

THE LINGUISTIC AND NARRATIVE DIMENSIONS OF FAITH HEALING PRACTICES IN PASHTOON SOCIETY

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Abstract

Faith healing practices are found in majority of religions. It is a method of treating illnesses like toothache, stomachache, migraine, exorcism, earache, or pain in other parts of body through the exercise of faith instead of medical methods by physicians (Farooqi, 2016). The present study aims at investigating the linguistic and narrative dimensions of faith healing practices in Pashto speaking society. Linguistic features included lexical choices, invocative terms, and theological concepts. For that purpose, the researcher visited the faith healers and recorded the data during those practices. After recording, data was translated to English. Then the data was analyzed keeping in view the target linguistic and narrative features. The data was analyzed qualitatively as the study adopted qualitative approach. Major themes, patterns, concepts and narrative techniques had identified and deduced. Results of the study depicted that the language of the faith healing practices contained authoritative commands, ritualistic features, and personifications as well as hyperbole. The use of sacred phrases and sacred names like Allah, Beloved of Allah, Saints, Aulias (pious people), other prophets and Sahabas marked the language as theological. For migraine and expulsion of jinn and demon, faith healers used narratives. These narratives had specific and simple plot, characters and setting. Moreover, they invoked Allah, the Holy Prophet (SAW), Sahabas and saints. Lastly, it is recommended that the language of faith healing practices should be explored for other linguistics features and it should be compared with other religions.

Key Words: Faith healing practices, lexical choices, invocative terms, theological concepts, and narrative techniques.

1. Introduction

Faith healing is a method or way of treating illnesses through the exercise of faith instead of medical methods by physicians. Faith healing is usually practiced via prayers to God and deities. All religions have their own faith healing practices and rituals (Gopi, 2016). Ritual is one of the components of religion. It may benefit mental health (Schumaker, 1992). It confirms faith and invokes assistance from deity thereby facilitating control over daily affairs in the world. So, it is an effective copying technique (Hinde, 1999). Faith healing practices are complex spiritual and religious methods which are employed with such belief that supernatural or divine intervention can be cured physically or psychologically. These practices are found in various emotional and physical ailments. These practices are found in various religious and cultural contexts in the world (Farooqi, 2016). Faith healers carry out a variety of rituals and practices that are often deeply rooted in religious or spiritual beliefs. The specific processes can vary widely depending on the faith healers' cultural and religious context. Sometime they touch the part of the body and transfer divine power or healing energy. They also pray to deity or spiritual beings for healing. Sometimes they recite specific mantras, chants or holy texts which they think have healing properties. They also sprinkle holy water or using blessed objects, leaves, relics and crosses. They also write sacred lines on a piece of paper or prepare amulets to be worn (Lawal &

Jegade, 2024). Faith healing is an integral part of society for many centuries even before the advent of modern medicine. They are based on the belief that supernatural and higher authority like spirit, angel or other deity has the ability to heal illness. These practices are often seen as complementary or alternative to conventional medical treatments, particular in communities where access to modern healthcare is limited or where cultural traditions emphasize spiritual approaches to health (Mischel, 2018). In his book Battino, (2017) writes that language has the power to change the behaviour of people. Certain language statements are uttered which affect the psychological mind set of the target people. There are some faith healers who narrate stories and treat the patients through his or her oral language.

Islamic texts explain diverse kinds of spiritual beings in the universe in the form of *jinn* (spirits), *marrid* (demons), *shaytaan* (satanic beings), *farista* (angels), and *bhut* (evil spirits). Studies among Muslims in Europe and the Middle East showed that mental illness is caused by jinn spirits; resort is frequently made to religious healers who recite the Quran in an endeavor to exorcise these malevolent spirits (Gaw, 1993). There are other healers who use language other than religious texts like Hindi, Parsi and Pashto languages to treat the psychological patients. Specific statements are used by those healers for such purpose to deal with the patients. These statements and utterances specifically known as *Ijaza* (spiritual authorizations) are passed from generations to generations (Dein & Samad, 2018).

People turn to faith healers for a variety of reasons, often driven by their cultural practices, beliefs, and the search for holistic healing. People in Pashto speaking society go to faith healers to seek treatment to get relief from physical ailments such as headache, earaches, and other persistent health issue when face problems. They also seek treatment in case of toothache, evil eyes, madness, epilepsy and kidney stone. People also seek faith healing for mental and emotional problems, including stress, anxiety, depression, and trauma. Faith healing is seen as a way to restore spiritual balance and connection to a higher power (Ibrahim & Mojab, 2022).

Faith healing is a specific method or procedure of treating different kinds of illnesses via faith rather than medical methods. Such type of illnesses included mental and psychological illnesses; like insomnia, stress, and depression, physical illnesses; like joint pain, back pain, headache, migraine, snake bites, fever, paralysis, spiritual and supernatural illnesses; like evil eye (Nazar), black magic sihr), possession by jinn and social problems; like marital problems and family conflicts. Faith healers solve such problems and illnesses via faith using language (Deepak, et al. 2020). All religions have such practices using different languages. People in such practices are of the belief that healing of disability and diseases can be solved by religious faith via prayer or other types of rituals that can stimulate divine power and presence (Randi, 1989).

In Pashto speaking society, faith healers use Pashto language as they are traditional faith healers. They use *ijazas*, statements used in faith healing practices, for treating their healer-patients. These Pashto statements are traditional and passed from generation to generation. Such language has specific characteristics. They contain invoking and religious terms (Rafiq, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

In Pashto speaking society, faith healing practice is a deeply rooted religious and cultural practice, often regarded as a significant means of addressing spiritual, physical, and emotional ailments. The language used in such type of practices plays a significant role in invoking divine intervention, facilitating healing and creating trust. Despite its importance, no systematic

research work has been carried out to explore and analyze the linguistic features of faith healing practices in Pashto speaking society. This lack of linguistic investigation leaves a critical gap in understanding how language functions as an instrument for healing, persuasion, and connection in this context. Therefore, the present study aims at investigating the language of faith healing practices in Pashtoon society, focusing on its narrative techniques, structure, and other linguistic features themes involved.

Research Questions

The present study included the following research questions.

1. What are the religious and theological concepts in the language of faith healing practices?
2. What are the narrative techniques used in the faith healing practices?
3. What are the lexical choices in the language of faith healing practices?
4. What are the invocative terms portrayed in the language of faith healing practices?

Research Objectives

The present study included the following research objectives.

1. To explore the religious and theological concepts in the language of faith healing practices.
2. To investigate the narrative techniques in the faith healing practices.
3. To find out the lexical choices in the language of faith healing practices.
4. To investigate invocative terms portrayed in the language of faith healing practices.

Significance of the Study

The present research study holds substantial significance in both cultural and linguistic domains. By exploring the language used in faith healing practices in Pashto speaking society, the study gives influential insights into the unique thematic religious-based structures, discourse patterns, narrative techniques, and communicative strategies. It further highlights how language acts as a strong instrument for trust-building, invoking divine intervention, trust-building and religious and theological framework of the Pashto speaking community. The results and findings will contribute to the field of sociolinguistics by revealing how linguistic and cultural features intersect in these practices. Moreover, it offers practical impacts for linguists, educators and anthropologists interested in the role of language in culturally embedded rituals. Lastly, the study offers a foundation for further interdisciplinary research studies that will promote deeper understanding of the link between culture, language and treatment.

Research Gap

Faith healing practices is a common practice in most of the religions including Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. In several religions faith healing practices have been subject of interest in various disciplines, including religious, cultural, psychological and medical studies. Researchers have explored the importance of faith healing across different religions and cultural contexts, shedding light on its affects on beliefs, health, and community practices. However, little attention has been given to the language used in faith healing practices, specifically in the Pashtoon society of Pakistan. While studies exist on the religious and sociocultural dimensions of these faith healing practices, the linguistic strategies, communicative functions, discourse patterns and narrative techniques employed during these practices remain unexplored. This gap

in understanding highlights the need to investigate the unique language dynamics within Pashtoon faith healing traditions.

2. Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The present study took insights from Narratology and thematic analysis. Narratology is a literary theory that deals with the ways stories are structured and characteristics stories have in common and what makes such stories different from other stories. This theory refers to the structuralist study of narrative. The structuralists seek to understand how recurrent themes, elements, and patterns yield a set of universals that determine the makeup of a story. Aristotle is considered to be the founder of modern Narratology. Poetics written by Aristotle is believed to have laid the foundation for narrative theory and criticism (Phelan & Rabinowitz, 2005). The main proponents of this theory are Vladimir Propp, best known for his work *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), Claude Lévi-Strauss, who applied structuralist principles to the study of myths, proposing that myths from different cultures share universal structures. Narrative is anything that presents or tells a story while story is a sequence of events involving different characters.

A widely recognized Narratology model that depicts plot, characters, themes, setting, and point of view is the "Narrative Communication Model" based on Seymour Chatman's structuralist approach. This model differentiates between the discourse (expression) and the story (content) and provides a comprehensive framework to analyze the key elements of narratives (Chatman, 1978).

Thematic Analysis

Thematic Analysis involves identifying and analyzing patterns or themes within the text. It is particularly useful for exploring the underlying religious and theological concepts inside religious based language. It has many advantages like identification of major themes like identifying key themes related to religion and theology in the texts, such as references to scripture, invoking God and prophets, expressions of faith, and descriptions of divine intervention. Pattern Analysis look for patterns in how these themes are developed and interconnected throughout the text. Interpretation, analyze the significance of these themes in the context of faith healing practices (Dawadi, 2020). The researcher applied thematic analysis as a second theoretical framework, after Narratology, to explore theological concepts and religious based invocative terms in the language of faith healing practices.

Previous Research Studies

This study tries to investigate the issue of faith healing from the point of clinical care. It explains five aspects to supplement the argument which are concepts of spirituality, faith, faith healing and religion. Ethical issues have been taken into consideration during decision making. This study refers to those faith healing practices which are not harmful like wearing rings and amulets and prayers (Gopichandran, 2015).

Muhammad & Fareed, (2023) through their work showed that spiritual healing is considered the first line of care for psychosocial illness and people consider imams as the primary support network. The findings revealed that war-related traumas and post-resettlement challenges have significant impact on family functions and well-being.

People beliefs are shaped by the culture about illness and health. This study aims at assessing the role of faith healers in the treatment of mental illness. It is a cross-sectional study and convenience sampling technique is adopted. Results indicated that 41.5% participants firstly contacted the faith healer while 86% visited faith healer anytime during the course of illness (Kudi, Khakha, & Kumar, 2023).

Bosire & Cele, (2021) explored that why, what, and how people living with chronic illness in an urban South African township priorities healing practices of the Church over the Clinic. 88 in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted to understand how people think about chronic illness, health, and healing. The faith healing practices included religious practices, such as prayer and drinking church water, as well as one's spirituality, which was an essential way in which people found healing.

Another study explores the modalities and development of faith healing in Islam and Christianity. These practices have been compared in the two religions. It aims to provide medical practitioners with better understanding of faith healing from Muslim and Christian contexts (Reinhardt, 2015).

Ortiz, (2019) undertakes representations of faith healing in contemporary Latin literature in order to argue for and find out the possibilities for radically different realities afforded by holistic, inter subjective healing modalities. Each chapter takes a different theoretical approach to faith healing, thereby examining the ways in which faith healing can be subversive medicine, and the various forms of oppression faith healing can resist.

Faith healing has been accepted way or mode of treatment in many cultures. This research aims at assessing the cultural beliefs towards faith healing practices. Data was collected from 197 patients via purposive sampling using questionnaire about behaviors of the people towards faith healing. Results of the study should call the attention of higher authorities to avoid delay in seeking medical help thereby affecting the prognosis of illness (Kausar, Kumar, & Kausar, 2020).

A study carried out on the topic '*African traditional and religious faith healing practices and the provision of psychological wellbeing among amaxhosa people*'. The authors identify a strong relationship between African traditional and religious faith healing (Sandlana & Mtetwa, 2008).

This article aimed at investigating the idea of spiritual healing. This is a qualitative study with a grounded theory approach was utilized. Focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were conducted, and data were analyzed using thematic content analysis technique. The explorative of spiritual healing revealed motivation challenges and treatment frameworks. Healers emphasized skills mastery and adherence to values, employing methods like Ijazas and wazaiif. Patients reported mixed experiences, with some finding benefit while others expressed their doubt (Khan, Asif, & Ullah, 2024).

The study explored 216 participants of faith healing experiences in Philippines. Two catholic priests provided the data. Narratives were provided by healers (Varela, 2023).

People give importance to religion in every walk of life including health. In Islam, Muslims show inclination towards Quran and Sunnah. We reviewed the structural and philosophical elements echoing the Quran and Islamic principles in the intervention content reported. However, most research studies have identified that the needs of Muslim communities were often compromised or overlooked. This review emphasizes the importance of intellectual apparatus when working in diverse communities, effective communication-strategies, and

community consultations when designing interventions with Muslim-minority communities (McLaren, Patmisari, & Jones, 2021).

Apart from the above studies, another article entitled “healing in Islam: a psychological perspective: religious psychotherapy” conducted by Sulaiman & Gabadeen, (2013) explained from psychological point of view. Similarly, another research, on behalf of PhD in Philosophy, carried out by Siddiqui, (2019) about faith healing at a Muslim Shrine in Gujarat, India: exploring the site, subject and Ghost. In the same way, Levin, (2019) summarizes theoretical perspectives from psychology supportive of a healing effect of faith.

3. Methodology

This research paper is purely qualitative in nature. It deals with qualitative data. Qualitative research is a kind of research that seeks to understand phenomena through the collection and analysis of non-numerical data. It is primarily concerned with understanding human behavior, experiences, and the reasons that govern such behavior (Cropley, 2023). The major research instrument for data collection is recording. Recording is an important research tool used in qualitative researches to capture audio or video data from research participants also called subjects in their natural settings. Population of the study included all the individuals practicing faith healing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Due to the unregulated and informal nature of faith healing practices, exact number of faith healers is unknown. The study employed convenience sampling method by approaching faith healers who are approachable, easily accessible and willing to participate. Data was collected from 30 faith healers including both male and female. Data was recorded through mobile phone during faith healing practices. The recorded data in the form of statements and stories of faith healers were then translated to English for further analysis.

Table 3.1 Faith Healers’ Data

S.#	No. of Faith healers	L1	Gender	Age	Religion
1	30	Pashto	Both male and female	40 – 100 years	Islam

4. Analysis and Discussion

Religious and Theological Concepts

The language of the faith healing practices contained authoritative commands, ritualistic features, and personifications as well as hyperbole. The use of sacred phrases and sacred names like Allah, Beloved of Allah, Saints, Aulias (pious people), other prophets and Sahabas marked the language as theological. The language contributed to its effectiveness and meaning. Important religious and theological features are explained as under.

Faith healers believed in the ultimate power and divine authority of God. They invoke Allah and sought help from Him. They believed that Allah has ultimate authority over all things and people. Allah is one Who treats illness and diseases and gives good health. During faith healing practices this is often expressed through phrases like *"in the name of God"* and *"by the command of God"*.

Similarly, some faith healers used sacred words and texts taken from Quran and Hadith. The name of angels, prophets, saints, holy prophets and some words taken from Quran are used in the language. Figures such as saints, holy persons, or prophets are believed to have special access to divine power. They serve as intermediaries between people and God seeking healing.

Narrative Techniques in the Language

Narratology is the study of narrative patterns and structure and how these structures affect our perception of stories. It investigates the main elements that make up a narrative and the methods used to tell a story. From the data obtained through recording, it is evident that faith healers used short stories orally narrated during their practices. Different faith healers use different stories for treatment of migraine. The key concepts in these stories are discussed as under.

For Migraine

Beloved of Allah came and he told to his companions. Collect wood and light the fire on the dew drops. The companions collected the wood and lighted the fire. Beloved of Allah said, "Who are you"? "I am headache (Migraine)", he said. Beloved of Allah said, "The headache should be finished". Headache said, "Do not burn me"! "Cover something on me and hide me". Beloved of Allah said, "Whoever reads this verse (Arabic verse), you will be finished by the command of Allah". (Story1)

Five faqirs were walking along the road. While traveling, they stopped at a Hindu's shop-based house and asked him to give them some rice. The Hindu first denied and then gave them some rice. Then the people went to potter's house and asked him to give them a kettle. First he denied and then gave them the kettle. Finally then went to a river side (village water point). Three of them placed kettle on the fire and two people offered prayer. The kettle started whistling. There was something in the kettle that was jumping again and again. They asked who you are. It said that he was migraine. Then they said, "May Allah finish migraine". (Story 2)

Plot

Stories narrated by faith healers seemed to be simple with unified plot. Incidents were described one after the other. They had unity, coherence as well as cohesion. Stories were simple and understandable. These stories had beginning, mid and end.

Setting

Every narrative or story has some setting like ground, plain, mountain, village etc.

Character

Two to seven characters are mentioned in every story. Apart from these living characters, some inanimate objects are also mentioned. In most of the stories, abstract entities, angels and saints are mentioned.

Point of view

Most of the stories are narrated in third person by invoking Messenger of God, prophet, Sahabas, or any other saint. Different people belonging to different professions are mentioned in these stories.

Time

Most of the stories used by faith healers showed past time and present time. There is no future tense to be used.

Voice

Voice of the faith healers was authoritative and they spoke with confidence. They claim to treat illnesses via spiritual means, often use specific narrative voices in their narratives or stories to evoke emotions, establish credibility, and inspire belief. Their narrative voice is unique style and perspective from which the story is told, and it plays a vital role in how people perceives and responds to the message of the healers.

Narration

The stories are narrated beautifully and artistically. They are culturally bounded. In Pashto language these stories vary in size and length. They are simple and understandable.

Narratives in Exorcism

The faith healers used specific stories in Pashto language and sometimes use Arabic verses for the expulsion of Jinn, demon or evil spirit. In such practices, they talk with the demons and Jinns. Faith healers while talking to jinns use interrogative statements. Through that specific kind of Pashto language, they treat the patients.

“In the Name of Allah and by the command of Allah, A Jinn! go from here, and leave the patient”, “Why do you come here?. Why do you tease this person?”

Sometimes, faith healers talk to jinns like ask questions from them like:

“Who are you? Are you Muslim or non-Muslim? What do you want from him”?

Lexical Choices in the Language

Lexical choices refer to the selection of those words and phrases that writers and speakers use to convey his or her message. Faith healers adopt language related to emotional, spiritual and cultural dimensions of such practices. They are often involved in specific terminology like divine healing, spiritual healing and miracle healing. They often use metaphorical language in their statements.

Religious Terms

In the Name of Allah, by the command of Allah, Beloved of Allah are the religious terms used in such language.

Frequent use of Imperative and Directive Language

The main feature of the language is the use of imperative and directive language. For example, “collect wood”, “light the fire”, “go from here”, “Do not burn me”, “Hide me” are used in the language. Other phrases, for example “by the command of Allah” are frequently used.

Personifications in the Language

Many entities have been personified in this type of language. Toothache, headache, earache, and stomachache have been personified by many faith healers. The headache has been addressed many times as seems as headache is a living entity.

“Who are you”? “I am headache (Migraine)”

Headache said, “Do not burn me”!

Exorcism or Expulsion of Jinn

Exorcism is a practice that involves the expulsion of an evil spirit, demon, or jinn from a person or place believed to be possessed. Words such as God, angels, demons, Jinn, spirits and saints are used commonly. The faith healers use specific chants, prayers, chanting, meditation and curse. While using the language, the faith healers also used water, leaves, cloth and certain vegetables.

Invocative Terms in the Language

The faith healers during their practices and treatment invoked many names. The most common invocative terms used by the target faith healers came to the researcher's notice. They were dominantly found in the language of most of the faith healers. They are described as below.

God

Faith healers including people used and invoked God by mentioning different names like Khuda, Allah, Allah Pak, Malik, Rab etc. They sought help from God.

Hazrat Muhammad (SAW)

Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) is the last prophet (SAW) of Allah. Faith healers also invoked Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) by using different names like beloved of Allah, Rasool of Allah etc.

Quran Sharif

Most of the faith healers also invoked Quran as the script of Allah.

Four Companions

Faith healers used the term "four companions" which refers to Hazrat Abubakar (RA), Hazrat Usman (RA), Hazrat Ali (RA), and Hazrat Umar (RA)

Hazrat Sulaiman (AS)

Many faith healers also mentioned Hazrat Sulaiman (AS)

Local Saints (Peeran)

Most of the faith healers also invoked five peeran (saints). They mentioned local saints that vary in names.

Mian Saeed Jalal Bukhari Baba

Some mentioned Mian Saeed Jalal Bukhari Baba in their stories during faith healing practices.

Big Saint

Some of them mentioned the most senior saint as the big saint.

Mian Peer Budlay Baba

This saint is also mentioned by some of them.

Apart from the above mentioned names, some faith healers used the following names like: Teacher, Lal Shahbaz Ajmeer Qalandar Bugdad Sahib, Silsala e Aulia, Toor Baba, Shams-o-Tabriz Baba, Akhoon Musa Sahib, Akhun Rahmat Sahib, and Mir Abdullah Haji Sahib. It is evident that Allah, Prophet (SAW) and Quran have been mentioned by all faith healers.

Findings

The language of the faith healing practices contains authoritative commands, ritualistic features, short stories and personifications as well as hyperbole. The use of sacred phrases and sacred names like Allah, Beloved of Allah, Saints, Aulias (pious people), other prophets and Sahabas marked the language as theological. It is found that all the faith healers use the names of Allah, Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and four Companions (Sahaba) as common terms. While the names of their teachers and saints vary among them. Due to the overused of these religious-based and theological names, common people highly believed in the authenticity and reliability of those faith healers. In their use of language, the faith healers continuously invoke the divine names of Allah Almighty. References are given to different saints, Sahabas, and other prophets. Similarly, the language used in these practices is highly imperative and directive in mood. Several pains and illnesses have been personified as they are living entities. Sometimes, hyperbole is used. The sentences are very simple and straight forward. In the same way, the language used by these faith healers adopted narrative techniques. The stories have simple plot with incidence beautifully

narrated in sequences. Mostly the stories are told in third person with several characters. Different tenses are used in them. Some are told in past while others are told in present and future. It was further found that faith healers treat faith healers for the problems of toothache, earache, exorcism, headache, migraine, evil eyes, snake biting, and pain on other parts of body.

Limitations of the Study

The present research study included limited number of texts from faith healers due to accessibility issues and time constraints which may not fully represent diversity of these practices across Pashto speaking society. Data was taken from three districts namely Buner, Mardan and Sawabi. There are several dialects used in Pashto language. This study primarily explores linguistic features while excluding detailed medical or psychological implications of these practices. Moreover, access to the texts of these faith healing practices may be limited due to reluctance of faith healers and privacy concerns to share information. It is very sensitive topic because most of the faith healers thought that the researcher was a kind of agent from government came for the purpose of arresting him or her. Some of them also thought that the researcher wanted to become a faith healer in future by copying faith healing statements. Furthermore, translating the text used by faith healers from Pashto to English may lead to smaller discrepancies that can affect the depth of linguistic interpretation.

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