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**A COMPARATIVE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PASHTO AND  
ENGLISH TEXTS: A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS  
PERSPECTIVE**



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**Abstract**

*This study is made up by a qualitative comparative discourse analysis in Pashto and English using the Systemic Functional Linguistics to investigate the difference between structure of discourse and role of linguistic and cultural factors to form discourse functions. Based on original texts, which are not translated, this non-translation-oriented analysis uses the Halliday's metafunctional text as the framework to examine the ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings of texts across languages. The results show very clear and consistent cross-linguistic differences in discourse patterns. Pashto texts, especially editorials, are inclined towards emphasizes collective responsibility, moral responsibility and explicit logical order, while the English discourse has a higher concentration on individual agency, rational argumentation and built themed progression. These contrasts have been exhibited in contrast patterns of transitivity, modality, cohesion, information organization, and that discourse construction is culturally and linguistically embedded. By conducting the comparative analysis of language with Systemic Functional Linguistics, the present research is feasibly contributed the discourse research and gives an insight for language education and cross-cultural communication.*

**Keywords:** *Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Pashto, English*

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Language is not a neutral media for communication but a social embedded system through which meaning, social relations and cultural values are built. Discourse studies bring our attention to the fact that texts are shaped by social, cultural, and institutional contexts of their production (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008). Accordingly, discourse is ordered language use that goes beyond the domain of grammar and encompasses organization, stance, evaluation and cohesion. In multilingual societies, such difference in organization of discourse is especially pronounced because speakers of diverse languages employ different linguistic and cultural resources to organize meaning.

Pashto and English are linguistically and culturally divided languages which coexist in educational, media, and public spheres in particular in south Asian contexts. English functions as a global language that is tied to institutional authority, symbolic capital and Pashto is deeply tied to regional identity, cultural traditions, and community values (Hussan et al., 2017; Ali et al., 2020). Despite the interaction, little literature has systematically compared the ways in which these languages construct discourse in similar communicative contexts, because most of the previous studies examined grammatical features, code-switching, and/or attitudes towards these languages rather than discourse on these languages.

Systemic Functional Linguistics advanced by Halliday (1994) has offered a strong framework for analyzing the language as a socially situated meaning making resource. SFL conceptualizes texts on the basis of three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal and textual, which deal respectively with experience, social relations and discourse organization (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). Its reliance on functional meaning and not on formal structure has made it widely applicable in studies of cross-linguistic discourse (Eggins, 2004; Hyland, 2005), making it especially appropriate for the comparative study of Pashto and English discourse.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Although discourse analysis has become significantly developed, the comparative discourse Studies of Pashto are still few. The extant studies on Pashto have focused more on morphosyntactic functionalities, lexical borrowing and educational contexts, and often these studies have not been placed within the wider analysis of discourse (Ali et al., 2016; Akram and Iqbal, 2021). Moreover, studies of Pashto and English language, for example, rarely utilize a holistic view of SFL as a way to systematically investigate the discourse structures and communicative functions according to genres. A further limitation is inadequate attention to the relationship between language structures and cultural orientations and their impact on discourse functions. Agency, modality, cohesion, and thematic organization of linguistic organization may vary between languages, which may significantly impact discourse construction in public and informational texts. The absence of both integrated, functional and comparative research in this area demonstrates the demand for qualitative research on SFL based approaches of Pashto and English in comparable communicative contexts.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

1. How the structures of discourse are different in Pashto and English texts?
2. How linguistic and cultural factors affect discourse in Pashto and English text?

## **1.4 Research Objectives**

1. To investigate the structures of discourse which are different in Pashto and English texts.
2. To find out the linguistic and cultural factors influencing functions of discourse of Pashto and English text.

## **1.5 Significance**

This study is of theoretical and practical importance. Theoretically, it is an extension to a comparative analysis of Pashto and English of Systemic Functional Linguistics' functional account of the relationship between linguistic resources and cultural orientations and their contribution to the structure and meaning of discourses. It also fits into the inadequate learning on Pashto in the field of functional discourse analysis. Practically, the results have implications for language education, media communication and cross-cultural communication processes. Insights on discourse organization and the functional meaning may assist genre based pedagogy in bilingual situations and help educators, journalists, translators, and practitioners of media to facilitate effective and culturally sensitive communication in Pashto and English languages.

### **1.6 Rationale**

The rationale behind this study is that there is an increasing interaction between Pashto and English in shared communicative fields like education, media and public discourse. As English remains to have institutional and symbolic authority alongside Pashto as the central marker of cultural identity and group life, distinctions in various aspects of discourse routines and functional structuring become more salient (Hussan et al., 2017; Rahimi, 2022). A qualitative approach to SFL helps to analyze these differences in depth as it transcends the surface level of grammar and uncovers the cultural and functional principles underlying discourse construction. By looking at both editorial and expository genres, the study is guaranteed to add comparability of the communicative purpose while also making the variation in evaluative and informative discourse. Of all, the aim of the study is to improve the understanding of how linguistic and cultural factors influence the structure and functions of discourse in Pashto and English texts.

## **2. Literature Review**

Discourse analysis conceptualizes the language as a socially situated practice through which the meaning is constructed and institutionalized. Rather than considering language as an autonomous system, discourse-oriented approaches focus on how texts are affected by social context, communication purpose and cultural norms (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008). From this point of view, discourse refers to the patterned use of language that reflects and reinforces social structures and ideologies that makes genres such as editorials and expository texts culturally and institutionally determined, rather than neutral representations of reality.

Editorial discourse has been extensively examined as a genre of evaluation, argumentation and social positioning. Research shows that editorials influence the public's opinion by constructing an authority and moral judgment with the modality, stance, and thematic organization (Hyland, 2005). Expository discourse, despite being often viewed as objective, is also culturally loaded as it organizes cultural assumptions via the organization of knowledge, lexical English choices, and cohesive strategies (Biber et al., 2011). These genre distinctions provide some basis for comparative discourse analysis across languages.

Systemic Functional Linguistics developed by Halliday (1994) provides a sound framework for analyzing discourse "as the socially situated making of meaning". SFL insists on the working of three metafunctions in every text at the same time; namely: ideational, interpersonal and textual. These metafunctions, respectively, deal with the representation of experience, the enactment of social relations and evaluation, and the organization of information into a coherent discourse (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). Because SFL has emphasis on functional meaning rather than formal structure, SFL has been fairly employed in cross-linguistic discourse studies and genre studies (Eggins, 2004; Thompson, 2014).

Cross-cultural discourse studies also serve to explain that discourse patterns differ from language to language as a result of cultural traditions in rhetoric. Foundational work on contrastive rhetoric indicate that the rhetorical patterns of argumentation and thematic development are patterned culturally not universally (Kaplan, 1966; Connor, 1996), consistent with the argument that Pashto and English correlate argumentative discourse expressively in different communicative norms.

As well, it is the hybrid linguistic practices that characterize Pashto and English discourse. Extensive code-switching particularly the incorporation of English lexical items in Pashto texts has been documented especially in education settings, the media and governance where English

plays its role as an authority and expertise marker (Akram, et al. 2021; Khan, et al. 2023). Based on the concept of symbolic capital developed by Bourdieu, Hussan et al. (2017) hold that English possesses institutional prestige in Pashtun contexts and affects discourse functions without overwriting Pashto grammatical structures.

Cultural orientations also influence the functions of discourse in both languages. Pashto discourse is characterized by collectivism, hierarchical relations and moral authority: it is frequently conveyed with explicit modality and evaluative language (Rahimi, 2022). English discourse which is in accordance with individualistic norms tendencies favoring implicit evaluation, rational persuasion (Bacha & Rustum, 2019). These differences are especially salient in genres of evaluation, such as the editorial.

Despite the interest that is developing in Pashto language and bilingual discourse, loopholes persist. Many studies are isolated linguistic features and not integrated into a discourse analysis, and few of them are overall using a comprehensive SFL framework and multiple genres. Pashto expository discourse research is limited especially from a functional perspective. Filling this gap, in the present work, a qualitative and SFL based comparative approach that analyses Pashto and English texts in editorials and expository is raised so as to observe the connection between linguistic structures and cultural orientations, which together constitute the process of discourse organization and the communicative functions. This review forms the basis for methodology and analysis introduced in the sections that follow.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study uses qualitative comparative research design to analyze structural and functional differences in Pashto and English discourses in comparable communicative backgrounds. A qualitative approach be appropriate in light of the study that seeks the in-depth functional explanations rather than quantitative measurements of linguistic features. Based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the research views language as a social semiotic system, which allows us to analyze the formation of meaning in texts in a systematic way. The use of the comparative design guarantees genre equivalence between different languages, making it possible to attribute differences between languages to linguistic and cultural factors, and not to variation within individual contexts.

#### **3.2 Materials**

The dataset is comprised of 4 original, non-translated written texts for two different languages and genres. Pashto editorial texts - Pashto texts are from a known Pashto language media outlet, Pashto expository texts - Encyclopedic platform. English editorial texts are derived from the opinion section of a reputable international newspaper and English expository texts are derived from a well-established reference encyclopedia. All texts are publicly available, authentic and created by good language users. To ensure comparability, the texts deal with similar thematic areas such as social responsibility, governance and education.

**Table 1**

Data Set	Source	Genre	Topic	Text Excerpt (Original Pashto)
Pashto Data Set 1	DW Pashto (Deutsche Welle Pashto)	Editorial / Opinion	Social responsibility and governance	ټولنه هغه وخت پرمختګ کولی شي، چې خلک د خپلو حقونو تر څنګ پر خپلو مسئولیتونو هم پوه شي. د قانون درناوی او د ټولنیزو ارزښتونو ساتنه د هر وګړي اساسي دنده ده. که چېرې دا اصلونه له پامه وغورځول شي، نو ټولنیز نظم له جدي ستونزو سره مخ کېږي.
Pashto Data Set 2	Pashto Wikipedia	Expository / Informational	Education in Afghanistan	په افغانستان کې د زده کړو نظام له بېلابېلو پړاوونو څخه تېر شوی دی. ښوونیز بنسټونه د ټولنې د پرمختګ لپاره مهم رول لري. زده کړه نه یوازې فردي وړتیاوې زیاتوي، بلکې ټولنیز بدلون ته هم لاره هواروي.

**Table 2**

Data Set	Source	Genre	Topic	Text Excerpt (Original English)
English Data Set 1	The Guardian (Opinion Section)	Editorial / Opinion	Civic responsibility and democracy	A functioning democracy depends not only on strong institutions but also on responsible citizens. When individuals disengage from civic duties, public trust begins to erode. Democratic values survive only when participation is treated as a shared obligation.
English Data Set 2	Encyclopaedia Britannica	Expository / Informational	Education systems	Education systems are designed to facilitate learning and knowledge transmission. Formal education plays a crucial role in economic development and social mobility. Access to education is widely regarded as a key indicator of societal progress.

### 3.3 Procedure

Data analysis is carried out with a systematic qualitative procedure based on SFL principles. Each text was analyzed multiple times in order to detect dominant discourse patterns and functional features on both clause and discourse levels. The focus of the analysis was transitivity, representation of agency, modality, evaluative language, thematic organization and cohesion. The approach was interpretive but text centered, focusing on the way the choice of linguistic forms works in the discourse. Patterns found in Pashto texts were compared with the corresponding texts in English in the same genre to show similarities and differences in discourse structure and function.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section has carried out a comparative discourse analysis of Pashto and English text with using Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) in order to explain the difference in the structure of discourse in a similar communicative context and the role of linguistic and cultural factors in terms of discourse functions. The use of texts from the genres of editorial and expository writing makes for the

possibility of a controlled comparison of the genres with the taking into account of differences of language and culture.

The analysis is structured according to the three metafunctions of Halliday i.e. ideational, interpersonal and textual and focuses on the different enactment of these three in Pashto and English discourse. Where relevant, findings are put into context from the light of previous studies on the discourse of Pashto and English and hybridity, modality and morphosyntactic variation.

#### **4.1 Discourse Structure across Pashto and English**

Discourse structure is examined by looking at the textual metafunction; how ideas are sequenced, foregrounded and logically connected. Analysis of the editorial and expository texts provides systematic differences in the way that Pashto and English organize discourse.

##### **4.1.1 Editorial Discourse Structure**

The Pashto editorial text reflects the structure of norms and principles. The discourse is based on a generalized social claim:

”ټولنه هغه وخت پرمختګ کولی شي، چې خلک د خپلو حقونو تر څنګ پر خپلو مسؤلیتونو هم پوه شي“

*(Society can progress only when people understand their responsibilities along with their rights.)*

This opening clause sets an abstract condition for the progress of the society (پرمختګ کولی شي), which brings out the collective responsibility toward the progress, not the individual action. The next sentence expounds on this principle is elaborating moral obligation:

”د قانون درناوی او د ټولنیزو ارزښتونو ساتنه د هر وګړي اساسي دنده ده“

*(Respect for the law and preservation of social values are the fundamental duty of every individual.)*

So, the word which we consider a Noun Phrase “اساسي دنده” meaning (fundamental duty) talks about the obligations that is taken for considering social norm. The conclusion of discourse is a conditional consequence:

”که چېرې دا اصولونه له پامه وغورځول شي، نو ټولنیز نظم له جدي ستونزو سره مخ کېږي“

*(If these principles are ignored, social order faces serious problems.)*

Structurally, the Pashto editorial is in the form of a deductive movement of principle, obligation, and consequence. Cohesion is made on repetition of abstract social concepts like ټولنه (society), مسؤلیتونه (responsibilities) and ټولنیز نظم (social order). The English editorial text, on the other hand, follows a problem-solution argument structure. It is by using a conditional claim that it starts:

“A functioning democracy depends not only on strong institutions but also on responsible citizens.”

The choice of language "depends on" is used to indicate contingency and logical causation. The discourse then raises a problem:

“When individuals disengage from civic duties, public trust begins to erode.”

Here, the metaphorical verb “erode” builds up social decline as a continuum. The last sentence gives a prescriptive resolution:

“Democratic values survive only when participation is treated as a shared obligation.”

The focus on the phrase “**only when**” results in clear reasonable conclusion. Unlike the Pashto text in which the common moral assumptions are given importance, in the English text an argument is constructed through a sequential argument. Thus, although both texts are persuasive, Pashto discourse is value-oriented and deductive whereas English discourse is expressly argumentative and problem-focused.

#### **4.1.2 Expository Discourse Structure**

Structural differences are also present in the expository texts. The Pashto expository text starts with an historical summary:

”په افغانستان کې د زده کړو نظام له بېلابېلو پړاوونو څخه تېر شوی دی“

(*The education system in Afghanistan has passed through various stages.*)

This clause puts education in a larger temporal and social context. The next sentence brings out institutional importance:

بښتونه د ټولنې د پرمختګ لپاره مهم رول لري“

(*Educational institutions play an important role in societal development.*)

The last sentence makes the link to transformation in the collective population:

”ښوونیز

”زده کړه نه یوازې فردي وړتیاوې زیاتوي، بلکې ټولنیز بدلون ته هم لاره هواروي“  
(*Education not only enhances individual abilities but also opens the way for social change.*)

The above-mentioned frequent reference to ټولنه (society) and ټولنیز بدلون (social change) is an indication of a collectivist orientation and a holistic discourse structure.

“Education systems are designed to facilitate learning and knowledge transmission.” “Formal education plays a crucial role in economic development and social mobility.” “Access to education is widely regarded as a key indicator of societal progress.”

Each sentence introduces a discrete informational unit, emphasizing systems, outcomes, and indicators. Lexical items such as “**designed,**” “**role,**” and “**indicator**” reflect institutional and analytical framing. Unlike the Pashto text, which integrates education into a collective narrative, the English text organizes information in a linear, outcome-oriented manner. By comparison, the structure of the English expository text is more functionally segmented.



## **4.2 Linguistic and Cultural Influences on Discourse Functions**

Discourse functions are examined by reference to the interpersonal metafunction, namely stance, evaluation and reader positioning.

### **4.2.1 Editorial Discourse Functions**

In the case of the Pashto editorial the interpersonal is actualized by implicit moral authority. Phrases like "اساسي دنده" (fundamental duty) and "د قانون درناوی" (respect for law) code obligation, without modal verbs. The declarative mood makes the writer a moral guide who is speaking to a group of people.

By contrast, the English editorial makes use of explicit evaluative and persuasive language. Expressions like "depends on," "begins to erode" and "only when" set up a dialogic relationship with the readers; asking him or her to agree by way of logic and reasoning, not by moral assertion.

### **4.2.2 Expository Discourse Functions**

In expository discourse, interpersonal involvement is minimal in the two languages; however, slight differences still exist. The Pashto expository text retains evaluative undertones in the use of phrases such as "مهم رول" (important role), and "تولنیز بدلون" (social change), such that there is implied normative value even among a non-evaluative discourse.

The English expository text keeps evaluation at an absolute minimum, using such neutral descriptors as "designed," "plays a crucial role," and "widely regarded." This is an expression of English academic norms that value objectivity and detachment.

### **4.2.3 Cultural Interpretation of Discourse Functions**

These linguistic choices are part of more general cultural orientations. The nature of Pashto discourse in contrast to English discourse generates its own coding of collective responsibility, moral obligation and social harmony and sets itself apart from the very different coding of individual agency, institutional function and rational persuasion promoted in English. Discourse functions are thus inextricably linked with cultural assumptions about authority, responsibility and communication.

## **5. Conclusions, Findings, and Recommendations**

This section introduces the study's conclusions and summarizes the key findings in relation to the study questions, as well as offering practical implications and recommendations. Based on the analysis of the Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) of Pashto and English editorial and expository texts, it commented on the implication for the study of discourse, language education and cross-linguistic communication. The discussion is still concentrated on discourse structure and function in line with the goals of the study.

### **5.1 Conclusions of the Study**

The study intended to undertake comparative discourse analysis of Pashto and English languages using SFL to explore the relationship between linguistic and cultural elements and their influences

on the structure and function of discourse in the same context. The results show that the differences between the two languages go beyond grammar and are based on cultural orientation, rhetorical culture, and functional language use. Pashto discourse favors collective responsibility, moral duty, distinct and explicit logical sequencing, especially in the editorial in their writings. In contrast, English discourse places value upon individual agency, rational persuasion, and development of thematic organization, and is an expression of the wider individualistic and institutional norm. While these patterns do occur in texts of both genres, in evaluative editorial discourse, they are more marked than in expository texts. Through the SFL framework, the study reflects the fact that the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual metafunctions are realized in different ways in Pashto and English. These differences are reflected in the representations of agency, evaluative stance and modality, and strategies of cohesion and information organization, which underscore the importance of considering discourse as a culturally embedded functional phenomenon.

## **5.2 Findings**

In response to Research Question 1, a significant difference between Pashto and English in discourse structure was exposed by the analysis in correspondence with similar communicative contexts. Pashto texts also make frequent use of agent backgrounding, conditional constructions but also structures of cumulative clauses result in explicit and linear argumentation. English texts prefer to be explicit with agency, to be syntactically compressed, and to have progressive thematic developments, resulting in fewer overtly linear but accumulatively persuasion based discourse. Addressing Research Question 2, the results suggest that linguistic and cultural aspects are a key in shaping discourse functions. Pashto discourse reflects collectivist and hierarchical values by explicit moral evaluation and high deontic modality; especially in editorials. English discourse based on the individualistic and egalitarian norms is based more on implicit evaluation, logic and institutional authority. The symbolic position of English in Pashto forms of speech is also important in influencing hybrid discourse practices, where lexical items from English are used to denote authority and expertise while not affecting the Pashto syntactic structure during language speech. The findings have important implications for language education and for the media communication and cross-cultural interaction. In an educational context, and especially in a bilingual context, an awareness of the differences at a discourse level can be used to support an approach to language teaching that goes beyond grammar to encompass the conventions of genres and the organization of discourse. Integrating SFL informed discourse analysis into the Pashto and English curriculum can improve the reading and writing competences of learners. For media and communication, the study provides some knowledge for journalists, translators, editors who work in both Pashto and English languages. However, understanding differences in evaluative stance, cohesion and structuring of information can contribute to better clarity, effectiveness, and cultural appropriateness. The findings also have implications for cross-cultural and institutional communication, as they point out the role of authority, responsibility, and explicitness as supported or undermined by the way they are encoded linguistically.

## **5.3 Recommendations**

Future research should increase the number of genres and text samples analyzed to further support the patterns found. Using mixed-methods techniques integrating qualitative SFL analysis with the application of corpus-based analysis may contribute to the generalizability. Comparative studies of

other regional languages in conjunction with English would also help to place Pashto in a wider discourse typology. Pedagogically, discourse level teaching should be incorporated to be taught in the language of Pashto and English, especially in academic and professional settings Curriculum developing and educators are combusted to target on genre awareness, cohesion strategies and evaluative language informed by cultural awareness. Professional training for translators, editors and media practitioners may also benefit from the inclusion of functional discourse analysis for the strengthening of cross-linguistic competence.

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