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**A Comparative Morpho-Syntactic Analysis of English and Pashto  
Prepositions within the Framework of X-Bar Theory**



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**Abstract**

This study examines the morpho-syntactic analyses of adjuncts in English and Pashto, within the light of Chomsky's X bar theory. It focuses on analyzing how adjuncts are structured in terms of both their form (morphology) and their grammatical role (syntax) in English and Pashto languages. The analysis is conducted using Chomsky's X-bar theory, a framework that helps understand the hierarchical organization of phrases in a sentence. Its objective is to assess the applicability of X bar theory in Pashto and explore the syntactic and morphological similarities and differences between Pashto and English prepositions. Data for this study were gathered from native speakers of Pashto and English texts. Various English books were scrutinized in order to conduct a comprehensive exploration of X-bar theory.

English temporal and spatial prepositions—namely "since," "for," "on," "in," "at," "of," and "with"—were examined morphologically and syntactically. Each preposition, within its respective sentence, was translated into Pashto. Subsequently, each prepositional phrase underwent scrutiny within X bar theory.

The findings of the data analysis show that Pashto prepositions possess distinct syntactic structures, as Pashto uses pre and post positions, whereas English solely employs prepositions preceding nouns or pronouns. This study exhibits that English prepositions "for" and "since" when use temporally, these prepositions share the same morphological postposition in Pashto, namely "na." Similarly, three other prepositions—"at," "on," and "in"—manifested analogous morpho-syntactic "puh-ke" pre-post positions in Pashto when denoting time. Unlike English, Pashto doesn't mandate specific prepositions for every context, sometimes omitting prepositions altogether or utilizing the same preposition in diverse contexts. The study concludes that Pashto exhibits less morpho-syntactic complexity as compared to English. It provides various substitutes for a single preposition. Additionally, while spatial and temporal prepositions share similar syntactic structures in Pashto, temporal prepositions demonstrate greater morphological resemblance in Pashto as compared to spatial prepositions. X-bar theory offers a framework to comprehend the hierarchical arrangement of phrases in Pashto, explaining the way heads, specifiers, complements, and adjuncts merge to create syntactic units. The conclusion of the study validates the universality of X bar theory and recognizes the applicability of the theory to Pashto language.

**Key words:** X-Bar Theory, Pashto, English, Prepositions, Morpho-Syntax, Comparative Linguistics

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Prepositions constitute an essential category of functional elements in natural languages. They establish semantic and syntactic relationships among constituents and contribute significantly to the interpretation of spatial, temporal, directional, and abstract meanings. While English relies heavily on prepositions to express grammatical relations, Pashto employs a combination of prepositions, postpositions, and circumpositional structures. These differences make comparative investigation particularly valuable for understanding cross-linguistic variation.

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Within generative linguistics, X-Bar Theory provides a universal framework for describing phrase structure. According to the theory, every phrase contains a head, complement, and optional specifier, forming hierarchical structures that are assumed to be universal across languages. The present study investigates whether these structural principles can adequately account for prepositional constructions in both English and Pashto.

## **2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The current study aims at providing a comprehensive review of the prepositional system of English and Pashto languages-their forms, syntactic position and usage. The study has the following objectives.

- To provide a comprehensive account of morphological and syntactic differences and similarities in English and Pashto languages within theoretical framework of Chomskian X' bar theory.
- To check the validity of Chomsky's X' bar Theory in Pashto language.

To demonstrate possible syntactic and morphological similarities and differences between English temporal or spatial prepositions with those of Pashto language.

## **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The present study examines the syntactic similarities and differences between English prepositions and Pashto postpositions through the framework of X-Bar Theory. A review of the relevant literature is essential to understand how prepositions and postpositions have been analyzed across languages and how syntactic theories have been employed in contrastive linguistic studies. Previous research has mainly focused on comparisons between English and languages such as Arabic and Urdu, highlighting the challenges that arise from structural and semantic differences. Although several studies have investigated various aspects of Pashto grammar, limited attention has been given to the analysis of English prepositions and Pashto postpositions within the framework of X-Bar Theory. Therefore, this section reviews the literature related to X-Bar Theory, comparative studies on prepositions, and research on Pashto grammar to establish the theoretical foundation for the present study.

### **2.1 X-Bar Theory and Syntactic Analysis**

X-Bar Theory, introduced by Chomsky (1970) and further developed within Generative Grammar, provides a universal framework for analyzing phrase structure across languages. The theory proposes that all phrases share a common hierarchical organization consisting of a head, complement, and specifier. Lexical categories such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and prepositions function as heads that project phrases through intermediate and maximal levels. This framework has been widely used in syntactic studies because it explains both language universals and structural variations among languages.

Within X-Bar Theory, prepositions function as heads of Prepositional Phrases (PPs) and determine the syntactic relationship between sentence elements. The theory provides an effective tool for examining the structure of prepositions and postpositions across languages because it allows researchers to analyze phrase constituents through a unified model. Consequently, X-Bar Theory has become an important framework in contrastive syntax and cross-linguistic studies.

### **2.2 Comparative Studies on English Prepositions**

Prepositions are among the most challenging grammatical elements for second-language learners because their meanings and functions often vary across languages. Hasan and Abdullah (2009) examined the difficulties faced by Arabic learners in translating English prepositions and found that learners frequently made errors due to differences between the Arabic and English prepositional systems. The study highlighted that Arabic contains fewer prepositions than English, and a single Arabic preposition may correspond to several English prepositions depending on context. Such differences often lead to first-language interference and incorrect usage.

Similarly, Alwreikat and Yunus (2020) compared English and Arabic prepositions and reported significant structural and semantic differences between the two languages. Their findings revealed that English prepositions generally function as independent lexical items, whereas some Arabic prepositions may occur as prefixes attached to nouns. These differences create challenges in translation and second-language acquisition.

Hanif et al. (2013) compared English and Urdu grammar and identified substantial differences in sentence structure, gender marking, and the use of prepositions and postpositions. The study noted that Urdu follows a Subject–Object–Verb (SOV) pattern and relies heavily on postpositions, unlike English, which follows a Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) structure and employs prepositions. Such structural differences contribute to learner errors and demonstrate the importance of contrastive linguistic analysis.

### **2.3 Studies on Pashto Grammar and Syntax**

Research on Pashto has primarily focused on its grammatical and syntactic characteristics. Tegey and Robson (1996) describe Pashto as a language that employs prepositions, postpositions, and ambipositions to express spatial, temporal, and abstract relationships. Their work provides an important foundation for understanding the structure and function of relational elements in Pashto.

Abdul Hamid (2011) conducted a comparative study of Pashto and English argument structure and reported notable syntactic differences between the two languages. The study demonstrated that Pashto frequently requires explicit markers to express grammatical relationships that may remain unmarked in English. These findings indicate that the syntactic organization of Pashto differs significantly from that of English.

Similarly, Ali and Khan (2016) compared English and Pashto adjectives and found both similarities and differences between the two languages. Their findings suggest that structural differences between English and Pashto can influence language learning and support the usefulness of contrastive analysis in identifying potential areas of difficulty for learners.

### **2.4 Research Gap**

The reviewed literature demonstrates that considerable attention has been given to the comparison of English prepositions with Arabic and Urdu. Likewise, several studies have examined different aspects of Pashto grammar and syntax. However, little research has specifically investigated the syntactic behavior of English prepositions and Pashto postpositions through the framework of X-Bar Theory. Most previous studies have focused on grammatical descriptions, translation issues, or language learning difficulties rather than phrase-structure analysis. Therefore, a significant gap exists in the literature regarding the application of X-Bar Theory to the contrastive analysis of English prepositions and Pashto postpositions. The present study seeks to address this

gap by examining their structural properties and phrase organization within a unified theoretical framework.

#### **4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is based on Noam Chomsky's X-bar theory within the framework of generative grammar. The theory explains how phrases in natural languages are hierarchically structured and how different syntactic elements are organized around a central head. X-bar theory proposes that every phrase (XP) consists of a head (X), a specifier, and a complement, forming a universal structure applicable across languages. Chomsky introduced X-bar theory as an extension of phrase structure rules to explain sentence formation more systematically. In this model, lexical categories such as noun (N), verb (V), adjective (A), and preposition (P) function as heads of their respective phrases. These heads project into larger structures (X' and XP), allowing recursion and complex sentence formation.

Jackendoff (1977) expanded X-bar theory by emphasizing the relationship between syntax and semantics. He argued that phrase structure not only represents syntactic form but also reflects conceptual meaning. His work contributed to a more integrated understanding of linguistic structure.

Carnie (2001) further refined X-bar theory in modern syntactic analysis by clearly presenting its role in recursion and movement. He highlighted how embedded structures and transformations, such as wh-movement, operate within the X-bar framework.

Overall, X-bar theory provides a universal model for analyzing phrase structure and syntactic relationships. This study applies the theory to Pashto to examine whether its syntactic structure follows the same universal principles proposed in generative grammar.

#### **5. METHODOLOGY**

The study adopts a qualitative comparative research design to examine the morpho-syntactic behavior of selected English prepositions and their corresponding Pashto equivalents. The data were collected from established grammatical references, linguistic studies, and translated sentence constructions to ensure reliability and contextual relevance. Each selected example was carefully analyzed at both morphological and syntactic levels. For syntactic interpretation, X-bar theory was applied to examine the hierarchical structure of prepositional phrases in both languages, allowing for a systematic comparison of how English and Pashto organize prepositional relations within sentence structure.

#### **6. DATA ANALYSIS**

In the chapter, an attempt has been made to compare Pashto and English adjuncts within the light of X bar theory. The chapter also makes a mention of the syntactic structures of both Pashto and English sentences. This analysis follows analogy theory and analogously observes the syntactic patterns of English sentences into Pashto. Subsequently, an attempt has been made to check the validity of X-bar theory on prepositional phrases, assessing its applicability in both Pashto and English contexts. Additionally, the analysis encompasses the identification of variants for each English preposition within the Pashto language. Five prepositions, namely "on," "in," "of," "with," and "at," undergo analysis within the context of the phrases.

##### **1.1 The Use of the Preposition “of” in English**

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The preposition "of" is a fundamental element in English grammar that serves various syntactic and semantic functions. It plays a crucial role in indicating relationships between nouns and other elements within a sentence.

Like other prepositions in English, the preposition "of" primarily functions as the head of a prepositional phrase. In a PP, "of" is followed by a noun phrase (NP), indicating the possessive, origin, composition, or relation between the elements.

One of the most common usages of "of" is to indicate possession. Consider (1)

1. The book of John.

The preposition *of* in (1) signifies that the book belongs to John. It is the syntactic variant of the genitive structure (2).

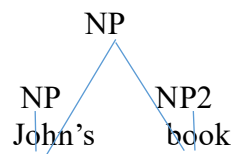
2. John's book.

Due care, however, must be taken to note that the NPs in the possessive structure (1) are determinate. Both the nouns are realized by determiners which is "the" in the case of (1). Syntactic restriction, however, comes into effect when the same NPs feature in genitive "s" structure. As evident from (2), the second NPs must be indeterminate. English does not admit a determiner with the second NP and hence, a structure like (3) is not admissible. Chomsky, (1965).

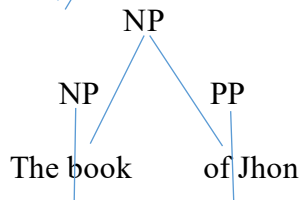
3. \*Jhon's the Book.

A simple tree diagram for (1) and (2) will be (i) and (ii) respectively.

i.



ii.



## 1.2 The Syntactic and Morphological Realization of "of" in Pashto

The preposition "of" is a fundamental element in the Pashto language that serves to establish relationships between nouns, pronouns, or phrases in a variety of contexts. In Pashto, the preposition "of" is commonly expressed by the word "da" (da) or its variants, which may undergo morphological variations based on the gender, number, and grammatical case of the following noun or pronoun. As an illustration, consider the following example.

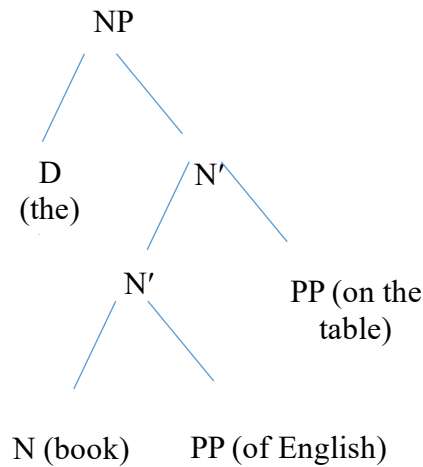
1. The book of English on the table is mine.

NP → the (D) N'(book)

N' → book (N) of English (PP1) on the table (PP2). Following is the tree diagram of sentence (4).

NP2

iv.



In (4), the NP *the book* consists of the head *book* and a determiner *the*. According to rule 1(a), the NP *the book* has a head N' (*book*) and a D (*the*). In the tree diagram, the head *book* will diverge into the head *book*, a complement *about poetry* (PP1) and an optional adjunct *on the table* (PP2). These PPs follow the head *book*.

The study of NP structure in Pashto unveils some intriguing details that may or may not align with English NP structure. The structure of NP will be characterized as.

NP → (PP) N (PP)

Hence, the sentence (11) can be written as (13) in Pashto.

5. انگریزی کتاب په میز باندې د

PP2            N            PP1

Poetry about (the) book the table on

In (5), the PP1 *انگریزی* is a pre-head dependent if we follow Huddleston's terms (2012) about phrase structure rules while PP2 *په میز باندې* is a post-head dependent. As can be seen in sentence (2), Pashto has postpositions and hence the head P follows the complement NP. In other words, we can say that PPs as dependents can follow or precede the head N. This analysis results in linguistic description that PSRs in Pashto may adopt various syntactic configurations. Hence, the NP form in Pashto can be described as (6)

(6a). NP ----- (Det) N'

(6b). N' ----- (PP) N' (PP)

Syntactically, the phrase-marker (or a tree-diagram) as described by Rodney Huddleston (1979, p. 37). For sentence (5), will be (7):

7.

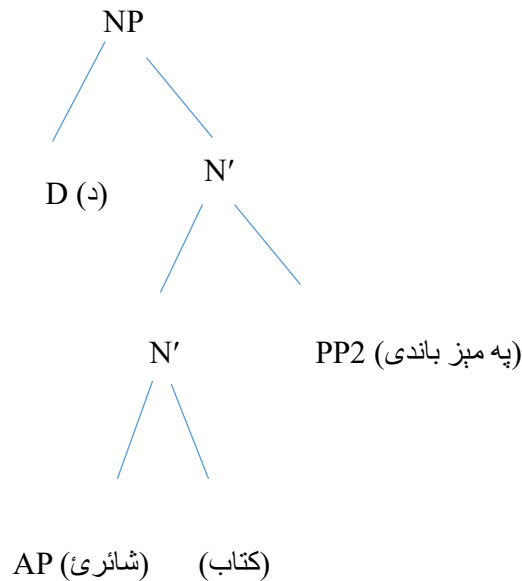


Figure (7) demonstrates that PP1 “of poetry” takes an adjectival form AP in Pashto. This AP, however, does not have a complement configuration as was evident in case of English. There is another possible syntactic variant of “of poetry” in Pashto which is given in (7).

8. د شاعري کتاب په مېز باندې.

PP2    PP1    N

PP 1 in (8) assumes a complement form and is not easily omittable from the sentence without creating a meaning gap.

2. په مېز باندې.

This sentence syntactically well-formed but semantically ill formed. It presents a semantic gap which can duly be filled by providing the complement like PP1 in (8).

### 2.1 Uses of the Preposition “In” in English

The preposition "in" is a fundamental element in English language, serving various grammatical and spatial functions. It is used to indicate location, time, inclusion, and certain states or conditions. Greenbaum (2014). "In" is commonly employed to denote a position within a particular place or space.

For example, consider the following sentence.

1. The book is in the library

The preposition “in” in the sentence (1) indicates that the book is located inside the library. When used with time expressions, "in" signifies a period within which an event occurs. For instance, in (2) “in” implies that the meeting will take place one hour from the present situation.

2. I will meet you in an hour

"In" is also utilized to convey being part of or contained within a larger entity.

Consider sentence (3)

3. There is sugar in the bowl.

The use of “in” in (3) suggests that sugar is present within the confines of the bowl.

In the same manner, "In" can also express a state or condition. For example, consider (4)

4. She is in good health

**2.2 Morphosyntactic Realization of “In” in Pashto**

The use of preposition “in” in Pashto demonstrates morphological and syntactic variations concerning the use of the corresponding form of the preposition “in” For an, consider the illustration following sentence.

5. A red flower in the vase.  
 NP                      PP

6. بو سور گل په گلدسته کښي  
 A red flower the vase in  
 D AP N    D N P  
 NP                      PP

The syntactic configuration in accordance with X' theory wants necessary description. The possible tree diagram for the sentence (6) will be the figure i.

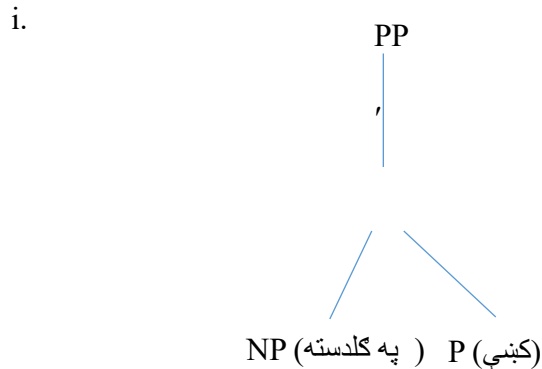


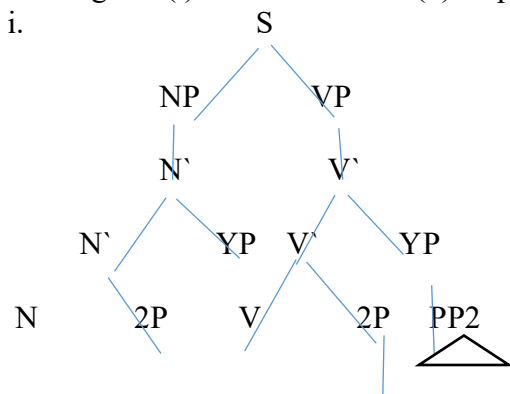
Figure (i) illustrates that the head P “کښي” follows the complement NP “په گلدسته.” This again verifies that point that Pashto is head-final language regarding PP structures.

**3.1 The Usage of the Preposition for in English**

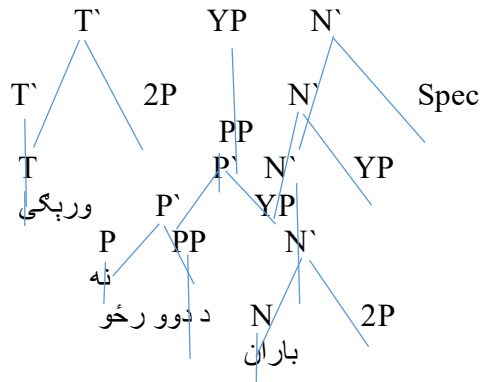
The preposition "for" is a crucial component of the English language, serving a wide range of functions and contexts. It establishes relationships between different elements in a sentence and conveys various meanings. Here's an in-depth analysis of the preposition "for".

One of the primary uses of "for" is to indicate the purpose or benefit of an action or situation. Bannet, D.C(1972). Consider Sentence (1)

1. Ali went to England for higher studies.  
 A tree diagram (i) for the sentence (1) respectively,







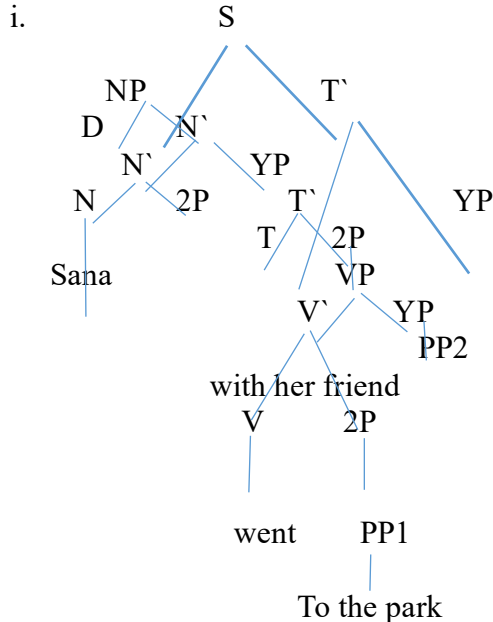
**4.1 Usage of the Preposition *with* in English and Morphological and phonological realization of *with* in English**

The preposition "with" is a fundamental element of the English language, used to establish various relationships between nouns, pronouns, and phrases. It conveys notions of association, accompaniment, manner, and more. Lind Stromberg (1998) "With" is commonly used to indicate companionship or presence as a locative preposition. Consider sentence (1)

1. *Sana went to the park with her friends.*

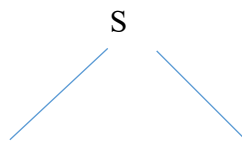
This sentence signifies that someone or something is together or accompanying another.

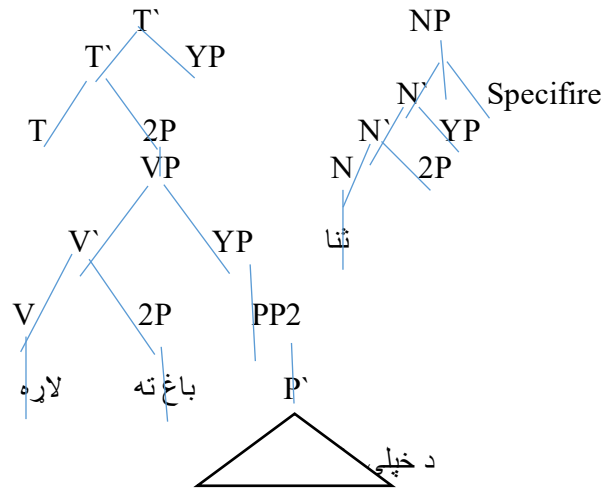
Tree diagram of sentence (1) is,



The sentence consists two PPs *to the park* as PP1 and *with her friend* as PP2. this PP1 is the complement of VP while PP2 is optional. In PP1 the head of the phrase is *to* and *the* determiner while *park* is the complement of the head. In PP2 the head is *with* while *her* is determiner and *friend* is complementing of *with*. Sentence (1) in Pashto will be (2),

2. *تڼا خپلې ملگرې سره باغ ته لاره.*  
 PP    PP    N





In Pashto سره is used as postposition when the noun is accompanying with someone, here شنا going to the park with her friend, so with is used as سره. In addition, "With" can express the way or instrumental means by which something is done.

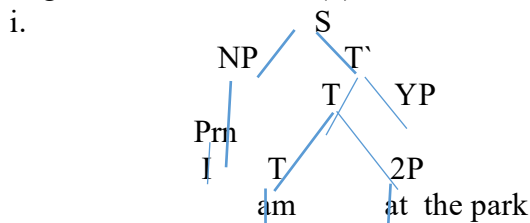
**5.1 Usage of the Preposition "At" with Morphosyntactic Realization in Pashto.**

The preposition "at" is a versatile and commonly used word in the English language, serving various purposes in different contexts. It is used to indicate locations, times, and relationships between nouns, pronouns, and phrases. One of the primary uses of "at" is to denote a specific location or point. Quirk et al.(1985). Sentence (1) is,

- 1. I am at the park.

It signifies a particular place where something is situated.

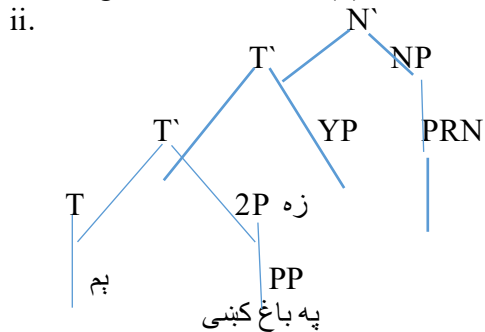
The tree diagram of the sentence (1) is,



The sentence has one PP at the park which the complement of VP am and PP provides additional information about the location. Here PP is not optional but VP is complement by PP at the park. Pashto realization of the sentence 1 will be (2).

- 2. زه په باغ كښې يم .

Tree diagram of sentence (2) is below.



This sentence (2) shows په كښې as adposition and the PP has post head rather than

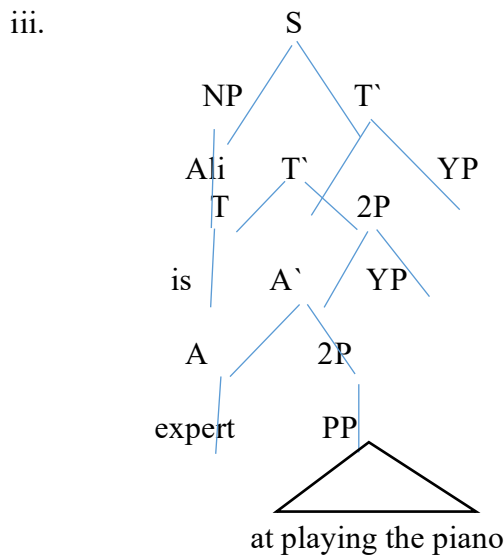
English. Furthermore, *at* is can show skills as pointed out by Yafes (2013). Consider (3).

3. Sana is good at mathematics.

It signifies the context in which Sana excels or is comfortable and can indicate her proficiency or expertise in the field of science. Similarly, sentence (4).

4. Ali is expert at playing the piano.

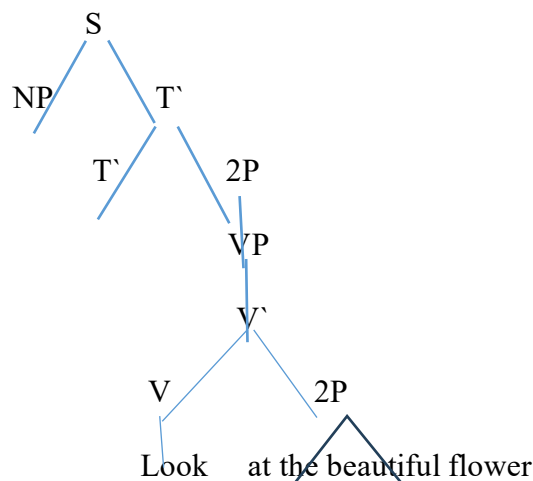
This sentence also communicates the area in which Ali possesses skill, like Ali is only talented in the field of music. Tree diagram of the sentence (4) is described in the following figure iii,



In PP *at playing the piano*, the head is *at* while *playing the piano* is the complement of the head. "At" is used to focus on a particular subject or target. For example, sentence (5).

5. Look at the beautiful flower.

Here preposition *at* directs attention to the specific object that is flower. tree diagram of the sentence is,



Here PP *at the flower* is the complement of *Look*. In PP *at* is the head and *beautiful* is the determiner of N.

**6.1 Usage of the preposition “On” with Morphological and phonological realization in Pashto**

The preposition "on" has multiple uses and is recognized in numerous pragmatic uses. and commonly used prepositions in English. In pashto it is is used as په as adposition په-باندی (puh-bandi)

i. For expressing dates and days

For expressing dates and days consider the following examples.

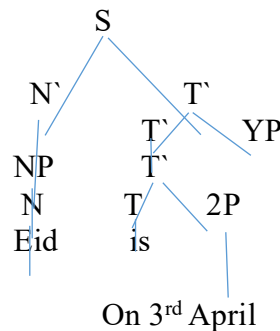
1. Eid is on 10<sup>th</sup> April.

Sentence 1 is its Pashto version.

2. اخترد اپریل په لسم تاریخ دی

Tree diagram of sentence 1 is.

i.



Here both sentences show same syntactic structures as both have prepositions that complement NP.

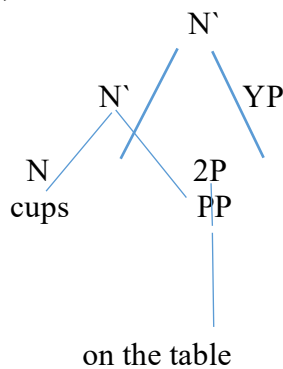
I. Locative use

On is also used to show location. For example, sentence (3) expresses the location of cup somewhere.

3. Cups on the table.

Here it illustrates that the cup is present on the surface of a table. Tree diagram of it will be,

ii.

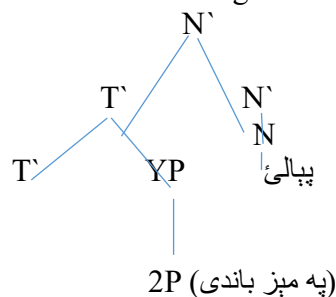


Sentence (4) is its Pashto structure.

4. پپالی په میز باندی

Figure iii shows the tree diagram of sentence (4).

iii.



According to Huddleston’s terms (2012) this PP is post head dependent and hence it follows the complement NP as sentence 56. But in Pashto ad-position is mostly used when *on* is used as spatial preposition. *On* as locative and for dates and days has different morphological realization in Pashto.

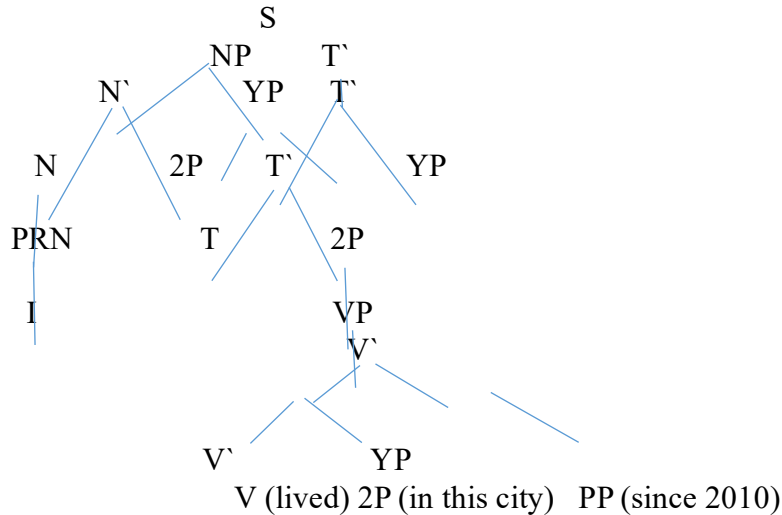
**7.1 Usage of the Preposition “Since” with morphological and Phonological realization in Pashto**

The preposition "since" is primarily used to indicate a starting point in time or duration. Sentence (1) shows duration of time

1. I have lived in this city since 2010.

Here, "since 2010" tells us when the speaker began living in the city and that they still live there. Here PP “in the city” is the complement of the main verb VP “lived”. In PP “in” PP is the head, “this” is determiner and “city” is a complement. Tree diagram is,

i.

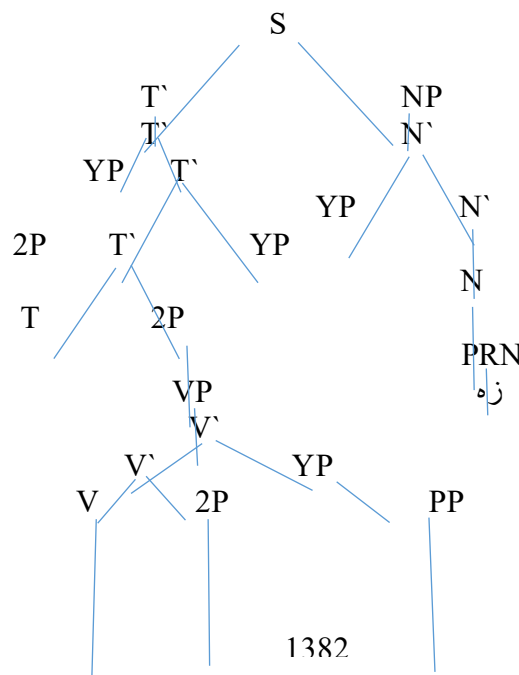


In Pashto “Since” is translated as ښه to show time. Consider the Pashto version of sentence (2) is,

2. زه د لسو کالو نه په دې ښار کېنې اوسېږم.

Figure ii shows the tree diagram of sentence (2)

ii.



## 7. CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

This study investigates the morpho-syntactic differences between English and Pashto prepositions, focusing on spatial and temporal prepositions and the applicability of X-bar theory to Pashto. In English, prepositions typically precede their noun phrase complements, forming head-initial prepositional phrases (PPs). In contrast, Pashto often exhibits a head-final structure, where the complement precedes the preposition, reflecting the use of postpositions.

The analysis shows that while both languages share similar functional roles for prepositions, their syntactic realizations differ significantly. English employs a more differentiated system for temporal expressions using prepositions such as “at,” “on,” “in,” “since,” and “for,” whereas Pashto tends to use fewer forms with broader semantic coverage, often relying on markers such as “د,” “په,” “سره,” “ته” and “دپاره” depending on context.

Findings further indicate that “since,” “at,” “on,” “in,” “with,” “of,” and “for” show systematic correspondences in Pashto, though their morphological realizations vary according to temporal, spatial, or instrumental use. Additionally, the study confirms that X-bar theory is applicable to Pashto, as both English and Pashto exhibit hierarchical phrase structures. However, a key difference lies in PP structure: English follows a head-initial pattern (P + NP), while Pashto follows a head-final pattern (NP + P).

Overall, the study highlights significant typological differences in prepositional systems while confirming underlying structural parallels between the two languages. English employs prepositions before noun phrases, whereas Pashto frequently places relational markers after noun phrases. Despite these structural differences, both languages demonstrate hierarchical phrase organization consistent with X-Bar Theory.

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