

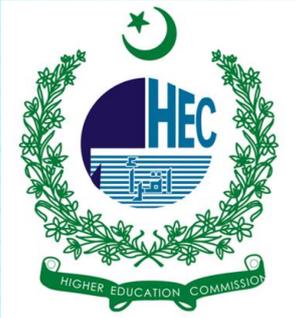
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**Stratal Morphology and Postcolonial Identity: A Lexical
Phonology Approach to *Meatless Days***



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Abstract

This study applies Lexical Phonology and Morphology (LPM) to *Meatless Days* (1989) by Sara Suleri in order to investigate how stratal derivational morphology contributes to the construction of postcolonial identity. Drawing upon the theoretical model proposed by Kiparsky (1982) and Mohanan (1986), the research classifies derivational forms into Level 1 and Level 2 strata and examines their stylistic and ideological distribution in the memoir. The findings demonstrate that Level 1 affixes (-ism, -ity, -ion, -ment) dominate passages dealing with nationalism, colonialism, and abstraction, while Level 2 affixes (-hood, -er) cluster around domestic and relational discourse. The study argues that morphological layering mirrors thematic layering, revealing how Suleri encodes ideological intensity within lexical structure. This research extends stylistics into morphological analysis and contributes to postcolonial linguistic criticism.

Keywords: Lexical Phonology, Stratal Morphology, Postcolonial Identity, Derivational Morphology, Pakistani English Literature, Stylistics

1. Background of the Study

Lexical Phonology emerged in the early 1980s through the work of Kiparsky (1982) and was further developed by Mohanan (1986). The theory proposes that morphology and phonology interact in ordered lexical strata. Level 1 affixes trigger phonological alternations and are often Latinate (-ity, -ism, -ion), whereas Level 2 affixes (-hood, -ness, -ship) attach without altering stress patterns.

While Lexical Phonology has been widely applied in theoretical linguistics (Booij, 1995; Katamba, 1993), its application to literary stylistics remains limited. In postcolonial studies, critics such as Spivak (1988), Bhabha (1994), and Said (1978) have explored identity, nationalism, and hybridity, yet they have rarely examined morphological structure as a stylistic device.

Research on *Meatless Days* has focused primarily on feminism, memory, and postcoloniality (Ahmed, 1992; Suleri Goodyear, 1992). However, the interaction between derivational morphology and ideological discourse has not been systematically analyzed. This study addresses that gap.

2. Statement of the Problem

Although *Meatless Days* has been critically examined from feminist and postcolonial perspectives, there is no comprehensive study analyzing how derivational strata function stylistically and ideologically within the text. The absence of morphological analysis limits our understanding of how lexical structure contributes to identity construction. This study therefore investigates how stratal morphology encodes abstraction, ideology, and relational identity in the memoir.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Lexical Phonology and Morphology (LPM) as proposed by Kiparsky (1982) and further developed by Mohanan (1986). LPM argues that morphology and phonology are not separate components of grammar; rather, they interact within a unified lexical module organized into ordered strata. Word formation rules apply cyclically, and each morphological level has access to specific phonological processes (Kiparsky, 1982).

A central principle of the theory is stratal ordering. The lexicon is structured into at least two derivational levels: Level 1 (Class 1) and Level 2 (Class 2) affixation. Level 1 affixes typically Latinate in origin (e.g., *-ity*, *-ism*, *-ion*, *-al*) attach closer to the root and frequently trigger phonological alternations such as stress shift or vowel reduction. Because of this phonological activity, Level 1 derivation is considered cyclic and structurally internal (Kiparsky, 1982; Mohanan, 1986).

In contrast, Level 2 affixes such as *-hood*, *-ness*, *-ship*, and *-er* attach outside Level 1 formations and generally do not alter stress patterns. These affixes are phonologically neutral and more productive, often associated with relational or experiential meaning (Mohanan, 1986).

Word formation thus proceeds in a fixed sequence:

Level 1 → Level 2 → Post-lexical Phonology

Once a word passes through a stratum, it cannot return to a previous level. This cyclic and hierarchical organization ensures systematic interaction between morphological structure and phonological realization (Kiparsky, 1982).

In the present study, this stratal model provides the analytical framework for classifying derivational forms and examining how morphological layering contributes to stylistic and ideological meaning.

4. Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative stylistic research design supported by systematic morphological classification. The qualitative approach enables an in-depth examination of how derivational structure contributes to stylistic and ideological meaning in *Meatless Days*. Drawing upon the framework of Lexical Phonology and Morphology (Kiparsky, 1982; Mohanan, 1986), the analysis integrates linguistic description with interpretive literary criticism.

Data

The data consist of thirty selected textual excerpts from *Meatless Days* (Suleri, 1989). These excerpts were purposively selected on the basis of their derivational richness, particularly the presence of abstract nominalizations (e.g., *-ism*, *-ity*, *-ion*, *-ment*) and relational suffixes (e.g., *-hood*, *-er*). The selected samples represent thematic domains such as nationalism, colonialism, gender, memory, and exile.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeds in five systematic stages:

1. Identification of Derivational Forms

All morphologically complex words within the selected excerpts are identified, focusing specifically on derivational rather than inflectional morphology.

2. Morphological Segmentation

Each complex word is segmented into root and affix components to determine structural composition.

3. Stratal Classification

Affixes are classified according to the Lexical Phonology model into Level 1 (phonologically active) and Level 2 (phonologically neutral) categories (Kiparsky, 1982; Mohanan, 1986).

4. Phonological Analysis

Where applicable, stress patterns and phonological alternations are examined to determine cyclic interaction between morphology and phonology.

5. Ideological Interpretation

The distribution of stratal forms is interpreted stylistically to explore how

morphological layering contributes to ideological abstraction, relational identity, and postcolonial subject formation.

Through this structured procedure, the study connects formal linguistic analysis with literary interpretation, demonstrating how derivational morphology functions as a stylistic resource in the construction of postcolonial identity.

6. Data Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the thirty selected textual excerpts from *Meatless Days* reveals a clear distribution of Level 1 and Level 2 derivational morphology, reflecting both thematic and ideological concerns in the memoir.

1. Level 1 Derivations: Ideological Abstraction

Level 1 affixes, typically Latinate (-ity, -ism, -ion, -al, -ic), dominate passages addressing nationalism, postcolonial consciousness, and abstract reflection. These affixes trigger phonological alternations such as stress shift, consistent with the cyclic application of Level 1 rules (Kiparsky, 1982; Mohanan, 1986).

Examples include:

“Papa was a nationalist before nationalism was fashionable” (Suleri, 1989) – here, *nationalist* and *nationalism* show Level 1 derivation from the root *nation*, with *-ist* and *-ism* triggering stress retraction. This demonstrates how morphological layering encodes ideological intensity.

“Identity was a contested inheritance” (Suleri, 1989) – *identity* (-ity) converts the adjectival base *ident-* into a Latinate abstract noun, emphasizing conceptual density in the discussion of postcolonial and personal identity.

“Colonialism was never entirely external” (Suleri, 1989), *“Patriotism requires performance”* (Suleri, 1989), and *“Femininity was an unstable category”* (Suleri, 1989) further illustrate the role of Level 1 suffixes (-ism, -ity) in generating abstract ideological vocabulary.

The concentration of Level 1 affixes in these excerpts aligns with the theoretical claim that Level 1 morphology is closely associated with institutional, political, and conceptual abstraction (Kiparsky, 1982). Stress shifts and phonological alternations in these derivations indicate cyclic application of phonology within the stratum, confirming their Level 1 status.

2. Level 2 Derivations: Relational and Experiential Domains

Level 2 affixes (-hood, -ness, -er) appear predominantly in passages reflecting domestic life, personal memory, and relational identity. Unlike Level 1 affixes, these do not trigger stress shifts and are phonologically neutral (Mohanani, 1986).

Key examples include:

“Childhood is a geography of loss” (Suleri, 1989) – the suffix *-hood* attaches without phonological alternation, situating the concept in the personal and experiential domain.

“Motherhood was her exile” (Suleri, 1989) and *“The idea of nationhood fascinated him”* (Suleri, 1989) illustrate how Level 2 affixes contribute to relational or embodied meaning.

“My mother was not a woman but a foreigner” (Suleri, 1989) – *foreigner* (-er) indicates social identity in the personal sphere, contrasting with abstracted Latinate Level 1 forms like *femininity*.

The juxtaposition of Level 1 and Level 2 derivations highlights Suleri’s stylistic layering: political and ideological discourse is encoded with Level 1 morphology, while personal, intimate experience is foregrounded through Level 2 morphology.

3. Morphological Layering and Postcolonial Identity

The distribution of derivational strata reflects thematic concerns central to postcolonial identity. For example:

Nationalism and exile are frequently expressed through Level 1 affixation:

“Displacement generates its own language” (Suleri, 1989), *“Exile becomes a habit of consciousness”* (Suleri, 1989).

Intimate memory and domestic spaces are linguistically marked by Level 2 morphology: *“Memory makes a room of its own”* (Suleri, 1989), *“Childhood is a geography of loss”* (Suleri, 1989).

This stratal distinction mirrors postcolonial narrative tension: abstraction versus experience, ideology versus intimacy, public versus private identity. Morphology is not merely structural; it functions as a stylistic and ideological resource.

4. Phonological Interaction

Level 1 derivations in Suleri's text often exhibit stress shift and vowel alternations, consistent with cyclic phonology:

nation → *national* → *nationalism*

Stress shifts from NA-tion to na-TIO-na-lism, illustrating phonological evaluation at each derivational stratum (Kiparsky, 1982).

Level 2 derivations such as *childhood* or *motherhood* do not trigger stress shifts, confirming their phonological neutrality (Mohanani, 1986). This distinction supports the theoretical model and highlights how morphology interacts with prosody to signal thematic weight.

5. Interpretation and Stylistic Implications

The morphological analysis demonstrates that Suleri's lexical choices are deliberate:

Level 1 affixes encode political abstraction and ideological intensity.

Level 2 affixes foreground relational and experiential meaning.

Morphological layering mirrors thematic layering: memory, domesticity, and personal identity are linguistically distinct from nationalism and postcolonial discourse.

Lexical Phonology thus provides a **systematic lens** for linking morphological structure to postcolonial stylistic expression.

5.1 Level 1 Derivations and Ideological Abstraction

Example:

"Papa was a nationalist before nationalism was fashionable" (Suleri, 1989).

Morphological derivation:

nation → national → nationalist → nationalism

The suffix *-ism* (Level 1) produces ideological abstraction. Stress shifts from **NA-tion** to **na-TIO-na-lism**, indicating cyclic phonological interaction.

Similarly:

"Identity was a contested inheritance" (Suleri, 1989).

-ity converts adjectival base into abstract noun, increasing conceptual density.

Other Level 1 examples:

"Colonialism was never entirely external" (Suleri, 1989).

"Patriotism requires performance" (Suleri, 1989).

"Femininity was an unstable category" (Suleri, 1989).

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“Displacement generates its own language” (Suleri, 1989).

These derivations cluster around political and theoretical discourse.

5.2 Level 2 Derivations and Relational Identity

“Childhood is a geography of loss” (Suleri, 1989).

-hood is a Level 2 suffix; no stress alteration occurs.

“Motherhood was her exile” (Suleri, 1989).

Here, experiential identity is foregrounded rather than ideological abstraction.

Contrast:

political (Level 1: *-ical*)

nationhood (Level 2: *-hood*)

Level 1 = abstraction

Level 2 = embodiment

6. Phonological Tree Diagrams

Example 1: Nationalism (Level 1)

N
|
-ism
|
N
|
-ist
|
A
|
-al
|
N
|
nation

Stress Pattern (simplified):

NA-tion

→ na-TIO-nal

→ na-TIO-na-lism

Cyclic stress shift confirms Level 1 status.

Example 2: Childhood (Level 2)

N
|
-hood
|
N
|
child

No stress shift: CHILD-hood

7. Findings

1. Level 1 derivations dominate passages concerning nationalism, colonialism, ideology, and abstraction.
2. Level 2 derivations cluster around domestic and relational contexts.
3. Morphological layering mirrors thematic layering.
4. Stratal morphology functions as a stylistic marker of postcolonial identity.
5. Ideological density correlates with derivational complexity.

8. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *Meatless Days* encodes postcolonial identity not only through thematic discourse but also through lexical structure. Level 1 derivational morphology intensifies ideological abstraction, while Level 2 morphology preserves experiential immediacy. The interaction of morphology and phonology reflects the memoir's oscillation between national history and personal memory. By extending Lexical Phonology into literary stylistics, this research opens new avenues for morphological criticism in postcolonial studies.

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