdependence.

4.3. GNN Evaluative Language

The example of GNN (G News Network) a major Pakistani broadcaster shows the high level of ambivalence in term of evaluative style in the weather reports. This two-fold appeal to positive reassurance and institutional alerts is what generates a discursive tension; a form of mixed messaging that makes it difficult to understand the risk to the environment. This ambivalence corresponds with the category of stories formulated by Stibbe (2015, 2021), who refers to ambivalent discourses, the discourses which do not explicitly engage in the preservation of ecological understanding but also do not actively discredit it. In a different manner.

Table 3
Evaluative Language in GNN Weather Reports

Report Excerpt	Evaluative Term(s)	Attitude	Engagement	Graduation	Ecological Implication
"The weather remained dry and comfortable in most parts of the country today."	*Dry, comfortable*	Appreciation Reaction: Quality	Monoglossic	Mild positive force	Frames weather as bodily comfort; normalises dryness and marginalises its ecological consequences (e.g., water stress) (Anthropocentric)
"Authorities have issued a rain alert for upper regions."	*Rain alert*	Judgement (Institutional action) Appreciation	Heteroglossic (authority voice invoked)	Moderate force	Emphasises institutional control and preparedness; ecological causes such as deforestation or land-use change are backgrounded (Anthropocentric)
"Visibility improved following yesterday's dusty conditions."	*Improved visibility*	Appreciation Reaction: Impact	Monoglossic	Positive adjustment	Evaluates weather through human convenience and safety; ignores environmental sources such as pollution or land degradation (Anthropocentric)
"Temperatures will dip slightly over the weekend."	*Dip slightly*	Appreciation Reaction: Quality	Monoglossic	Down-scaled force (*slightly*)	Downplays temperature variation; frames change as minor and normal, obscuring

					broader climate variability (Anthropocentric)
"No major changes expected in weather over the coming days."	*No major changes*	Appreciation Valuation (Stability)	Monoglossic	Softened evaluation	Constructs stability and routine; obscures gradual climatic transformation and long-term ecological trends (Anthropocentric)

Table 3 highlights how good, bad, and neutral evaluation stories in weather reporting are linguistically apprehended. Evaluative meanings are primarily expressed through Appreciation, where weather conditions are assessed as *good* or *unproblematic* in terms of human comfort, safety, and routine, using expressions such as *comfortable*, *improved*, *dip slightly*, and *no major changes*. These evaluations construct climate as benign when it aligns with everyday human expectations. The Engagement system is largely monoglossic, with limited inclusion of ecological or scientific perspectives, except in cases where institutional voices are invoked, such as in the issuance of rain alerts. Even then, attention is directed toward administrative response rather than environmental causation. The Graduation system further contributes to this normalising effect by down-scaling change through mitigating expressions like *slightly* and *no major*, which soften the perception of variability and reinforce a sense of stability. Collectively, these appraisal patterns form evaluation stories in which climate is understood as *good* or *neutral* when it maintains human comfort and predictability, thereby reproducing an anthropocentric worldview that obscures ecological processes, long-term climatic shifts, and human–environment interdependence. GNN uses language that is evaluative and presents a lost opportunity that could have been used as environmental communicating. It is more of a perception management discourse, which serves to privatize attitudes toward climate change, rather than intent on building public knowledge or encouraging the mobilization of people to act on climate change.

4.4. Evaluative Languages used in BBC

Extreme weather in the BBC counters with highly intense evaluative language. The words like treacherous, life-threatening, relentless storms and brutal cold also feature in it. Though these adjectives fulfil the role of journalism in dramatizing the situations and making audiences alert. They also depict a hostile relation with nature as a threat, unpredictable, and ready to attack. This context is also linked to the concept of destructive stories (Stibbe, 2015, 2021) a threat, rather than a partner in the interdependence view of the natural world.

Table 4
Evaluative Language in BBC Weather Reports

Report Excerpt	Evaluative Term(s)	Attitude	Engagement	Graduation	Ecological Implication
"The region is bracing for treacherous ice and winds."	*Treacherous*	Appreciation Reaction: Quality	Monoglossic	Intensified negative force	Personifies nature as deceptive and dangerous; foregrounds unpredictability while backgrounding ecological causes (Anthropocentric)
"This life-threatening cold snap could linger through the weekend."	*Life-threatening*	Appreciation Reaction: Impact	Monoglossic	Extreme force (existential threat)	Constructs weather as lethal to humans; positions people as passive victims of an external natural threat (Anthropocentric)
"A relentless downpour continues to batter northern England."	*Relentless, batter*	Appreciation Reaction: Quality	Monoglossic	High force through militarised metaphor	Frames nature as an aggressive enemy; obscures climate systems and human contributions (Anthropocentric)
"Rescue services respond to brutal weather overnight."	*Brutal*	Appreciation Reaction: Quality	Monoglossic	High force, emotive framing	Emphasises emergency response and human suffering; erases ecological causality and long-term environmental context (Anthropocentric)
"Emergency declared as deadly storm moves in from the Atlantic."	*Deadly, emergency*	Appreciation Reaction: Impact	Heteroglossic (institutional authority invoked)	Extreme intensification	Supports crisis and authority narratives; discourages systemic or ecological interpretations (Anthropocentric)

Table 4 demonstrates how fear-based evaluation stories in weather reporting are constructed through the interaction of the Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Evaluative meanings are primarily realised through Attitude, specifically negative Appreciation, where weather and climate phenomena are repeatedly characterised as *bad* through terms such as *treacherous*, *life-threatening*, *relentless*, *brutal*, and *deadly*. These evaluations attribute hostile and violent qualities to nature, often through militarised or personifying metaphors, which construct weather as an aggressive external force acting upon vulnerable human populations. The Engagement system is predominantly monoglossic, presenting these fear-laden judgements as self-evident and uncontested, although institutional voices are occasionally introduced to legitimise emergency responses and reinforce crisis framing. At

the same time, the Graduation system intensifies evaluation through extreme force and emotive escalation, amplifying alarm, urgency, and panic. Together, these appraisal patterns generate dominant evaluation stories in which climate is understood as *bad* because it threatens human safety and control, thereby reinforcing a strongly anthropocentric worldview that marginalises ecological processes, systemic climate causality, and the interdependence of human and non-human life.

4.5. Evaluative Language in the Weather Reporting of Al Jazeera

The evaluative style that Al Jazeera employs is measured but still effective, with words like a rare, unusual, urge and prepare. These dialectical decisions are opposed to dramatized language that is observed in other media. They put the phenomena presented within the environment into the context of more general climate patterns, which enables them to evaluate them in reflective and ethically sound ways.

Terms such as rare direct the attention to the rare patterns in nature ones which imply that the local weather occurrences are related to the bigger pattern's nature such as climate fluctuations or modifications by people. The seriousness exhibited by the institution in the use of urge portrays that it is not in a panic but rather in a position to create room where governance can be active and the citizens can hold its leaders accountable. These kinds of words are so insidious in their ability to amplify a sense of ecological consciousness in that they will cause audiences to realize that environmental distresses are manifestations of systemic ills but not random calamities.

Table 5

Evaluative Language in Al Jazeera Weather Reports

Report Excerpt	Evaluative Term(s)	Attitude	Engagement	Graduation	Ecological Implication
"Authorities urge caution as rare weather event hits Gulf region."	*Rare weather event, urge*	Appreciation Valuation (Unusualness) Judgement (Institutional action)	Heteroglossic (authority voice invoked)	Moderate force	Acknowledges climatic irregularity and seriousness, but frames response through institutional control rather than ecological explanation Weakly ecocentric / predominantly anthropocentric
"Dust storm blankets the city, visibility reduced to near zero."	*Blankets, near zero*	Appreciation Reaction: Impact	Monoglossic	High force (sensory extremity)	Emphasises immediate sensory disruption; omits environmental causality such

					as desertification or land mismanagement (Anthropocentric)
"Rainfall recorded in desert areas for the first time this year."	*First time this year*	Appreciation Valuation (Novelty)	Monoglossic	Mild–moderate force	Frames ecologically significant rainfall as a statistical anomaly; lacks systemic climate interpretation (Anthropocentric with ecocentric potential)
"Unseasonal winds disrupt daily life across multiple provinces."	*Unseasonal, disrupt*	Appreciation Reaction: Impact	Monoglossic	Moderate force	Centres human inconvenience; climatic irregularity is noted but not connected to ecological systems or climate change (Anthropocentric)
"Temperatures dropped unexpectedly, bringing some relief to coastal communities."	*Unexpectedly, relief*	Appreciation Reaction: Quality	Monoglossic	Down-scaled positive force	Evaluates climate in terms of human comfort; abnormality is neutralised through relief framing (Anthropocentric)

Table 5 demonstrates how anomaly-based evaluation stories in weather reporting are constructed with evaluations distributed across bad, neutral, and good value positions. Through the Attitude system, weather events are predominantly evaluated as bad when they are framed as disruptive or risky to human life, as in expressions such as *rare weather event*, *unseasonal winds disrupt*, and *visibility reduced to near zero*, which foreground threat and inconvenience. Neutral evaluations emerge where climatic irregularity is acknowledged but treated as a statistical or temporal deviation, for example in *first time this year*, which marks anomaly without ecological interpretation. Occasional good evaluations appear in terms like

relief, where unexpected temperature drops are positively appraised in relation to human comfort. The Engagement system alternates between monoglossic presentation and heteroglossic attribution to authorities, lending legitimacy to evaluations while steering interpretation toward institutional management rather than ecological explanation. Meanwhile, the Graduation system amplifies negative evaluations through sensory intensification or softens anomaly through down-scaling, thereby shaping whether climatic change is perceived as alarming, routine, or beneficial. Together, these appraisal patterns generate evaluation stories in which climate is predominantly understood as bad when it disrupts human routines, neutral when framed as an unexplained anomaly, and good when it restores comfort—resulting in an overall anthropocentric worldview with only limited scope for ecocentric meaning-making.

5. Findings and Conclusion

The findings reveal significant variation in how evaluative language constructs environmental problems across different media and geopolitical contexts.

5.1. Prevalence of Bad Evaluation

BBC and CNN frequently employed negatively intensified evaluative expressions such as *devastated communities*, *life-threatening cold*, and *treacherous winds*. These bad evaluations dramatize weather events and frame nature as hostile, foregrounding human vulnerability while obscuring ecological causes such as climate change, deforestation, or infrastructural failure. Such patterns correspond to destructive stories that discourage systemic ecological understanding.

5.2. Neutral Evaluation

DW and GNN predominantly relied on institutional and economic assessments, using formulations such as *economic hit*, *alert issued*, and *most affected zones*. These largely neutral evaluations frame weather as a governance or economic issue rather than an ecological one. It reflects ambivalent stories that acknowledge climatic irregularity but externalize environmental responsibility and limit ecological depth.

5.3. Emergence of Good Evaluation

Al Jazeera demonstrated comparatively more ecocentric and context-aware evaluation. It employs expressions such as *rare event*, *unusual patterns*, and appeals that *urge citizens* toward preparedness and conservation. These good evaluations connect weather anomalies to broader climatic systems and collective responsibility. It aligns with beneficial stories that promote ecological awareness, civic engagement, and long-term thinking.

5.4. Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that weather reporting is not neutral; rather, it systematically assigns value to climate events and shaping public perceptions of nature and human–environment relations. Across the dataset, weather is predominantly evaluated as *bad*. CNN and BBC rely heavily on negatively charged evaluative terms such as *devastated*, *life-threatening*, *deadly*, and *treacherous*. These bad evaluations portray the natural world as hostile and threatening, reinforcing destructive stories in which nature is framed as an aggressor and humans as victims, with little reference to ecological causality or climate systems. In contrast, DW and GNN most frequently employ neutral or ambivalent

evaluations. Weather events are described through institutional alerts, economic losses, or routine forecasting language (e.g., *economic hit*, *losses recorded*, *alert issued*, *no major change expected*). While such evaluations avoid overt dramatization, they neither frame climate as *good* nor critically address its ecological significance. As a result, weather is normalized as manageable disruption. It corresponds to ambivalent stories that acknowledge environmental problems without questioning underlying ecological imbalance. Positive (*good*) evaluations appear only selectively and most clearly in Al Jazeera's reporting. Expressions such as *relief*, *rare weather event*, and calls urging preparedness evaluate weather not only in terms of human comfort but also as a meaningful climatic signal. These good or ethically oriented evaluations partially reframe weather events as opportunities for awareness, adaptation, and collective responsibility, aligning with beneficial stories that support more ecocentric worldviews.

Overall, the dominance of *bad* and *neutral* evaluations, alongside the relative absence of sustained *good* ecological evaluations, reveals a critical limitation in contemporary weather reporting. The lack of evaluative language that frames climate within long-term ecological systems, interdependence, and moral responsibility encourages short-term, reactive interpretations and obscures the structural causes of climate instability. This study shows that current weather discourse largely perpetuates harmful evaluation stories by dramatizing risk (*bad*), normalizing disruption (*neutral*), and only rarely fostering ecological care (*good*). These findings suggest that everyday weather discourse plays a significant role in shaping climate awareness and therefore merits closer attention within climate communication aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 13 (Climate Action). This research highlights the ideological role of everyday weather reporting and calls for a shift toward ecologically constructive evaluations that align media communication with principles of ecosophy, ecological justice, and sustainability.

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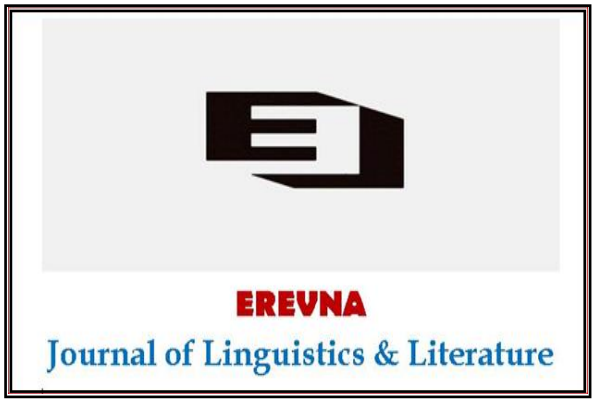

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