

Glossing in Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1989): A Postcolonial Perspective

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Abstract

*This paper examines the strategy of glossing employed by Sara Suleri in her novel *Meatless Days* (1989) as a means of language appropriation that expresses her ethnic identity and resists colonial linguistic dominance. Despite existing scholarship on postcolonial literature, there is a lack of understanding regarding how Suleri's use of glossing—incorporating indigenous language into English text—serves as a tool for asserting her cultural identity. Using Ashcroft et al.'s (2003) theoretical model of language appropriation, this research investigates how Suleri challenges foreign cultural hegemony and reclaims her voice against the dominance of English. Employing a qualitative approach, the study analyzes character conversations in their natural context, focusing on three glossing techniques: interlinear, bracketed, and abbreviated glossing. The findings reveal that these strategies effectively bridge the gap between Pakistani culture and English-speaking readers, preserving cultural significance while ensuring accessibility. The paper illustrates how Suleri's glossing techniques balance cultural preservation with the blending of languages and identities, highlighting the complexities of postcolonial narratives.*

Keywords: glossing, language appropriation, ethnic identity, postcolonial literature, cultural preservation

Background of the Paper

The study of postcolonial literature has gained significant attention in recent decades, particularly as scholars explore the subtleties of language, culture, and identity in works by authors from formerly colonized regions (Ashcroft et al., 2003). Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1989) is a notable example that offers a rich exploration of the interplay between Pakistani culture and the English language. Suleri, as a Pakistani author writing in English, illustrates the complexities of her ethnic identity while confronting the lingering effects of colonial linguistic dominance.

Glossing, a technique that involves integrating indigenous language and cultural terms into a dominant language, serves as a powerful tool for Suleri to assert her cultural identity. Despite the growing body of scholarship focusing on postcolonial narratives, there remains a gap in understanding how Suleri specifically employs glossing as a strategy for language appropriation.

This study seeks to fill that gap by examining Suleri's use of interlinear, bracketed, and abbreviated glossing within the context of her narrative. Drawing on Ashcroft et al.'s (2003) theoretical model of language appropriation, this research highlights how Suleri's strategies not only preserve her cultural heritage but also challenge the hegemony of the English language.

By analyzing character conversations and the ways in which glossing is employed, the study aims to reveal how Suleri's narrative bridges the gap between Pakistani culture and English-speaking audiences. This exploration accentuates the intricate relationship between language and identity in postcolonial literature, illustrating how Suleri's *Meatless Days* reflects broader themes of cultural preservation and the blending of diverse linguistic identities.

Suleri's Novel: *Meatless Days*

Meatless Days (1989) is Sara Suleri's memoir about growing up in newly established Pakistan, featured in the Penguin Women Writers series to commemorate the centenary of women's suffrage in Britain (Goodyear, 2013). Suleri employs postcolonial themes and English to convey her non-Western perspectives, illustrating the clash between colonized and Western cultures without lamentation (Deckard, 2007). The novel reflects the lingering impacts of colonialism, addressing political turmoil, religion, gender, and family dynamics while honoring her English mother. As a Pakistani writer, Suleri draws from her dual cultural heritage, blending Eastern and Western viewpoints in her exploration of female identity and experiences.

Relevant Studies about *Meatless Days*

Various scholars have critically examined *Meatless Days* (1989), each offering unique insights. Nadeem et al. (2023) describe Suleri as a postcolonial literary figure who addresses social and political issues such as female subordination and the misinterpretation of Islamic law in Pakistan. Her works highlight themes of family tragedy, gender, religion, division, and postcolonial nationalism, giving voice to marginalized groups who struggle for survival. Suleri asserts that Pakistani women and the lower classes are denied freedom, a theme she explores in *Meatless Days*.

While Suleri is recognized for her memoirs *Meatless Days* and *Boys Will Be Boys* (2003), she also writes shorter pieces like "The Property of Woman," emphasizing the challenges faced by the lower class. The protagonist, Halima, serves as a representation of the plight of the disadvantaged, which Suleri argues has worsened in the postcolonial era (pp. 882–883). Ali (2022) refers to *Meatless Days* as a compelling memoir reflecting the experience of growing up in a new Pakistan. He highlights the blending of postcolonial themes and English language, noting that the narrative reflects the struggles between indigenous and imposed traditions, demonstrating the ongoing influence of colonial power.

Suleri uses her experiences with colonialism to articulate her perspective, depicting the discomforts of living between cultures (p. 4). Hassan (2022) emphasizes that *Meatless Days* explores postcolonial identity through the lens of characters grappling with crises related to politics, religion, and nationality. The memoir challenges the biased narratives of Western scholars by highlighting the struggles of third-world identities while illustrating that rigidity in religious beliefs does not equate to irrationality.

Nasir et al. (2022) discuss how Suleri employs language and character development within Pakistani English literature, asserting that the remnants of colonialism continue to shape global politics and perceptions. They argue that even post-independence, many countries remain mentally occupied by colonial attitudes. The legacy of colonial language persists in postcolonial writing, as authors from former colonies adapt and reshape the language of their colonizers (p. 458).

Despite the extensive critical discourse surrounding Suleri's work, there is a gap in the analysis of linguistic appropriation in *Meatless Days* using Kachru's model. This presents an opportunity for further research, as no existing studies have explored the novel through this specific linguistic lens, highlighting the potential for novel scholarly inquiry.

Statement of the Problem

This paper seeks to investigate the strategy of glossing employed by Sara Suleri in her novel *Meatless Days* (1989) as a means of language appropriation to express her ethnic identity and resist colonial linguistic dominance. Despite extensive scholarship on postcolonial literature, there remains a gap in understanding how Suleri's use of glossing, a technique of incorporating indigenous language into English text, serves as a tool for ethnic proclamation. By utilizing Ashcroft, et al.'s (2003) theoretical model of language appropriation, this research aims to examine how Suleri reacts against foreign cultural and linguistic hegemony, challenging the imposition of English as a dominant language and reclaiming her cultural voice.

Research Methodology

This paper follows a qualitative research approach, focusing on the conversations between characters in their natural context. Its qualitative nature is evident from the research objective, which aims to

explore the language appropriation strategies employed in Sara Suleri's novel *Meatless Days* (1989). The novel serves as the primary data source.. The study also utilizes content analysis as its main research method, drawing on specific tools from a selected theoretical model. Specifically, the study examines three types of glossing strategies—interlinear, bracketed, and abbreviated—used to analyze the novel. Interlinear glossing refers to inserting the meaning or translation of a foreign word directly next to or underneath the original word within the text. Bracketed glossing places explanations of foreign words or phrases within brackets for clarification, often in line with the main text. Abbreviated glossing, on the other hand, provides minimal explanations for commonly understood terms. These glossing techniques are applied to *Meatless Days* to analyze how Suleri integrates cultural and linguistic elements, a process that aligns with the model of language appropriation outlined by Ashcroft et al. (2003) in *The Empire Writes Back*. The central aim of the paper is to explore Suleri's strategic use of language and how it reflects cultural identity in the novel.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The paper is grounded in the Post-colonial perspective of language appropriation, as outlined by Ashcroft, et al. (2003) in *The Empire Writes Back*. This perspective examines how colonized societies respond to the imposition of the colonizer's language and how language becomes a tool for resistance, negotiation, and hybridity. Ashcroft, e. al. (2003) identify several strategies for language appropriation, with glossing being the primary focus of this study. Glossing mainly consists of three types. Interlinear glossing involves the insertion of the meaning or translation of a foreign word directly alongside or underneath the word in the text. This type of glossing helps the reader understand a foreign term by providing its meaning without interrupting the narrative. Next, bracketed glossing involves placing the explanation of a foreign word or phrase within brackets, often in line with the text, to clarify the meaning. This allows the author to embed cultural or linguistic explanations without disrupting the flow of the narrative. Finally, abbreviated glossing is a more concise form of glossing, where the translation or explanation is brief, often just a few words, and directly tied to the foreign term without much elaboration. This type is typically used for common words that require minimal explanation. (Ashcroft, et al. 2003)

Analysis and Interpretation of Glossing in Suleri's *Meatless Day* (1989)

The analysis is concentrated on the three types of glossing strategies applied in Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* to reflect the cultural and linguistic elements of Pakistani life and language. The study investigates how Suleri uses methods like interlinear glossing (placing translations within the text) and bracketed glossing (adding explanations in parentheses) to reflect the richness of Pakistani culture and language.

Interlinear glossing

Pakistani identity is represented in the use of Urdu. Instead of combining words from Urdu, the author might have easily chosen simple English words. This action on the part of Suleri emphasizes the role that the narrative plays when these words are viewed in light of the entirety of the text and the context. As previously noted, Suleri used the phrase "Dadi"(دادی) (p. 2) before referring to 'my grandmother'. This use of the word "Dadi"(دادی) (p. 2), which is glossed with Grandmother," makes Pakistani culture visible for readers to see and absorb, and it suggests usage of these words in a variation that is expanding in Pakistani called Pakistani English. "Dadi, my father's mother, was born in Meerut towards the end of the last century. (Suleri,1989, P.2). Here the writer has done interlinear glossing because the word "Dadi"(دادی) means grandmother. Second, to illustrate a further significant element of Pakistani life, Suleri uses the word "Eid"(عید) (p. 4). In order to emphasize the significance of the festival and its relevance in Pakistani lives, she puts the phrase 'Muslim Festival' before the word "Eid"(عید) (p. 4). She strengthens the narrative about Pakistani culture by emphasizing the term "Eid" (عید) as one that should be utilised in an English work. She creates a story that is driven by the desire to forge a communal Muslim identity and a national identity, as well as a convincing voice in Pakistani English that can effectively incorporate all of these concepts.

"One such occasion was the Muslim festival called Eid (Suleri, 1989, p.4). Here, the writer showed interlinear glossing by using the word "Eid"(عيد).

Consequently, in developing a story that accurately captures the spirit of Pakistani culture in a different passage, Suleri uses the word "Munni"(مونى) (p. 25), which is translated as "his little girl". This glossing draw attention to the usage of the fairly common Urdu word "Munni" (مونى) which is used to refer to a female who is younger or a little girl. This also echoes the Pakistani context in its additional dimension of referring to young boys and females as 'Munni' and vice versa. "That was when Munni caught me" (Suleri, 1989, p. 25). Here the author displayed interlinear glossing through the word Munni,"() مونى which means 'little girl'. The use of religious ideology is more important than adopting glossing techniques within the field of appropriation. The author makes use of idioms and a desire to discuss certain important Islamic concepts while maintaining a religious stance. One such illustration can be found in *Meatless Days* (1989), where Suleri talks about "Ramzan, (رمضان) the Muslim month of fasting (p. 29).

Suleri seems to signify the month of "Ramzan" (رمضان) in this passage. "Ramzan" (رمضان) is the Arabic translation of this Arabic word, which is given in the text as "the Muslim month of fasting (p. 29). This word from the novel by Suleri relates to the tenets of Islam. This is the most revered month in Islamic teachings, and this is also a holy month in Islam. "Take, for example, Ramzan, the Muslim month of fasting, often remembered as the season of perfect meals (Suleri, 1989, p.29). Here the writer showed interlinear glossing through the word Ramzan," which means 'the Muslim month of fasting'.

In addition, traditional and cultural name of the food in the text as "Alu ka bhartha (آلوکابھرتہ) (p. 3) are used. The translation of this Urdu word, which is given in the text, is: "potato messes, i.e., eggplant and often onion or tomato. Here, the author defines this word and informs her audience that "Alu ka bhartha" (آلوکابھرتہ) means "potato messes, i.e., eggplant and often onion or tomato". She clarifies it in a more instructional manner by describing how this word was contrived for this purpose. She says that "food, too, could move her. Alu ka bhartha," Dadi repeated with wonderment and joy (Suleri, 1989, p.3).

By using the phrase "Alu ka bhartha", (آلوکابھرتہ) the author displayed abbreviated glossing. In her novel, Suleri uses the traditional name of dress as "pyjamas", (پاجامہ) (p. 4). She has given this Urdu word, which can be translated as trouser." This word is glossed here, and the author informs her audience that "pyjama" (پاجامہ) means "trouser" (p. 4). She explains the pedagogical significance of the word's creation. "Ifat, Shahid, and I greeted a goat...and soon after he ravished us, eating Shahid's pajamas." (Suleri, 1989, p.4). Here, interlinear glossing is also observed through the word, 'pyjama' (پاجامہ), which means trouser.

Suleri used the traditional and cultural name for her mother in her novel as "Mamma" (ماما) (p.5). This Urdu word has the meaning mother; Suleri glossed this word and told her readers that "Mamma" (ماما) means 'Mother'. She explains how this word was didactically made for this purpose. "Tillat and Irfan gulped their baby sobs over such a slaughter. "Honestly", said Mamma, "honestly (Suleri, 1989, p.5). Using the word Mamma," (ماما) which means mother is also the example of interlinear glossing.

There are also some other words and clauses in the text that present the cultural background; as an example, "Hanh, Hanh, (ہاں ہاں) (p.7). Here, the meanings is first given as in the use of Urdu expression "Hanh, Hanh (ہاں ہاں) which is translated as "Yes, Yes" (p. 7). "Men!" said Dadi. "Men! Hear, hear, Dadi! Hanh, hanh, Dadi! My sisters cried (Suleri, 1989, p.7). Here, bracketed glossing is shown through the phrase [Hanh][hanh], which means 'Yes, yes'. Suleri incorporated another term from local culture into the text, "Papa" (پاپا) (p. 7). The translation of this Urdu word is "Father" (p. 7). "At teatime in particular, when Papa would want... Dadi came to peer at her ghostly peer (Suleri, 1989, p.7).

The word "Khala" (بادشاہی) (p. 9) has also been translated for "maternal aunt." "A Khala, mother's

sister...we reveled in the exercise of Khala-love (Suleri, 1989, p.9). Here, the writer showed interlinear glossing using the word Khala,"(خاله)" which means maternal aunt. Suleri utilized the above terms in her writing in Urdu to demonstrate her respect for the elders in society. Due to the novel's extensive use of Urdu terms, it has become well-known in the context of the local tongue. Other local expressions are used by Suleri in *Meatless Days (1989)* from the Urdu language to show her respect for the elders in the community. Such words that are integrated in the novel are "Begum Sahib" (بیگم صاحب) (p. 25), which can be translated as "Lady-ship." "There is an animal, Begum Sahib," he mourned to my mother, "like a savage in my garden. (p.25). This word uses abbreviated glossing and tells her readers that "Begum. Sahib) (بیگم صاحب) means "Ladyship" (Suleri, 1989, p. 25).

In *Meatless Days*, the word "Abba Ji(اباجی) is used for Dad or Father" (p. 26). The writer explained to her audience how she glossed this word, "Abba Ji (اباجی)," which means "Dad or Father." To clarify the educational significance, she came up with a word. "That was when Munni caught me." "Abba Ji!", she screamed for her father like a train engine (Suleri, 1989, p.26). Here, the author has abbreviated glossing by using the word "Abba. Ji (اباجی)," which means 'Dad or Father'. In the book, there are additional terms of respect that reflect the cultural context of the writing, for example, "Bibi" (بی بی) (p. 26), which means "Lady. "What are you doing, Sara Bibi?" the driver finally and gently asked. " (Suleri,1989, p.26). Also, a term from the local language is "Bibi Ji" (بی بی جی) (p.26), which means "Grandmother (as a respectful term of address). "Which animal, Bibi Ji, you naughty girl? (Suleri, 1989, p.26)

Abbreviated glossing

By using abbreviated glossing, the Suleri showed respect for the community's elders. "Bibi.Ji" (بی بی جی) means grandmother." How pedagogically Suleri crafted these sentences to serve this function. In another passage from *"Meatless Days (1989),"* Suleri employed traditional and cultural terminology. Such terminology can be found in the novel, such as "Zenana Khana" (زنانه خانه) (p. 47), which is glossed by "Harem. These glosses draw attention to the use of the typical Urdu word "Zenana Khana (زنانه خانه) that is used for "Lady Room.

"To the city, after all, of the old days of the Zenana Khana, its room after room of enterable women's rooms" (Suleri, 1989, p.47). The author showed bracketed glossing through the phrase [Zenana][khana], which means 'Lady Room'. Suleri has glossed the word "Raj" (راج) (p. 51), which is followed by rule. In her writings, this allows the readers to observe and understand Pakistani culture directly. This was built in the latter days of the British Raj (Suleri, 1989, p. 51). In addition, Suleri includes in her book the names of foods that are customary and cultural, such as "salan" (سالن) (p. 52). To convey information to her audience, the author employed the glossing approach that "Salan (سالن) means "curry" (p. 52). "Mustakar ended up in Dublin. He put Salan into cans" (Suleri, 1989, p.52). The writer displayed interlinear glossing here using the word Salan (سالن) which means curry.

Various more words, including "Yar" (یار) (p. 53), that means small, little, or junior," have been glossed by Suleri in her writings. "Tarik, as his male friends called him, saying Yar (Suleri, 1989, p.53). Here, Suleri does interlinear glossing using the word Yar,"(یار) which means small, little, or junior. Another instance of glossing may be seen in *Meatless Days (1989)*, where it says "Taj" (تاج) (p. 55), which can be translated as "Diadem. In order to highlight the world's cultural significance, the author has glossed over it. She wrote in her novel, "His Taj is his Taj, (Suleri, 1989, p. 55). Here, the writer displayed interlinear glossing by using the word Taj, (تاج) which means 'Diadem'. Suleri has glossed the word "Badshahi" (بادشاهی) (p. 55), which has the translation, "Monarchy. Here, Suleri has glossed over this word to highlight the significance of the Urdu language to Pakistani culture. "His Taj is his Taj, but his Badshahi, it is more..." (Suleri, 1989, p.55). Here, the author has done interlinear glossing using the word Badshahi," (بادشاهی) which means 'Monarchy'.

Conversely, Suleri integrates the place's traditional and cultural name as "Anarkali Bazaar" (آنارکلی)

بازار (p. 55), which means "The Busiest Market" (a major bazaar in Lahore). Here, the author glosses over this word and tells her readers that "Anarkali Bazaar" (آنارکلی بازار) means "Busiest Market" (p. 55). She explains how this word was developed with objectiveness in mind. "At this point we were sitting in a tiny roadside café at the edge of the Anarkali Bazaar, (Suleri, 1989, p. 55). The author glossed another Urdu word, "Lambu" (لمبو) (p. 78), which means "very long or very tall. Here, the author showed interlinear glossing of the word 'Lambu' (لمبو) to highlight cultural value. Another word used by the author in her novel, Kutha-wallah," (کتوالا) means 'dog in charge.' Here, the author showed abbreviated glossing by using the phrase "Kutha-wallah" (کتوالا). Suleri integrated the names of some religious places into her text while using the technique of glossing. One such example can be seen from *Meatless Days (1989)*, that is, "Masjid" (مسجد), which is followed by the word "Mosque", "Take me to a Masjid (Suleri, 1989, p. 80). These words, uttered by Papa in the novel through Suleri, show the importance of religious places through the approach of interlinear glossing.

And another word that has been glossed over by the author in her novel is "Wazzoo" (وضو) (p. 91), which is followed by "Ablution. This use of the word "wazzoo" (وضو) that is glossed with "ablution" represents the importance of religion in Pakistani culture. "How to do Wazzoo (that is how to ablute), and dressed perfectly respectable (Suleri, 1989, p.91).

By using interlinear glossing, the writer glossed the word Wazzoo," (وضو) which means ablution. Suleri has sparkled words in *Meatless Days (1989)* through the use of a glossing approach. For instance, "Ghazal" (غزل) (p.99), which is followed by Ode," Because the author has chosen to use Urdu. This is a purposeful attempt to depict the actual identity of Pakistanis. "For Chishti gave us the ghazal" (Suleri, 1989, p. 99). Here, the author depicted the word ghazal, (غزل) which means ode, using the interlinear glossing technique.

Some other indigenous Urdu words that Suleri has integrated in her writing are "Tanga" (تانگہ) (Suleri, 1989, p. 104), which can be translated as a light 2-wheeled vehicle for two or four persons drawn by one horse. "Perhaps someone in Lahore...horse-drawn tangas from the roads (Suleri, 1989, p. 104). Here, the writer showed interlinear glossing by corporate that the word "Tanga" (تانگہ) means '(a light 2-wheeled vehicle for two or four persons drawn by one horse.' In the text that has been glossed, Suleri included cultural and customary terms. As an example, see "Mussalmans" (مسلمان) (p. 114), which has the translation "Muslims". It has always been taken for granted that the Mussalmans are a minority (Suleri, 1989, p. 114). Here, the author explains the significance of religion and its holiness for Pakistanis and Muslims in general using an interlinear glossing approach.

Bracketed glossing

Bracketed glossing involves placing the explanation of a foreign word or phrase within brackets, often in line with the text, to clarify the meaning. This allows the author to embed cultural or linguistic explanations without disrupting the flow of the narrative. As Suleri uses the word "Khala" (خالہ) and glosses it with the phrase "[Khala] [love]" (p. 9), explaining the cultural honorific for a maternal aunt while embedding the term in a contextual narrative. In another instance, she writes "Hanh, Hanh" (ہاں ہاں) and glosses it as "[Hanh] [hanh]" (p. 7), which means "Yes, yes." This explains the conversational usage of the Urdu phrase within a Pakistani cultural context.

Other traditional Urdu words in *"Meatless Days (1989)*, which are glossed by the author, are obvious in the text, namely "Takht" (تختہ) (p. 180), which is followed by the word "board. "Our boards were lap-sized slabs of wood," (Suleri, 1989, p.180). Here, the writer has done interlinear glossing by integrating the word "Takht," (تختہ) which means board, in her work. The author has glossed yet another word, and it is, "Maro! Maro!" (مارو مارو) (p.25) which can be translated as, "Kill, Kill. Here, Suleri glossed over this word and discussed the value of Pakistani culture to both Pakistanis and foreigners. "There is an animal, Begum Sahib," he mourned to my mother, "like a savage in my garden. Maro! Maro!" (Suleri, 1989, p.25). Here, the author showed bracketed glossing by using the

phrase [Maro!] [Maro!] Which means 'kill, kill'.

In the same way, when she writes "a khala, (خاله) mother's sister" (p. 9), she demonstrates the various honorifics used in Pakistani society to refer to various relationships on both the maternal and paternal sides. "We learned to become that enviable personage, a Khala, mother's sister; we reveled in the exercise of Khala] [love]" (Suleri, 1989, p. 9). Here the author showed bracketed glossing by using the phrase [khala] [love].

Here, the phrase [Anarkali] [Bazaar] also shows bracketed glossing which means busiest market. In *Meatless Days* (1989), "Suleri incorporated the traditional name of the dress. For example, she used the word "Kurtha" (پاجامہ) (p. 56), which has the translation "a loose collarless shirt" (Suleri, 1989, p. 56). Here, Suleri used the interlinear glossing technique for this word to explain its creation and intended use.

Suleri uses interlinear, bracketed, and abbreviated glossing to provide insight into Pakistani cultural elements, such as familial relationships, religious practices, and traditional foods, without alienating her audience. Through these methods, she weaves Urdu words into the English narrative, preserving the authenticity of her cultural background while making it understandable to those unfamiliar with the language.

Conclusion

The paper finds out that glossing techniques in *Meatless Days* (1989) are strategically employed to bridge the gap between Pakistani language and culture and English-speaking readers. Different types of glossing serve distinct purposes, with interlinear, bracketed, and abbreviated glossing used to present Pakistani cultural concepts while ensuring the narrative remains accessible to a global audience. Interlinear glossing preserves cultural significance by directly translating terms like "Dadi" (grandmother). Bracketed glossing provides explanations for familial terms such as "Khala" (maternal aunt), offering clarity without disrupting the flow of the text. The study shows that Suleri uses glossing to stay true to her cultural background while also highlighting the mix of languages that comes with living in a postcolonial world. Abbreviated glossing is reserved for commonly understood words, allowing for minimal explanation while maintaining cultural context. The findings indicate that Suleri's glossing techniques effectively balance the preservation of cultural elements with the integration of different languages and identities, underlining the intricate nature of postcolonial narratives.

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