

## EXPERIENCING THE WORLD THROUGH FICTION: A TRANSITIVITY ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL WORLDVIEWS IN PAKISTANI AND NATIVE ENGLISH SHORT STORIES

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### Abstract

*This research investigates how cultural worldviews are linguistically encoded through the experiential metafunction in fiction, employing Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) transitivity framework to analyze the native English story "The Mild Attack of Locusts" and the Pakistani short story "The Crucifixion." Using UAM CorpusTool for manual clause annotation, we systematically compared participant roles across material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential processes. The analysis reveals how each author fundamentally construes experiential perspective through distinct transitivity patterns: Native narrative foregrounds material action (27% Actor frequency) dominated by animate participants (90.4%) interacting with concrete inanimate (84.8%), constructing a world where human agency confronts environmental challenges through observable, goal-directed intervention. In stark contrast, the Pakistani text deemphasizes physical action (18.6% Actors) in favor of mental processes (7.7% Senser/Phenomenon) and abstract inanimate Actors (28.6%), framing experience as shaped by internal states and contextual forces like societal structures or spiritual imperatives.*

*Subtler patterns further illuminate this divergence: where native writer prioritizes Sayer-focused verbal exchanges (4.5% Sayers vs. 0.9% Receivers) to advance pragmatic action and communication. Behavioral processes reveal externalized emotion in the native text (6.7% Behavior) versus restrained introspection in the Pakistani narrative (6.1%), while relational processes show heightened descriptive focus on states of being in the latter (13.8% Carrier/Attribute vs. 12.6%). Existent participants (1.5%) function differently, as factual anchors in the native story versus symbolic presence in the Pakistani text.*

*These patterns crystallise two cultural ontologies: the native text embodies an empirical agency framework, prioritising individual mastery over environment through material intervention; the Pakistani text reflects a symbolic negotiation paradigm, where meaning emerges from contemplation of contextual forces. The study demonstrates that transitivity choices are inherently cultural acts, with participant distribution systematising worldview differences beyond mere style. Pedagogically, this offers educators tools for teaching cross-cultural literacy through linguistic analysis. Theoretically, it advances Systemic Functional Linguistics as a lens for decolonising literary studies by revealing how grammar perpetuates cultural epistemologies. Western narratives privileging environmental control versus South Asian narratives centring metaphysical embeddedness. Ultimately, this research proves that stories encode cultural DNA through their experiential perspective, making transitivity analysis essential for understanding how fiction shapes and reflects human experience.*

**Key Words:** Experiential perspective, Native, Pakistani Short stories, The UAM

### Introduction

Literature, especially fiction, serves as a powerful medium for understanding how individuals and communities experience, interpret, and represent the world. Short stories, in particular, provide condensed yet meaningful insights into cultural ideologies, social relationships, and human psychology. Within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the transitivity system plays a central role in exploring how language encodes experience. This

study examines how two culturally distinct short stories, one from Pakistan and one from a native English-speaking context, construct worldviews through transitivity patterns. By analyzing how authors represent actions, perceptions, emotions, and identities, the research seeks to uncover the deeper cultural and experiential meanings embedded in the texts.

This study is guided by the belief that language is not just a tool for communication but a resource for making meaning and shaping reality (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The transitivity system, a key component of the ideational metafunction in SFL, categorises processes (material, mental, relational, etc.), participants, and circumstances that together form the experiential content of a clause. Therefore, transitivity analysis allows researchers to explore the "who does what to whom" in narratives and how this reflects socio-cultural perspectives (Eggins, 2004).

By comparing short stories from Pakistani and native English literary traditions, this paper aims to identify both shared human experiences and culture-specific worldviews. Through transitivity patterns, this research will investigate how cultural ideologies manifest in linguistic choices, and how these choices construct social roles, power relations, and perceptions of the world. In doing so, the study highlights literature's role as a linguistic and cultural artefact that reflects and shapes identity.

The intersection between language, culture, and literature has been a key area of inquiry in linguistic and literary studies. Within this scope, Systemic Functional Linguistics has provided a robust framework for analyzing how language works to represent experiences in context. Developed by Halliday, the SFL model views language as a social semiotic system, where meanings are shaped by the functions that language serves in real-life situations (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). One of its core components, the transitivity system, has proven especially useful for studying how texts, especially narratives, encode the actions, perceptions, and states of human experience (Thompson, 2014).

Recent research has shown that transitivity analysis can reveal underlying ideologies, cultural norms, and power structures in various types of discourse, including fiction (Feng & Liu, 2010). Literary narratives are not merely aesthetic creations; they are reflective of socio-political realities and often embed the values and worldviews of their cultures (Simpson, 2004). In multilingual and multicultural contexts like Pakistan, literature becomes a site for negotiating cultural identity, colonial history, and social change (Rahman, 2011). Similarly, in English literature, especially that of postmodern and modern traditions, transitivity structures often reflect individualism, psychological depth, and ideological critiques.

Despite this, few comparative studies have analyzed how **experiential meaning** varies across cultural texts using a transitivity framework. This study aims to fill that gap by conducting a comparative linguistic analysis of two culturally rooted short stories—one Pakistani and one from a native English context to examine how language encodes cultural worldviews.

This study contributes to the growing body of research at the intersection of language, literature, and culture by applying transitivity analysis to reveal how cultural worldviews are encoded in fictional narratives (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). It enhances cross-cultural understanding by identifying the similarities and differences in how Pakistani and native English writers linguistically construct human experiences (Eggins, 2004). Furthermore, it offers valuable pedagogical insights for educators and researchers interested in integrating Systemic Functional Linguistics into literary and cultural studies (Simpson, 2004).

### **Research Objectives**

1. To analyse the Participants' patterns used to represent experiential meaning in selected Pakistani and native English short stories.
2. To compare the similarities and differences in the representation of experience across the two cultural contexts.

### **Literature Review**

The Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, pioneered by Halliday (1967/1973), situates the **transitivity system** within the ideational metafunction, offering a powerful tool to trace how experiences and actions are encoded in language (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Halliday, 1967/1973). This analytical method is widely applied across languages and genres to unpack how narrative discourse constructs cultural realities and ideological positions (Kansu-Yetkiner et al., 2023; Qasim, 2024).

In literary studies, transitivity analysis has illuminated how authors position characters and ideologies through process choices. For instance, Hamid's short fiction "A Beheading" was examined by Anam, Abbas, and Bilal (2022), revealing that frequent use of material and mental processes portrays the protagonist's internal conflict and evokes reader empathy subtleties reflecting socio-political commentary typical of South Asian contexts. Similarly, Jesudas (2025) applied this approach to Isabel Allende's "And of Clay Are We Created," demonstrating how material, mental, and relational processes jointly convey emotional intensity and critique social neglect in disaster settings.

Transitivity has also been used cross-culturally. Naeem and Zaidi (2024) analysed Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl," showing that transitivity patterns surface gender dynamics within post-colonial societies, offering parallels to Pakistani contexts. Although most research focuses on single-language texts, comparative studies remain rare. Kansu-Yetkiner et al. (2023) moved beyond literary analysis by applying transitivity to Turkish prefaces of modernist novels, finding extensive usage of material processes to recontextualize English literature in a new cultural space. These studies confirm that transitivity analysis is effective for uncovering cultural worldviews embedded in narrative discourse, demonstrating both universal linguistic strategies and locale-specific ideological inflections. However, no research currently compares Pakistani and native English short stories directly through transitivity analysis. By bridging this gap, the present study will offer new insights into how short fiction from these communities constructs experiential worlds and how cultural meaning is made linguistically.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative comparative approach grounded in Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) transitivity model to examine how cultural worldviews are constructed through participant roles in one Pakistani and one native English short story. The stories were purposefully selected for their cultural relevance and thematic richness. Using the UAM CorpusTool (O'Donnell, 2008), each clause was manually annotated to identify process types and associated participants, focusing specifically on how human experiences are encoded through linguistic choices. The analysis centred on the frequency and distribution of participant roles—such as Actor, Senser, Carrier, and Goal—to reveal patterns of agency, identity, and cultural representation. Interpretation of the tagged data was guided by the SFL framework, ensuring consistent application of transitivity categories and allowing for meaningful cross-cultural comparison.

Participants in the Material Process Type	Native author	Pakistani author
Actor Material	27%	18.6%
Animate Actor	90.4%	78.7%
In Animate Actor	9.6%	21.3%
Concrete Inanimate Actor	84.8%	71.4%
Abstract Inanimate Actor	15.2%	28.6%
Participants in Mental processes	Native	Pakistani
Senser	5.0%	7.7%

Phenomenon	5.0%	7.7%
Participants in the Verbal Process	Native	Pakistani
Sayer	4.5%	4.6%
Receiver	0.9%	2.6%
Participants in Behavioural Processes	Native	Pakistani
Behaver	6.7%	6.1%
Behaviour	2.8%	2.1%
Participants in Relational Processes	Native	Pakistani
Carrier attributive	12.6%	13.8%
Attribute attributive	12.6%	13.8%
Token identifying	1.9%	1.3%
Value identifying	1.9%	1.3%
Participants in Existential Processes	Native	Pakistani
Existent	1.5%	1.5%

The higher percentage of Actor material participants in "The Mild Attack of Locusts" (27%) compared to "The Crucifixion" (18.6%) reveals a key difference in how each author represents experiential meaning. This difference suggests that the native English writer adopts a more action-oriented and concrete approach, portraying characters as active agents who engage directly with their environment. The story emphasizes physical actions and external responses, such as fighting the locusts, which aligns with a Western cultural worldview that values individual agency, practicality, and visible outcomes. The native writer tends to show rather than narrate, using material processes to construct a tangible, immersive experience for the reader.

In contrast, the Pakistani writer's lower use of actor material participants points to a less physical and more reflective portrayal of experience. In "The Crucifixion", action is subdued, and the narrative leans towards introspection, passivity, or symbolic struggle. This reflects a cultural worldview that emphasises internal experience, social constraints, and existential realities over overt physical action. The Pakistani author presents a more narrative and interpretive style, where meaning emerges from what is felt, suffered, or imposed, rather than what is actively done.

Thus, the difference in actor material participant usage illustrates two distinct experiential perspectives: one that foregrounds external action and individual agency (native writer), and one that underscores internal depth and contextual forces (Pakistani writer), shaped by their respective cultural and literary traditions.

The data indicates a clear distinction in how the two authors native and Pakistani construct experiential meaning through material processes, specifically in their use of animate and inanimate Actor participants. The native English writer of "The Mild Attack of Locusts" uses 90.4% animate Actors, suggesting a narrative style that is highly action-oriented, concrete, and human-centered. This heavy reliance on animate participants shows that the native writer prefers to show rather than tell, foregrounding direct physical involvement, tangible actions, and clear agency. The characters in this story actively engage with their environment, especially in responding to the locust threat, reflecting a pragmatic and externalized worldview where individuals are depicted as capable agents confronting real-world challenges.

In contrast, the Pakistani writer of "The Crucifixion" uses only 78.7% animate Actors and a significantly higher percentage of inanimate Actors (21.3%), pointing to a more abstract, symbolic, and indirect representation of experience. This suggests that the Pakistani author is



less focused on physical action and more invested in portraying inner experiences, social structures, and symbolic forces. Inanimate Actors may represent societal institutions, spiritual forces, or metaphysical elements that exert influence on human lives, highlighting a less individualistic and more collective or fate-driven worldview.

Thus, the native writer's experiential perspective is concrete, direct, and grounded in physical reality, while the Pakistani writer presents a layered, interpretive, and abstract reality, where symbolism, suffering, and social commentary are more prominent. These differences reflect deep cultural orientations—Western narratives often emphasise agency, clarity, and external action, whereas South Asian narratives tend to value introspection, ambiguity, and the impact of unseen or symbolic forces on human life.

The comparison of concrete and abstract inanimate Actor participants in material processes between "The Mild Attack of Locusts" (native author) and "The Crucifixion" (Pakistani author) offers revealing insights into how each writer constructs experiential meaning and reflects their cultural worldview.

The native English writer uses 84.8% concrete inanimate Actors, indicating a strong preference for tangible, observable, and physical entities to drive action in the narrative. This supports the notion that the native author adopts a direct, realistic, and action-oriented storytelling style, one that aims to show rather than narrate. The events are largely grounded in the physical world—fields, locusts, tools, and people in motion highlighting a pragmatic and empirical worldview in which meaning is derived through interaction with the material environment. This use of concrete Actors contributes to an immersive narrative that foregrounds human struggle, agency, and resilience in the face of natural forces.

In contrast, the Pakistani writer uses 28.6% abstract inanimate Actors, a notably higher percentage than the native author. This points to a narrative strategy that incorporates symbolic, intangible, or conceptual forces such as society, ideology, emotions, or spirituality as active elements within the story. The reliance on abstract Actors suggests that the Pakistani author views human experience as shaped not only by physical actions but also by social, psychological, and philosophical dimensions. It reflects a more reflective and layered experiential perspective, where meaning is often interpreted rather than explicitly shown, and where passivity, inner turmoil, and external social constraints are central themes.

Therefore, the native writer's use of predominantly concrete inanimate Actors reveals a materialist and action-driven worldview, whereas the Pakistani writer's higher use of abstract inanimate Actors reflects a metaphorical, socially aware, and introspective worldview. This contrast illustrates how cultural context influences the linguistic encoding of experience, shaping the way reality is framed through fiction.

The higher percentage of Sensor and Phenomenon participants in mental processes in the Pakistani short story "The Crucifixion" (7.7%) compared to the native English story "The Mild Attack of Locusts" (5.0%) suggests a significant difference in how each writer constructs experiential meaning. This data shows that the Pakistani writer places greater emphasis on internal experiences thoughts, perceptions, emotions, and reflections indicating a more abstract, introspective, and narrative-driven approach to storytelling. Mental processes in this context allow characters to be portrayed as feelers and thinkers rather than mere actors, reflecting a cultural worldview that values emotional depth, psychological complexity, and spiritual or existential awareness.

On the other hand, the native English writer focuses less on mental processes and more on material ones, highlighting a concrete, action-based representation of experience. The lower percentage of Sensor and Phenomenon participants suggests that the native writer prefers to construct meaning through observable actions and external events, rather than internal states. This aligns with a Western narrative style that often prioritizes clarity, external conflict, and

problem-solving through action, portraying characters who engage with the world in direct and physical ways.

In terms of experiential perspective, the Pakistani writer presents reality through a lens of internal perception and narrative reflection, while the native writer constructs experience through tangible actions and events. These differences reflect deeper cultural orientations—South Asian literature often explores philosophical, emotional, and societal dimensions of human life, whereas Western literature tends to emphasize individual agency, practical response, and external resolution. Thus, the use of mental process participants becomes a linguistic marker of how each author encodes cultural values and worldview through fiction.

The data on verbal process participants shows a subtle but meaningful contrast in how the two authors construct experiential meaning through communication. In "The Mild Attack of Locusts", the native writer uses Sayer participants at 4.5% and Receiver participants at 0.9%, while in "The Crucifixion", the Pakistani writer uses Sayer participants at 4.6% and Receiver participants at 2.6%.

This indicates that while both authors include verbal interactions, their experiential perspectives differ in how communication functions within their cultural narratives. The native writer's slightly higher reliance on Sayers and lower use of Receivers suggests a worldview that emphasizes individual expression, autonomy, and outward communication. Verbal processes in the native story are likely used to convey action-oriented, pragmatic exchanges, where characters speak to assert, respond, or collaborate in the physical world. This aligns with Western cultural values that prioritize free expression, directness, and personal voice in narrative construction.

In contrast, the Pakistani writer's higher percentage of Receiver participants (2.6%) reflects a narrative style where dialogue is more relational and context-dependent. The Receiver's prominence may indicate a more hierarchical or socially embedded use of language, where communication serves to reflect societal roles, emotional vulnerability, or moral lessons rather than simple transmission of information. This aligns with South Asian storytelling traditions, where speech often carries symbolic weight, social responsibility, or emotional depth, and characters may express themselves more cautiously or reflectively.

Thus, while both authors use verbal process participants at similar levels, their distribution and function reflect distinct experiential worldviews: the native writer presents communication as a tool of outward action and expression, while the Pakistani writer uses it as a means of inner negotiation, relational sensitivity, and social navigation.

The data on behavioural process participants with the native writer using Behaver (6.7%) and Behaviour (2.8%), and the Pakistani writer using Behaver (6.1%) and Behaviour (2.1%) reveals how both authors encode internal experiences through outward human behavior, but with subtly different emphases.

The native writer in "The Mild Attack of Locusts" gives slightly more prominence to behavioural processes, suggesting a preference for expressing inner experiences through visible, physiological actions such as gestures, expressions, or bodily reactions. This reflects a cultural worldview that values the observable manifestation of emotions, making internal states accessible to the reader through external cues. It aligns with a Western literary tradition that often seeks to externalize emotions through behavior, portraying characters as emotionally expressive and psychologically readable.

On the other hand, the Pakistani writer in "The Crucifixion", while also using behavioural participants, does so slightly less. This points to a narrative strategy that leans more towards introspection and emotional depth that is not always physically expressed. The Pakistani author tends to explore the inner world through reflection, silence, or symbolism, rather than overt behavior, highlighting a cultural inclination towards subtlety, restraint, and internalized

suffering. In this way, internal experience is treated as sacred, complex, and often ineffable, resonating with South Asian literary aesthetics where the unspoken or spiritually implied often holds more weight than the explicitly shown.

In summary, the native writer emphasizes behavior as a mirror of internal states, reflecting a psychologically visible and emotionally direct experiential perspective, while the Pakistani writer leans toward quiet introspection and implied emotion, portraying a layered, inward-looking cultural worldview.

The data on relational process participants with both Carrier and Attribute at 13.8% for the Pakistani story and 12.6% for the native story reveals a subtle yet meaningful difference in how experience is constructed. The Pakistani writer's slightly higher use of relational processes suggests a stronger focus on description, states of being, and character identity rather than action. This indicates a narrative style that emphasizes interpretation, moral judgment, and social or psychological conditions, allowing the reader to understand the world through stable relationships and descriptive meanings rather than dynamic events.

Relational processes are used to assign qualities, define roles, or describe situations, and their higher frequency in "The Crucifixion" reflects a cultural worldview that values narrative depth, character introspection, and philosophical meaning. The Pakistani writer presents experience by telling what something is or how someone feels or is perceived, often embedding cultural or emotional nuance in these descriptions.

In contrast, while the native writer in "The Mild Attack of Locusts" also employs relational processes, their slightly lower frequency compared to the Pakistani writer suggests a more balanced approach that leans towards action and behavior, constructing experience through what characters do rather than what they are. This reflects a Western preference for progression, external change, and concrete details, aligning with an action-oriented worldview.

In essence, the Pakistani author presents an experiential perspective centered on description, interpretation, and social context, while the native writer constructs experience through tangible action and external dynamics. These choices reflect broader cultural orientations—introspective and relational in the Pakistani story, action-driven and pragmatic in the native English story.

The data on identifying relational processes with both Token and Value participants at 1.9% for the native writer and 1.3% for the Pakistani writer offers insight into how each author constructs logical connections and conceptual identity within their narrative worlds.

The native writer's slightly higher use of identifying relational processes in "The Mild Attack of Locusts" suggests a narrative approach rooted in cause-and-effect logic, where events, objects, and characters are clearly defined in relation to each other. This reflects a Western cultural tendency to view the world through linear reasoning, categorization, and functional relationships. In this context, the native author constructs experiential meaning by identifying what something is in precise terms, showing how each event is a logical consequence of the previous one. This gives the story a coherent, reason-driven progression, where identity and change are anchored in observable and explainable connections.

In contrast, the Pakistani writer's lower frequency of identifying relational participants in "The Crucifixion" points to a more philosophical, abstract, and introspective narrative style. Rather than focusing on logical definitions and causal sequences, the Pakistani author leans toward narrative flow, emotional depth, and symbolic representation. This reflects a South Asian worldview that often values spiritual interpretation, moral complexity, and layered meanings over strict logical reasoning. Events may not always be connected through cause-and-effect; instead, they may unfold as reflections of inner conflict, societal dynamics, or metaphysical themes.

In summary, the native writer presents an experiential perspective grounded in clarity, structure, and logic, using identifying relational processes to build a rational and sequential world. Meanwhile, the Pakistani writer constructs experience through rich narration and philosophical nuance, suggesting that identity and meaning are not always fixed or logical, but culturally and emotionally situated.

The identical use of Existential Process participants (Existent 1.5%) in both the native English story "The Mild Attack of Locusts" and the Pakistani story "The Crucifixion" reflects a shared narrative function the need to establish the existence of events, entities, or conditions within their respective fictional worlds. However, the interpretive value of this shared percentage can still reveal subtle differences in experiential perspective when viewed through the lens of each culture's storytelling style.

In the Pakistani short story, the use of existential processes aligns with the writer's overall narrative and descriptive approach. Here, existence is often stated to set a reflective tone, to build atmosphere, or to introduce moral or emotional contexts. Rather than driving the plot through concrete action, the Pakistani writer uses existential clauses to situate the reader in a philosophical or emotional space, where existence itself carries symbolic or spiritual weight.

In contrast, the native English writer tends to use existential processes in a factual and scene-setting way, aligning with a realist narrative tradition. The function is to anchor the action, establish context quickly, and move the story forward. Existence is often presented as observed reality, not open to interpretation but rather a foundation for unfolding action.

Therefore, although the percentage of Existent participants is equal, the experiential perspectives differ:

- The Pakistani writer uses existential processes to support a narrative mode focused on inner life, atmosphere, and philosophical reflection.
- The native writer employs them to support a concrete, action-oriented representation of experience, where existence is a backdrop to event progression.

This subtle distinction further supports the conclusion that Pakistani fiction leans toward introspective narration, while native English fiction emphasizes tangible action and external realism, even when using the same grammatical resources.

### **Conclusion**

The comparative linguistic analysis of "The Mild Attack of Locusts" (native English writer) and "The Crucifixion" (Pakistani writer) reveals fundamentally distinct modes of constructing experiential meaning, deeply rooted in their respective cultural and literary traditions. The native English narrative is characterized by a concrete, action-oriented, and externalized perspective. This is evidenced by its significantly higher use of Actor material participants (especially animate Actors), a strong preference for concrete inanimate Actors within material processes, and a relative emphasis on behavioural processes showing visible reactions. Characters are primarily portrayed as active agents confronting tangible challenges within a physical world, reflecting a Western cultural worldview that prioritizes individual agency, pragmatic problem-solving, and observable outcomes. Meaning is built through showing – depicting direct interaction with the environment and logical sequences of cause and effect.

Conversely, the Pakistani narrative adopts a reflective, abstract, and internally focused perspective. Its lower reliance on Actor material participants, particularly alongside a higher proportion of abstract inanimate Actors and a greater emphasis on mental processes (Senser/Phenomenon), signifies a shift away from overt physical action. Instead, the narrative foregrounds introspection, emotional depth, symbolic struggle, and the pervasive influence of social, spiritual, or existential forces. The slightly higher use of relational processes (Carrier/Attribute) and the nuanced role of verbal processes (especially Receivers) further support a style centered on description, interpretation, moral context, and relational dynamics.



Meaning often emerges through telling – narrating states of being, internal experiences, societal constraints, and symbolic implications, resonating with South Asian literary values that emphasize philosophical depth, emotional complexity, subtlety, and the weight of the unseen. While both authors utilize similar grammatical resources (e.g., identical use of Existential processes), the distribution and interpretive function of participants across all process types consistently diverge. These differences are not merely stylistic choices but reflect deeper cultural orientations: the native English story embodies a worldview valuing individual action, external realism, and tangible agency, while the Pakistani story embodies a worldview emphasizing internal states, symbolic resonance, social context, and the complexities of fate or suffering. Ultimately, the linguistic patterns serve as powerful markers of how cultural context fundamentally shapes the encoding of human experience within narrative fiction.

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