

A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF DEVIANT LANGUAGE IN KANZA JAVED'S *RANI*

Muskan Zaib,

MPhil English Linguistics Scholar,
Abasyn University, Peshawar, Pakistan

Abstract

This paper explores linguistic deviance in Kanza Javed's short story Rani (2025) through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Deviant language grammatical, lexical, and narrative foregrounds psychological states, cultural norms, and socio-emotional tensions in the story. Applying Halliday's (1994) framework, the study demonstrates how deviations in grammar, vocabulary, and narrative structure create meaning beyond conventional language, allowing readers to access the fragmented experiences of characters like Daddi and Annie. The findings reveal that Javed's deviations serve both aesthetic and functional purposes, illustrating memory, trauma, and familial dynamics.

1. Introduction

Language in literature is not merely a medium of communication; it functions as a semiotic resource to represent experience, interpersonal relations, and textual organization (Halliday, 1994; Eggins, 2004). Kanza Javed's *Rani* (2025) presents multiple forms of linguistic deviation, making it an ideal text to study through Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Deviant language deliberate departures from standard norms—creates emphasis, foregrounds psychological states, and disrupts conventional narrative structures (Simpson, 2004; Leech & Short, 2007).

This study investigates grammatical, lexical, and narrative deviance in “*Rani*” and explores how these deviations contribute to thematic meaning, character development, and emotional depth.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistics

SFL, developed by Halliday (1994), conceptualizes language as a resource for meaning-making, operating simultaneously on three metafunctions:

Ideational – Represents processes, participants, and circumstances, reflecting experiences of reality.

Interpersonal – Encodes attitudes, judgments, and social relationships.

Textual – Organizes language to structure coherence, emphasis, and thematic focus.

This framework allows the analysis of deviation as intentional meaning-making, highlighting how form and function interact.

2.2 Theory of Deviant Language

According to Simpson (2004) and Leech & Short (2007), deviant language is purposeful disruption of conventional linguistic patterns to foreground meaning. Deviance can be classified as:

Grammatical deviance – Sentence fragments, non-standard syntax, disrupted punctuation.

Lexical deviance – Neologisms, archaisms, or contextually marked vocabulary.

Narrative deviance – Shifts in perspective, non-linear temporality, fragmented sequences.

In *Rani* (Javed, 2025), these deviations help convey emotional intensity, cognitive fragmentation, and social critique.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative SFL approach, focusing on textual analysis of Javed's *Rani* (Javed, 2025). Data were coded for grammatical, lexical, and narrative deviations, followed by

functional interpretation using SFL metafunctions. Excerpts illustrating deviation were identified and analyzed for their contribution to:

1. Ideational meaning (representation of events and processes)
2. Interpersonal meaning (relationships, attitudes, judgments)
3. Textual meaning (cohesion, emphasis, narrative flow)

4. Analysis and Discussion

Systemic Functional Linguistic Analysis of Kanza Javed's *Rani*: Discussion

Kanza Javed's short story *Rani* offers a rich site for the application of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly when analyzed through the lens of grammatical, lexical, and narrative deviations. SFL provides a framework to examine how language constructs meaning across three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday, 1994). The narrative presents numerous examples of linguistic deviation, which are instrumental in representing cognitive, social, and textual functions.

1. Ideational Metafunction

The ideational metafunction in SFL concerns how experiences, processes, participants, and circumstances are represented in language. In *Rani*, deviations such as sentence fragments, unusual syntactic constructions, and lexical innovations foreground characters' inner lives and events. For instance, the fragment "She sat there for a moment, hollowed out" (Javed, 2025, p. 4) emphasizes Daddi's cognitive and emotional state, presenting her mind as vacant and disoriented. Similarly, expressions like "Her beautiful, dead hair" (Javed, 2025, p. 27) foreground a specific aspect of perception, compressing a full event into a brief, ideationally dense structure.

Lexical deviations also serve the ideational metafunction by creating semantic foregrounding. Metaphors such as "Cloak of invincibility" (Javed, 2025, p. 3) and "Interwoven in the fabric, burning in the fire, braided into the silver of her hair" (Javed, 2025, p. 2) portray the grandfather's enduring presence and the grandmother's grief through richly marked language. These non-literal constructions expand the ideational potential of the text, representing abstract emotional states and memory as tangible experiences.

Moreover, deviant syntactic structures often highlight unusual or extraordinary actions. For example, "She flung out her foot from the blanket and dangled it in the air" (Javed, 2025, p. 10) employs an unexpected clause sequence to foreground Daddi's unusual behavior. The story also utilizes repetitive clauses like "Yes, yes" (Jp. 5) to encode restricted speech patterns caused by dementia, representing cognitive limitation ideationally. Thus, deviations in ideational expression not only describe physical or mental states but also encode temporality, continuity, and memory within the narrative structure.

2. Interpersonal Metafunction

The interpersonal metafunction concerns how language enacts social relations, roles, and attitudes. In *Rani*, deviations such as imperative constructions, interrogatives, and repetitive utterances regulate interpersonal dynamics and social hierarchy. For example, the repeated phrase "Run upstairs and call Nargis!" (Javed, 2025, p. 15) asserts direct authority, reflecting the narrator's temporary exercise of power in the household. Similarly, fragments and repetitions such as "Accha, accha" (Javed, 2025, p. 5) and "Come here, Annie. Come here, little Annie" (Javed, 2025, p. 6) negotiate relational dynamics, conveying agreement, care, and attentional direction in interactions between characters.

Lexical deviations also carry interpersonal weight. Terms like "Behaya aurat. She's a shameless woman" (Javed, 2025, p. 12) are contextually marked, encoding social judgment and moral evaluation. Through such marked word choices, the narrative constructs social positioning and relational tension between characters, emphasizing power, disapproval, or emotional proximity. Furthermore, evaluative declaratives such as "And this is how you will

live now, too” (Javed, 2025, p. 28) serve as interpersonal interventions, imposing moral or experiential judgments on the addressed participant.

The story frequently interweaves interpersonal deviations with ideational content, creating multi-layered meanings. For instance, the exchange “Accha? So you want to hit me now?” (Javed, 2025, p. 21) combines an interrogative with a confrontational stance, expressing both the speaker’s evaluation of events and their relational positioning toward Nargis. Repetition, capitalization, and abrupt clause structures function as interpersonal markers, signaling emotional intensity, urgency, or care in ways conventional grammar does not.

3. Textual Metafunction

The textual metafunction involves the organization of information to create cohesion, coherence, and foregrounding within the narrative. In *Rani*, narrative and syntactic deviations organize attention and sequence, often fragmenting linearity to reflect memory, cognition, or psychological tension. Temporal shifts, such as “I WAS NINE. May had just begun” (Javed, 2025, p. 9), interrupt the present narrative to recount past events, using capitalization and abrupt temporal deixis to foreground episodic recall. Such disruptions in textual flow highlight narrative fragmentation and contribute to reader engagement with subjective experience.

Sentence fragments, ellipses, and abrupt transitions operate textually to manipulate information focus. Examples include “She remained silent. Imperfect. Reduced to a shadow again” (Javed, 2025, p. 22) and “Movement, accompanied by muffled cries and whispers” (p. 20). These fragments foreground the perceptual and emotional significance of events, providing the reader with selectively highlighted experiential content. Prepositional phrase openings such as “Halfway up the stairs, I heard movement in her room” (Javed, 2025, p. 24) also structure narrative attention spatially and temporally, guiding the reader’s cognitive mapping of events. Deviations in textual cohesion also interact with interpersonal meaning. Repetition of phrases like “Accha, accha” (p. 5) functions both textually, as a thematic anchor, and interpersonally, as relational emphasis. Lexical innovation, fragmented clause sequences, and non-standard syntax collectively serve to foreground experience, sequence, and relational evaluation, ensuring that the narrative’s textual texture aligns with its experiential and interpersonal aims. Through the lens of SFL, *Rani* demonstrates how grammatical, lexical, and narrative deviations operate functionally across ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. Ideationally, deviations encode cognitive, emotional, and sensory experiences; interpersonally, they regulate social roles, power, and evaluation; and textually, they structure narrative focus, cohesion, and temporal-spatial sequencing. Each deviation serves a meaning-making purpose, supporting Halliday’s assertion that linguistic variation is always functionally motivated (Halliday, 1994). In Javed’s text, deviations are not merely stylistic embellishments but systemic choices, enabling nuanced representation of memory, dementia, social interaction, and the fragmentary nature of lived experience.

4.1 Grammatical Deviance

Grammatical deviations include sentence fragments, irregular syntax, and disrupted punctuation.

Excerpt (Javed, 2025)	Type Deviation	of SFL Metafunction	Interpretation
“She sat there for a moment, hollowed out.”	Sentence fragment	Ideational	Highlights Daddi’s emptiness, emotional and cognitive disorientation. mirroring cognitive

Excerpt (Javed, 2025)	Type Deviation	of SFL Metafunction	Interpretation
“I DREW THE HEAVY CURTAINS in the bedroom...”	Capitalization, in the abrupt syntax	Interpersonal/Textual	Emphasizes Annie’s agency and emotional intensity during caretaking.
“Shhh... Shhh...”, “Accha, accha”	Repetition, ellipsis	Ideational/Interpersonal	Mimics disordered speech, reflects dementia and disrupted communication patterns.

Grammatical deviance mirrors psychological states, aligning ideational meaning with cognitive disarray while highlighting interpersonal dynamics between caregiver and patient.

4.2 Lexical Deviance

Lexical deviation occurs through contextually marked word choices and culturally loaded vocabulary.

Examples and Analysis:

Excerpt (Javed, 2025)	Type Deviation	of SFL Metafunction	Interpretation
“Behaya aurat. She’s a shameless woman.”	Contextually marked vocabulary	Interpersonal	Reflects cultural judgment and gendered norms in Pakistani society.
“Interwoven in the fabric, burning in the fire, braided into the silver of her hair.”	Metaphorical, emotive	Ideational	Symbolizes grief and memory, transcending literal description.
“Frailty,” “cloak of invincibility”	Emotive lexemes	Ideational/Interpersonal	Highlights perceptions of resilience and mortality, foregrounding ideological tension.

Lexical deviance emphasizes social, cultural, and emotional tensions. Deviant vocabulary encodes character perception, ideologies, and values.

4.3 Narrative Deviance

Narrative deviance includes temporal disruption, perspective shifts, and fragmented sequences.

Excerpt (Javed, 2025)	Type Deviation	of SFL Metafunction	Interpretation
“I WAS NINE. May had just begun... My father had received a scholarship...”	Temporal shift	Textual/Ideational	Non-linear temporality mirrors memory intrusion, blending past and present.
Alternating between Annie, and external observers	Daddi, Perspective shift	Ideational/Interpersonal	Provides fragmented subjectivity, emphasizing psychological depth.

Excerpt (Javed, 2025)	Type of Deviation	SFL Metafunction	Interpretation
“The old Daddi carried the smell of red Lifebuoy soap, sharp and antiseptic, and almond hair oil, sweet and nutty.”	Fragmented sequence	Textual/Ideational	Disjointed narrative mimics episodic memory and immediacy of perception.

Narrative deviance foregrounds fragmented experience and subjective reality, enhancing textual metafunction by structuring attention and emphasis.

Applying SFL and the theory of deviation demonstrates that Javed’s linguistic strategies are functional and meaningful: Grammatical deviance foregrounds cognitive fragmentation and emotional intensity. Lexical deviance encodes social norms, cultural judgments, and moral tension. Narrative deviance mirrors fragmented memory and subjective perception. Together, these deviations allow readers to experience characters’ inner worlds, bridging ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions (Halliday, 1994; Simpson, 2004; Leech & Short, 2007; Javed, 2025).

6. Conclusion

Kanza Javed’s *Rani* exemplifies the purposeful use of deviant language to construct psychological, cultural, and emotional meaning. Through SFL analysis, it is evident that grammatical, lexical, and narrative deviations are integral to the story’s interpretive power, representing memory, trauma, and relational dynamics. Deviant language not only foregrounds experience but also manipulates narrative flow, giving depth to character subjectivity and social commentary.

Moreover, SFL and deviant language perfectly complement each other for this study because SFL identifies functional meaning at ideational, interpersonal, and textual levels, while deviant language highlights how these meanings are constructed through deliberate departures from linguistic norms. In *Rani*, this synergy allows a nuanced exploration of dementia, grief, social tension, and memory, revealing the strategic linguistic choices Javed makes to convey subjective experience.

References

- Eggs, S. (2004). *Analyzing English Conversation: A Systemic Functional Approach*. London: Continuum.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (2nd ed.). London: Arnold.
- Javed, K. (2025). *Rani*. What Remains After a Fire. Pakistan: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Leech, G., & Short, M. (2007). *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (2nd ed.). Pearson.
- Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students*. Routledge.