

MORPHOSYNTACTIC ARCHITECTURE IN SHADAB ZEEST HASHMI'S *THE GREEN WALLS*: A DISTRIBUTED MORPHOLOGY APPROACH

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Abstract

This study examines Shadab Zeest Hashmi's poem The Green Walls through the lens of Distributed Morphology (DM), a generative model that views word formation as a syntactic process with post-syntactic phonological realization. The poem employs dense lexical clustering, hyphenated words, and strategic punctuation to reconstruct memory, social experience, and identity. Drawing on the theoretical contributions of Halle and Marantz (1993, 1994) and subsequent refinements by Embick and Noyer (2007), the study analyzes how commas, full stops, and hyphenated constructions function as morphosyntactic cues analogous to DM features. Using a qualitative textual analysis, the paper demonstrates that these elements—through compounding, derivation, and root assembly—encode continuity, termination, and semantic complexity. The findings reveal that the poem's morphosyntactic structure actively shapes rhythm, meaning, and ideological commentary, showing how form and interpretation are inseparable in poetic language.

Keywords: Distributed Morphology, compounding, derivation, punctuation, morphosyntax, Shadab Zeest Hashmi, poetry analysis

Background of the Study

Morphological analysis in literary linguistics has increasingly focused on how word formation contributes to semantic density, stylistic effect, and identity construction. Distributed Morphology (DM), developed by Morris Halle and Alec Marantz (1993, 1994), challenges traditional lexicalist models by treating words as syntactically constructed rather than stored lexical items, with phonological forms (Vocabulary Items) inserted post-syntactically. Subsequent work by Embick and Noyer (2007) highlights principles such as Late Insertion, Underspecification, and root-based structure building, which provide a framework for analyzing how morphological and syntactic features interact to create meaning.

Shadab Zeest Hashmi's poetry, particularly *The Green Walls*, offers rich material for such analysis. The poem's use of hyphenated constructions (e.g., *half-ful*, *tube-lights*, *tell-tall*) and punctuation (commas, full stops) can be read as morphosyntactic operations that mirror DM processes. While previous studies have examined Hashmi's poetry in terms of imagery and nostalgia, few have addressed the structural and morphosyntactic mechanisms that shape meaning. This study fills that gap by applying DM principles to the poem to uncover how syntax, morphology, and phonology collaborate to produce semantic and ideological effects.

Statement of the Problem

Although *The Green Walls* has been interpreted for its imagery, social commentary, and nostalgic tone, little research has examined how its morphosyntactic and morphological structures contribute to meaning. Specifically, there is limited work on analyzing punctuation and hyphenated words as functional morphosyntactic features within a generative framework. This study addresses the problem by investigating how roots, functional morphemes, and phonological realization, guided by Distributed Morphology, operate in the poem to construct temporal, spatial, and ideological significance.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative stylistic approach with a focus on morphosyntactic analysis. The primary data consists of the poem *The Green Walls* by Shadab Zeest Hashmi (2005). Analytical steps include:

Identification of morphologically and syntactically complex items: Hyphenated words (*half-ful*, *tube-lights*, *tell-tall*) and strategic punctuation (commas, full stops).

Structural decomposition into roots and functional morphemes, based on DM principles.

Application of Distributed Morphology: Late Insertion, Vocabulary Insertion, and root assembly are used to explain how abstract syntactic operations are realized phonologically. Interpretation of morpho-semantic effects, linking structural findings to poetic rhythm, meaning, and ideology.

Theoretical Framework: Distributed Morphology

Distributed Morphology posits that words are not stored as whole units; rather, roots (ν) combine with functional heads (n, v, a) in syntax, and phonological forms are inserted later (Halle & Marantz, 1993, 1994). In this framework:

Late Insertion: Vocabulary Items are inserted after syntactic structure is complete.

Underspecification: Features compete for insertion based on compatibility.

Root-based structure: Roots carry meaning without phonological content until realized.

In *The Green Walls* (2005), punctuation and hyphenation can be interpreted as morphosyntactic cues analogous to functional morphemes in DM. Commas signal ongoing processes (pause features), full stops mark termination ([Fin] or [ClauseBoundary] features), and hyphenated words represent composite root assemblies combining two abstract roots before phonological realization.

Analysis and Discussion

Distributed Morphology (DM) is a generative approach which holds that:

Words are not stored as whole units in the lexicon;

Instead, abstract syntactic operations build word structure, and

Phonological forms (Vocabulary Items) are inserted post-syntactically (Halle & Marantz, 1993; 1994).

In this view:

roots are feature bundles without phonology until Vocabulary Insertion,

functional elements (tense, aspect, etc.) shape interpretation before phonological realization.

In the poem, punctuation marks and hyphenated constructions can be interpreted as morphosyntactic cues that interface between syntax and phonology — paralleling morphemes in DM.

1. Commas as Syntactic/Functional Morphemes

In DM, abstract features trigger grammatical interpretation before phonological expression (Halle & Marantz, 1993). The *comma* functions similarly:

A comma in poetry signals a syntactic boundary or transition — an abstract pause feature realized phonologically as “,”.

The frequency and placement of commas in the poem map onto repeated Vocabulary Insertion of the same abstract “pause” feature across the syntax.

For example:

“These green walls,” (l.1), “so dirty,” (l.2), “so dark,” (l.3)

Here, the abstract pause feature is inserted repeatedly, encoding:

the cyclical continuity of child labor,

and the incomplete progression of lived experience,

before it is spelled out phonologically.

In DM, this resembles how a functional feature like tense gets repeatedly inserted across clauses but spelled out at PF (phonological form). Thus, the comma performs a *grammatical function* similar to a functional morpheme.

2. Full Stops as Terminative Morphemes

Full stops in DM terms can be seen as syntactic markers of termination or completeness that are spelled out phonologically at the surface.

Instances such as:

“stumbling to get samosas and chai.” (l.8)

“and hands obeying without a question.” (l.10)

reflect repeated insertion of an abstract boundary feature that signals end of a proposition in syntax, realized at PF by “.”.

In DM, abstract features like [Fin] or [ClauseBoundary] are built in narrow syntax and only spelled out later; similarly, these full stops are repeated realizations of a boundary feature that:

signals *semantic closure*,

ideologically marks *social exclusion* of child laborers,

and poetically emphasizes *segregation and separation*.

3. Hyphenated Words as Composite Root Assemblies

In DM, complex words are built in syntax through the combination of roots and functional layers, with Vocabulary Insertion occurring only after the syntactic structure is complete (Halle & Marantz, 1994).

The poem uses hyphenated constructions such as:

half-ful (l.16)

tube-lights (l.29)

tell-tall (l.42)

Each can be represented as a syntactic assembly of roots before phonological realization:

Example (simplified DM structure for *half-ful*):

AspP

|

√FUL

|

√HALF

In DM:

√HALF and √FUL are abstract root features combined in syntax,

The hyphen reflects a functional operation that joins them,

Vocabulary Insertion realizes them as *half-ful* in surface phonology.

This mirrors how DM treats compounding or derivation:

syntactic combination of roots → post-syntactic insertion → phonological output.

Semantically, these hyphens:

half-ful encodes *incompleteness / partial existence*,

tube-lights unites *path* and *illumination* (structured as root + root),

tell-tall fuses *speech* and *height/visibility* in a metaphorical composite — all paralleling the DM notion of root assembly.

4. Graphological Parallelism as Distributed Feature Realization

Graphological Marker DM Analogue

Interpretive Function

Comma (,)

Functional pause feature

Ongoing process / continuity

Full stop (.)

Boundary/terminative feature

Separation, closure

Hyphen (-)

Root combinatory feature

New meaning via root assembly

In DM, abstract features are assembled in syntax and only later spelled out phonologically (as Vocabulary Items). Similarly, the poem’s punctuation signals abstract grammatical meaning (continuity, termination, combination) that is realized at the *surface level*.

5. Poetic Implications: Syntax → Semantics → Phonology

Using DM reveals:

Commas are not random; they reflect an abstract *pause/continuity feature* that is repeatedly inserted — shaping the poem’s rhythmic and ideological cadence.

Full stops realize an abstract *boundary feature* that resets thought and marks structural and social breaks.

Hyphens are morphological junctions — analogous to DM root combinations that produce novel lexical meaning relevant to the poem’s theme.

Thus, the poem’s punctuation and word formation behave like morphosyntactic and morphological operations in DM:

built in syntax → spelled out in phonology → affecting interpretation.

This structural parallelism underscores how form and meaning are inseparable: punctuation becomes a manifestation of morphosyntactic features that shape interpretive and ideological impact.

Findings

Nominal compounding and hyphenation (e.g., *tube-lights*, *half-ful*) encode partiality, continuity, and composite meaning.

Derivational morphology emphasizes social, temporal, and emotional aspects of experience.

Punctuation functions as syntactic and semantic markers, shaping rhythm, closure, and ideological emphasis.

Morphosyntactic structure mirrors DM principles: syntax-driven assembly of roots → post-syntactic phonological insertion → semantic and stylistic effect.

The poem’s form contributes to its thematic concerns of memory, social exclusion, and cultural identity.

Conclusion

Applying Distributed Morphology to *The Green Walls* reveals that the poem’s punctuation, hyphenation, and word formation function as morphosyntactic and morphological operations that shape meaning. Commas, full stops, and hyphens correspond to abstract features inserted in syntax and realized phonologically, producing rhythmic, semantic, and ideological effects. This analysis demonstrates that Hashmi’s poetic craft integrates syntax, morphology, and phonology to construct memory, identity, and social commentary, highlighting the inseparable connection between linguistic form and literary meaning.

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