

MORPHOSYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF COLONIAL DISCOURSE IN E. M. FORSTER'S *A PASSAGE TO INDIA*

¹*Kashmala Khan*, ²*Laila Gul*, ³*Dr. Nijat Ullah Khan*

¹*MPhil Scholar in English Linguistics, Abasyn University, Peshawar*

²*MPhil Scholar in English Linguistics, Abasyn University, Peshawar*

³*Assistant Professor of English, Department of English, Abasyn
University, Peshawar*

Abstract

This study investigates the morphosyntactic structures in E. M. Forster's A Passage to India (2007) with a focus on how grammatical patterns construct meaning, ideology, and thematic representation. The research adopts a qualitative textual analysis approach grounded in morphosyntax, particularly drawing on Hallidayan systemic functional grammar and structural linguistics. Selected extracts from the novel are analyzed to explore sentence structure, pronoun usage, verb forms, modality, lexical morphology, and syntactic patterns such as coordination, subordination, declaratives, interrogatives, and passive constructions. The study demonstrates that morphosyntactic choices are not neutral but function as ideological and thematic carriers within the text. The findings reveal that syntax and morphology actively shape representations of colonial authority, psychological tension, cultural misunderstanding, and identity formation. The study contributes to stylistics and postcolonial linguistics by showing how grammatical structures in literary discourse encode deeper social and ideological meanings.

Key Words

Morphosyntax, Stylistics, Syntax, Morphology, Ideology, Colonial Discourse, Systemic Functional Grammar, A Passage to India, Forster, Postcolonial Linguistics

Background of the Study

Language in literary texts is not only a medium of expression but also a structured system that shapes meaning through grammatical choices. In stylistic and linguistic studies, morphosyntax plays a central role in understanding how sentence structure and word formation contribute to meaning-making. Morphosyntax combines morphology (word formation) and syntax (sentence structure), offering a unified framework to analyze how linguistic forms construct social and ideological meanings. E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (2007) is widely studied for its representation of colonial India, intercultural conflict, and psychological complexity. Previous studies have explored its postcolonial themes, discourse patterns, and narrative techniques; however, limited attention has been given to its detailed morphosyntactic structures. The novel contains rich linguistic patterns such as complex sentences, modality, passive constructions, and pronoun shifts that reflect deeper ideological and psychological tensions.

From a theoretical perspective, Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics emphasizes that grammar is a meaning-making resource rather than a neutral system. Similarly, postcolonial theorists such as Said (1978) and Bhabha (1994) highlight how language constructs power relations and identity. Therefore, analyzing morphosyntactic structures in *A Passage to India* provides valuable insight into how grammar contributes to the representation of colonial ideology and human relationships.

Statement of the Problem

This study is guided by two major research objectives: first, to analyze the morphosyntactic structures used in selected extracts from *A Passage to India*, and

second, to examine how syntax and morphology contribute to thematic representation in the novel. Although the novel has received extensive literary and postcolonial critical attention, there remains a noticeable lack of systematic morphosyntactic analysis that explores how grammatical structures function in the construction of meaning at both linguistic and ideological levels. This gap in existing scholarship serves as the primary motivation for the present study.

Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative research methodology based on textual and stylistic analysis. The data consist of selected extracts from *A Passage to India* provided for analysis. These passages include dialogues, narrative descriptions, and conversational exchanges involving British and Indian characters. The study uses purposive sampling because the selected passages contain significant morphosyntactic features related to colonial discourse, racial hierarchy, emotional tension, and social interaction.

The analytical framework of this study is grounded in morphosyntactic theory, which examines the relationship between morphology and syntax in language structure. The analysis particularly focuses on sentence structure, pronoun usage, verb forms, modality, lexical morphology, declarative and interrogative patterns, imperative constructions, repetition, coordination and subordination, adjectival constructions, tense structures, and passive voice constructions. These linguistic features are explored to identify how colonial discourse is constructed and represented in *A Passage to India*. The study employs a qualitative interpretive approach in which the selected textual data are analyzed within the broader socio-political and historical context of colonial India, highlighting the relationship between language, power, and ideology (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Fairclough, 1995; Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in morphosyntax. Morphosyntax refers to the interaction between morphology and syntax within linguistic structure (Spencer, 1991). Morphology studies the internal structure of words, including prefixes, suffixes, inflections, derivations, and lexical formation. Syntax studies sentence organization, grammatical relations, phrase structures, and word order. Morphosyntax examines how these systems function together in discourse. According to Carnie (2013), syntactic structures influence meaning and social interaction. Halliday (1978) further argues that grammatical choices are socially motivated and ideologically significant. The present study applies morphosyntactic analysis to colonial discourse in *A Passage to India*.

Morphosyntactic Analysis of *A Passage to India*

1. Sentence Structure and Ideological Framing

The analysis of sentence structures in *A Passage to India* demonstrates that syntax is not merely a grammatical arrangement of words but a powerful mechanism for constructing psychological, ideological, and colonial meanings. Forster frequently employs complex and compound-complex sentences to reflect fragmented consciousness and unstable perception. For instance, the sentence “The fatal day

recurred, in every detail, but now she was of it and not of it at the same time” (Forster, 2007, p. 230) shows a syntactic structure built on coordination and contradiction. From a morphosyntactic perspective, the coordinated clause “and not of it” creates semantic tension within the sentence itself, reflecting Adela’s divided psychological state. According to Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics, clause combination patterns often reflect experiential complexity, and here the syntactic layering mirrors cognitive instability.

Similarly, short declarative structures such as “Her vision was of several caves” (Forster, 2007, p. 230) contrast with longer complex constructions. This shift from simplicity to complexity reflects shifts in perception and awareness. The contrast between coordinated action sequences such as “Conversation and billiards stopped, faces stiffened” (Forster, 2007, p. 47) demonstrates how parallel syntactic structures encode collective social behavior, reinforcing the idea of colonial society as ideologically unified and emotionally controlled. Thus, sentence structure in the novel functions as a linguistic representation of both psychological fragmentation and institutional rigidity.

2. Pronoun Usage and Identity Construction

Pronoun systems in the novel play a crucial role in constructing social identity, inclusion, and exclusion. The use of first-person plural pronouns such as “us” in “He’s one of us” (Forster, 2007, p. 47) reflects a strong in-group colonial identity. Morphosyntactically, “us” functions as an inclusive pronoun, yet pragmatically it becomes exclusive, marking a boundary between colonizers and colonized. This aligns with postcolonial linguistic theory, where language becomes a site of ideological division (Bhabha, 1994).

In contrast, the use of “we” in “We Moslems simply must get rid of these superstitions” (Forster, 2007, p. 113) constructs a collective identity among Indian characters, though it is linguistically marked by obligation through the modal “must.” The demonstrative “these” further reinforces distancing. Similarly, pronouns such as “they” in “They are doing a play” (Forster, 2007, p. 43) create social separation and objectification. According to Halliday, pronouns function as deictic markers of social positioning, and in this novel, they systematically construct colonial binaries of self and other.

3. Verb Forms and Agency Representation

Verb morphology in *A Passage to India* reflects variations in agency, control, and emotional intensity. Dynamic verbs such as “slammed” in “The Superintendent slammed down his papers” (Forster, 2007, p. 231) indicate high transitivity and strong agency, positioning colonial authority as active and dominant. In contrast, stative constructions such as “She was of it and not of it” (Forster, 2007, p. 230) reduce agency and emphasize psychological states rather than actions.

Similarly, the use of sequential dynamic verbs in “He stormed, shouted, howled” (Forster, 2007, p. 111) reflects emotional excess through coordinated verbal repetition. According to transitivity theory, such verb choices encode levels of participation in events, and in Forster’s narrative, British characters are often associated with assertive verb forms, while Indian characters are frequently represented through passive or descriptive constructions. This distribution of verb morphology contributes to the ideological mapping of power relations in the text.

4. Modality and Ideological Meaning

Modality plays a central role in expressing obligation, uncertainty, and ideological positioning. In “We Moslems simply must get rid of these superstitions” (Forster, 2007, p. 113), the modal verb “must” encodes strong deontic obligation, reflecting ideological urgency and communal pressure. According to Halliday, modal verbs represent speaker judgment, and here they function as markers of social control.

In contrast, epistemic uncertainty is expressed in clauses such as “I am not quite sure” (Forster, 2007, p. 230), where negation combined with hedging weakens certainty. Similarly, “Perhaps pale” (Forster, 2007, p. 81) reflects tentative perception. Modal constructions such as “ought not to walk at night alone” (Forster, 2007, p. 43) combine moral advice with social regulation. Thus, modality in the novel encodes ideological tension between certainty and doubt, authority and hesitation.

5. Lexical Morphology and Semantic Expansion

Lexical morphology contributes to meaning-making through derivational and compounding processes. Words such as “incredible splendor” (Forster, 2007, p. 230) use prefixation (“in-”) to negate desirability, creating a semantic boundary beyond linguistic expression. Similarly, “unconventional behavior” (Forster, 2007, p. 96) uses the prefix “un-” to mark deviation from normative expectations.

Compound forms such as “self-complacency” reflect ideological criticism embedded in lexical structure. According to morphological theory, derivation modifies meaning at the word level, and in Forster’s novel, such forms encode judgments about social behavior, cultural difference, and emotional states. Thus, lexical morphology becomes a subtle tool for ideological representation.

6. Declarative and Interrogative Structures

Declarative sentences in the novel often express ideological certainty and colonial stereotyping. For example, “All unfortunate natives are criminals at heart” (Forster, 2007, p. 176) presents an absolute judgment encoded through universal quantification (“all”) and copular assertion (“are”). This syntactic closure eliminates ambiguity and reinforces colonial discourse.

Conversely, interrogative structures introduce epistemic instability, as seen in “What is the use of existing?” (Forster, 2007, p. 112). WH-interrogatives open semantic space for existential doubt. Similarly, “Why had she thought the expedition dull?” (Forster, 2007, p. 230) reflects internal questioning and cognitive reevaluation. Thus, declaratives construct authority, while interrogatives destabilize meaning.

7. Imperatives and Power Relations

Imperative constructions function as markers of authority and control. The command “Look at the flies” (Forster, 2007, p. 127) demonstrates direct directive force, removing the subject pronoun and asserting dominance. Similarly, “Let us go on” (Forster, 2007, p. 231) uses inclusive imperative structure, which Halliday identifies as mitigated authority, masking command as cooperation.

In institutional contexts, imperatives such as “Let me explain” (Forster, 2007, p. 48) structure discourse and regulate interaction. Thus, imperatives in the novel reflect both overt and covert forms of power distribution.

8. Repetition and Emotional Intensification

Repetition serves as a morphosyntactic strategy for intensifying emotional meaning. Expressions such as “Oh no, oh no, no” (Forster, 2007, p. 172) reflect emotional breakdown through phonological and syntactic repetition. Similarly, “Ate and ate and ate” (Forster, 2007, p. 89) uses iterative verbal repetition to indicate excess and monotony.

According to stylistic theory, repetition functions as a cohesion device and emotional amplifier. In the novel, it reflects psychological anxiety and ideological insistence.

9. Coordination and Subordination

Coordination and subordination structures reflect different modes of ideological organization. Coordinated structures such as “He stormed, shouted, howled” (Forster, 2007, p. 111) create rhythmic equality among actions, intensifying emotional expression. In contrast, subordinate clauses such as “Though they perceived neither Royalty nor Deity” (Forster, 2007, p. 47) introduce hierarchical dependency and ideological framing.

Thus, coordination reflects immediacy and emotional flow, while subordination encodes layered power relations.

10. Adjectival Constructions and Evaluation

Adjectives function as evaluative morphosyntactic units that shape perception. Phrases such as “pale masses of the rock” (Forster, 2007, p. 230) construct visual and emotional atmosphere. Similarly, “friendly Indians” (Forster, 2007, p. 62) encodes ideological positioning through evaluative labeling.

According to Halliday, adjectives contribute to interpersonal meaning, and in this novel, they construct colonial perceptions of space, identity, and emotion.

11. Tense Structures and Temporal Meaning

Tense structures organize narrative time and memory. The past tense in “The fatal day recurred” (Forster, 2007, p. 230) constructs cyclical memory. Past perfect constructions such as “She had forgotten the snakes” (Forster, 2007, p. 43) create layered temporality.

Thus, tense in the novel functions as a tool for psychological depth and historical reflection.

12. Passive Voice and Agency Suppression

Passive constructions frequently obscure agency and reinforce institutional power. In “The matter was placed beyond doubt” (Forster, 2007, p. 47), the absence of an explicit agent creates institutional authority as natural fact. Similarly, “They were strengthened to resist another day” (Forster, 2007, p. 47) hides the source of action.

According to transitivity theory, passive voice reduces agency and increases ideological neutrality. In the novel, it contributes to the invisibility of colonial power structures.

The morphosyntactic analysis of *A Passage to India* demonstrates that grammar is not merely structural but deeply ideological. Sentence patterns, pronoun usage, modality, verb morphology, and syntactic choices collectively construct colonial discourse. British characters are associated with declarative certainty, passive institutional authority, and modal control, while Indian characters are often represented through

emotional, interrogative, and dialogic structures. This aligns with Halliday's view that language is a social semiotic system and with postcolonial theorists such as Said (1978) and Bhabha (1994), who argue that discourse produces power relations. Thus, morphosyntax in Forster's novel operates as a linguistic mechanism through which colonial ideology, psychological fragmentation, and cultural tension are systematically encoded.

Findings

The analysis reveals that morphosyntactic structures play a crucial role in shaping meaning in *A Passage to India*. The findings indicate that complex and compound sentences reflect psychological fragmentation and ideological tension among characters. Pronoun usage constructs social boundaries, reinforcing inclusion and exclusion between colonizers and colonized groups. Verb forms encode agency, with dynamic verbs representing authority and stative forms reflecting psychological uncertainty. Modal expressions highlight obligation, uncertainty, and ideological control within social interactions.

Lexical morphology contributes to evaluative meaning through derivation and compounding, shaping perception and judgment. Declarative structures express ideological certainty, while interrogatives introduce doubt and existential questioning. Imperative constructions reflect power relations and institutional authority. Repetition intensifies emotional expression and psychological tension. Coordination and subordination structure ideological hierarchy and narrative complexity. Adjectival constructions create evaluative and descriptive meaning that shapes colonial imagery. Tense structures organize memory, time, and psychological reflection. Passive voice constructions obscure agency and reinforce institutional dominance.

The findings show that morphosyntax is deeply embedded in the construction of thematic meaning in the novel.

Conclusion

The study concludes that morphosyntactic structures in *A Passage to India* are not merely grammatical forms but powerful tools of meaning-making and ideological representation. The analysis demonstrates that syntax and morphology significantly contribute to the construction of colonial discourse, identity formation, psychological tension, and cultural conflict. Forster's use of sentence structure, pronouns, modality, verb forms, and passive constructions reveals a systematic linguistic pattern that reflects deeper social and ideological realities.

By applying morphosyntactic analysis, the study establishes that grammar functions as a site of ideological negotiation in literary texts. It further confirms that linguistic structures play a central role in shaping thematic meaning in postcolonial fiction. The research contributes to stylistics, morphosyntax, and postcolonial literary studies by highlighting the intersection of language structure and ideological representation.

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Authors' Contribution

1. Kashmala Khan

Conceived the research idea, collected textual data from *A Passage to India*, conducted the primary morphosyntactic analysis, and prepared the initial draft of the manuscript.

2. Laila Gul

Assisted in data interpretation, literature review, organization of analytical sections, formatting, and revision of the manuscript according to academic standards.

3. Dr Nijat Ullah Khan

Supervised the research process, provided theoretical and methodological guidance, critically reviewed the manuscript, and finalized the paper for publication.