



## Post-Colonial Impact on Language and Identity; A Pragmatics Analysis of Muniza Alvi's Selected Poems



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**Abstract:** *The subcontinent has been one of the well-known colonies of the vast British Empire. The colonial rule of the Britishers has put some everlasting impacts on every sphere of life in the subcontinent. Because of the dominance and superior nature of the British people they always have influenced other nations, especially African states and subcontinent: which ultimately has impacts on their social life, literature, identity, culture, and language. This sort of influence of the imperial centre on the peripheries has then reflected in the writing and literature they produced. So here the focus lies especially on Pakistani writing and the role of language and identity reflected in Muniza Alvi's selected poems. The researchers explore the ways which reflect the conflicted identity of the speaker along with pragmatic analysis. For this purpose, the researchers have selected two poems "The unknown girl" and "Presents from my aunts in Pakistan". The study is qualitative descriptive in nature which opens up the research questions in a coherent manner.*

**Key Words:** Imperial Centre, Identity, Pragmatics, Presents, Unknown Girl

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### Introduction

In mundane activities, people deploy language according to the situation and affairs. Through the meaning-making process, people use language for different purposes. The language used in certain contexts might have similar meanings within that context, albeit it may vary, which depends upon the audience and situation. This means that there may be a contrast between what people say and what they mean. Sometimes, the speaker's or writer's utterances can have much more than the actual word they utter or write. For example,

someone enters a room and another person inside the room says that 'Close the door'. So, the meaning of the sentence is obvious the speaker wants the door to be closed, yet this also means that the speaker wants the person to go out of the room and close the door from outside. This idea can be reflected in that of Jenny Thomas who advances that "people do not always or even usually say what they mean" (Thomas, 2014). He elaborates it with instances like, "it's hot in here". This statement is a sort of general one in terms of its interpretation. For example, if someone enters an office and witnesses the window



close, this might mean to open the window, or it might mean a question like, is it right if I open the window? What a person says at one time may be utterly opposite to what he means. Thomas is of the opinion that; what people say can mean something quite different from what their words suggest.

The study of what speakers mean, or speaker's meaning, is called pragmatics (Yule, 2016, p, 149). The intended meaning of the speaker is what is concerned with pragmatics. It is the waste area of study that can be applied to any literary canon. The focus here of pragmatics here is delimited to the study of poetry. To Ayeleru (2012), "poetry is a work of literature which is characterized by the presence of imagination, emotion, truth, sense of expression and concrete language expressed rhythmically." She emphasises that it is a means that is engaged by man to prompt mindsets and contemplations, split into stanzas, lines, or verses, concretize notions, using emblematic language, with others. At face value, poetry as a genre of literature might be viewed to be insignificant and does not appear to lend itself to a discourse-based approach (Carter, 2003, p. 65). Poets have different things to say and they use language skillfully, artistically, and aesthetically to convey their messages. The form of language used by poets has often repelled the interest and attitude of some people, among them teachers, pupils, and scholars (Bala, 2011 pp. 82-83). The focus of this work lies in the pragmatic analysis of Pakistani poetry written by Muniza Alvi. She is a Pakistani anglophone and currently is a dweller in London.

Muniza Alvi is a well-known Pakistani anglophone and a winner of the T.S Eliot Award in English literature. Her birth is in his native city Lahore Pakistan. However, her mother was an English woman and the family migrated to London. There she grew up and got an education from York and the University of London. This experience of being from one world and living in an entirely

different culture has inspired her writing. The experience ultimately reflected in her writing which also made the main theme of her poetry about her conflicted identity. The identity dilemma is very much transparent to readers as one cannot let go of her poem without noticing her conflicted identity. This is very much clear from her selected poems, particularly their titles. "Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan" is a sort of autobiographical poem in which she seeks her true identity. Quoting Muniza in her poem, the girl in the poem would be me at about thirteen. The clothes seem to stick to her in an uncomfortable way, a bit like a kind of false skin, and she thinks things aren't straightforward for her.' Similarly, "The Unknown Girl" is a nostalgic poem about an event witnessed in Pakistan. There again she is expressing the emptiness and desire for her homeland and remembering the bazaar and its vicinity in which she witnessed hennaing of her hand. The longing for being misdirected by nature and the aspiration for her real identity again is shimmering in her text. So, the researchers will examine the concept of her conflicted identity depicted in the above-mentioned poems. Additionally, the focus will also lie on the pragmatic's analysis of the selected poems. The pragmatic analysis deals with the intended meaning of the speaker. It also includes certain elements like invisible meaning, context, deixis, references, presupposition, and pragmatic markers. These elements in combination can make the pragmatic analysis possible. The work will enlighten the readers through the investigation of two perspectives of the selected poems. One perspective is that of the literary study of the poem and the second one is the linguistics study of the poem through the lens of pragmatics.

This study is unique and central to the poems and poet as well because no such niche is guided by anyone in the poems. in this regard, the study is pivotal to be pursued

for certain reasons. One of the main reasons is the writer is an indispensable figure in literature as a winner of the T.S Elliot Award winner. Moreover, a Pakistani prominent anglophone for the juvenile generation. Lastly, her writing is full of the rich indigenous tradition and its echoes is way different from other local anglophone, as she has focused on the identity conflict which is very basic and appealing to every Pakistani, particularly diasporic. The themes which are present in her poems are quite relevant in today's societies, the exploration of which is pivotal and cannot be ignored.

### Research questions

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1. How the language of the poems reflects the conflicted identity of the poet?
2. What elements of pragmatic studies are present in the selected poems?

### Literature Review

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Pragmatics analysis is central to the contextual studies of poems. Such analysis is one of the interesting topics for researchers in the field of linguistics. According to International Pragmatics Association, pragmatic language in terms of investigation is the ins and outs of the language use and its function (Blommaert & Verschueren, 2005). Pragmatics is the analysis of meaning or sense in context. It deals with the meaning-making process within its context and surrounding. According to Levinson (1983, p. 6), "pragmatics is the study of those relations between language and context that are grammaticalized, or encoded in the structure of a language." Language and context interact similarly to how hands and gloves do. If there is language and text there must exist the context of it. In literary works, the context, invisible meaning, and pragmatic markers are basically derived from the text. These literary texts as representative of the author's mind and idea take readers to that point. This

pragmatics element, especially the context varies from text to text. In poetry, the poet uses the choice of language as having a poetic license. So, the freedom of word choice reflects the identity of the culture and the poet as well. As people can be recognized by the kind of language they use. It is obvious that the selection of words gives identity to the person using language. The poems under consideration bear such instances from which it can be inferred that the poet is a non-native speaker of English. So, from their linguistic choices, the context of their culture and identity can be easily pointed out. In "The Unknown Girl," the depiction of an indigenous market event is portrayed in such words which are witnessing the identity of the poet being stuck to that culture. Similarly, 'Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan' is itself the representative of Pakistani culture, through which the writer is making her identity.

However, Crystal (1987) views the idea as "pragmatics studies the factors that govern our choices of language in social interactions and the effects of our choice on others." According to this interpretation, pragmatics deals not only with what is whispered but also with the characteristics that follow it and the motivations that cause the narrators or authors to adopt a specific visage rather than another in various milieus. The selected poem's lexemes are the representative of the culture and invisible meaning are witnessing the factors behind the words and identity. Using local terms like 'Bazar, shalwar kameez the writer is expressing herself as the local of the area. However, an anglophone living in London has an ardent desire to live in his homeland among the people she belongs to. If we call this her mourning for her homeland, it remained incomplete in her life. This experience of her has had an everlasting effect on her writing. It is the main reason behind the lexical choices and their invisible meaning that reflects upon the identity and culture of the writer.

Thomas (2014) explains the concept of pragmatics by using two viewpoints. One is the social viewpoint and the other is the cognitive one. He connects both viewpoints through the pragmatic meaning (speaker meaning) and comes up with the opinion that pragmatics is associated with the interpretation of speech which can be called utterance interpretation. He goes on to describe the traits of the pragmatic in two more ways. He first connects the spokesperson's pragmatic meaning through a social evaluation, but he then utilizes the second cognitive point of view to connect the spokesperson's expected comprehension.

George Yule's (1996) point of view concerning pragmatics is very pivotal. Speakers must be able to convey their meaning based on the customs and knowledge that are prevalent in the areas they are speaking about. According to this viewpoint, pragmatics illustrates how language content affects overawed obscurity. He added (2010) pragmatics is the study of implied meaning, or how to determine a word's connotation even when its intentional connotation is not spoken or written directly. Because of this, authors or narrators must rely on widely held beliefs and familiarity with the field of communication.

## **Methodology**

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This section of the research article deals with the mechanism to attain the objectives of the research. It unfolds the data, its sources, and the methodology to be analyzed. The nature of the study is qualitative and descriptive. Researchers have utilized qualitative descriptive study as a method for this study to explore the quality and relationship of the text that is commonly described through interpretation. The instrument for this study is a secondary source through which the data was collected from an online source. The internet is used as a secondary source to get the sample for this study. Purposive sampling is used in its support. Selective sampling is

another name for purposeful. Using a method known as purposeful sampling, qualitative researchers select candidates who can pay for in-depth research on the phenomenon they are studying. As the poet has many collections of poems. So, researchers have selected two of the poems named, "The unknown girl" and "Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan".

The literary investigation of the poems includes the examination of the poet's conflicted identity between the borders. The writer being a diasporic anglophone is looking like the victim of an identity crisis across borders. So, this element of representation of identity as the main theme of the poems will be one of the discussion points. On the other hand, the linguistics study of the poems deals with the pragmatic analysis of the poems. In linguistics, pragmatic analysis is one of the dominant tools or approaches to examine language discourse. Pragmatics analysis fulfils the space between the reader and writer or teacher and student with an enhanced indulgence of ideas. It is a method that centres on the author's language use, the intention of the writer/speaker and reader/hearer especially on the context of the text. It relies on the invisible meaning related to the context of the text which cannot be taken from its literal meaning. In this way, the study will analyze some of the pragmatic elements used in the selected poems. These features of pragmatics vary from text to text; however, the focus will remain on the context of the poems and the intended meaning of the speaker. The focus of the researchers within the pragmatics analysis will particularly lie upon, invisible meaning, references, anaphora, inferences, presupposition, and pragmatic markers. All such elements will be analyzed through a contrapuntal reading of the poems.

## **Data Analysis and Discussion**

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This section is a crucial part of the research

article. The researchers in this section analyze the data in hand. The data is analyzed through analytical and logical reasoning. The data gets opened up in its interpretation from the investigating angles. These angles depend upon the type of exploration the researchers have in mind. The focus here lies upon the exploration of conflicted identity reflected through the lexical expression of the poet along with the pragmatics analysis of the selected data.

The data comprises two poems by Pakistani anglophone Muniza Alvi. The poems are entitled, "the unknown girl" and "Presents from My Aunts in Pakistan". The writer is a Pakistani national by birth, yet migrated to England in her childhood. She gets her degree from London University and soon become a popular writer after winning T.S Elliot Award in English literature. The writer being the national of two states remains perplexed in terms of her identity. The culture she loves and was born in is too far away from her, yet the culture she currently dwells in is a sort of alien to her. The theme of conflict identity is predominantly present in her literary text which is one of the main concerns of the study. She reflects it in her words as "I never feel entirely at home in England, and of course, I'm not part of the Asian community at all." Bloodaxe publishers cited that Deryn Rees-Jones reinforced this idea and writes, "much of Alvi's work engages with a surreal or fantastical world of fractured and partially recovered identity" ("Poetry Book Society Choice").

The title of the poem "Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan" is self-explanatory regarding the identity issue of the writer. The poem spotlights the outlook of a young girl who is trapped between the culture across territories. It discusses a past event in her life when she received a gift from her aunts. Which means that she is not in her homeland. It is an autobiographical and author-oriented poem as Alvi herself writes

*"The girl in the poem would be me at about thirteen." "The clothes seem to stick to her in an uncomfortable way, a bit like a kind of false skin, and she thinks things aren't straightforward for her."*

*This teenage girl living far from her mother and entire family receives some presents which refers to the family bond and love between them, yet being apart she feels deprived of that bonding. The gifts include traditional attires of Pakistan 'shalwar kameez'. In the poem, she describes it as, 'glistening like an orange split open' a seemly simile that boosts the sense of enthusiasm and goodness. The language and the lexical expression used to convey the message of the poem are reflective of the indigenous culture. The term shalwar kameez from the very beginning line relates to language appropriation. This appropriation of language is the product of colonialism, which has impacted the literature of the Orient. This is quite obvious a person born in one land will never forget his nation and motherland. The same is happening with the poet as living far away from her culture, she cannot forget her homeland and culture, which is depicted in her writing. The use of indigenous imagery in the poem has made the poem entirely a local piece of writing written in the streets of the writer's village. The entire poem seems like she is still living here in her homeland as she depicts the imagery of it. "Sometimes I see Lahore, my aunts in the shaded rooms" Such verses witness the conflicted identity of the speaker. The poet's expressionism overall is a sort of driving force toward the main identity crisis. The clothes she received from her aunts are not admired by her classmates there as she says, "my shalwar kameez doesn't impress my school girls, I admired mirror work, tried to glimpse myself, recall the story, how the three of us sailed to England".*

These verses show how the speaker of the poem regrets the migration to England. There she feels entirely alien to the new

culture, her traditional attires; which are so special gifts to her are not even admired by her other cultural mate. The loneliness of the poet has made her addicted to seeing herself in the mirror and talking about her clothes to herself. As she says, "In English grandmother's dining room I found myself alone" Such sort of circumstances has made to question her identity. She is not from there nor from here, yet lives in a chaotic condition of self-made identity which she questions every time. Sometimes the nostalgic feelings in her imagination flew her away to the place she belongs to, other times she doubts why she is here. "of no fixed nationality, staring through the framework at the Shalimar garden". These words reflect upon the inconsistent identity which the speaker bears.

"The unknown girl" has the same notion of the conflicted identity portrayed by the poet. Through personal narrative, repetition, and cultural allusion, *An Unknown Girl* explores the concepts of identity and belonging. The speaker is unsure of who she is and wants to hold onto the sensation she experienced when the design was new and the girl was an unknown one, therefore the consummation is ambiguous. The use of local lexemes identifies the issue of identity with the speaker. The title itself bears such a notion, the speaker in one way seems to be unknown in his nearby marketplace. This might be because of living abroad and the local people have forgotten who she is. However, the lexical expression depicts her local culture. It is almost similar to "Present from my aunts in Pakistan" as the initial verse start from that of 'bazar' which is the reflection of local words in the poem. The indigenous culture's imagery and the writer's state of mind are regarded as one and intermixed. Similarly, the words used in the poem like 'sofa clothes, kameez, western perns, miss India, local banners, India appear and reappear' are the reflection of the author's locality, yet living apart feels that

connection. Such circumstances again create that question of identity crisis or conflicted identity that has beautifully portrayed overall in the poem.

A pragmatics view of literature demonstrates that in literary communication, we have not only a literary text, but also the emotional consequences of literary interpretation, which include the author's wants, wishes, desires, likings, and sentiments. Pragmatics is the branch of language study that investigates meaning in context. Yule as cited by (Osisanwo, [2003](#), p. 55), asserts that pragmatics is "concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by the listener (or reader)." When someone disputes pragmatics, they are merely discussing meaning beyond the linguistic facts, that is, pragmatics deals with the implicit meaning of an utterance that can only be inferred within the context. The pragmatics of literary communication addresses issues such as the types of activities completed by the creation of a literary text (i.e., the poem), the suitable conditions for those actions, and the links between the actions and their settings (Van Dijk, [2011](#)). A text compels its reader to create a picture or a series of alternate images. While the picture is being built and revised, the translator is attempting to figure out what the text's originator is doing and the nature of the communication scenario. The reader must then construct a set of inferences from which the contextual implication may be deduced for each successful interpretation. Understanding and interpreting poetry necessitates an appreciation for the historical, social, and ideological contexts in which the poets find themselves. Therefore, the pragmatic impact of the poem embraces the totality of the poem, combined with its emotional, intellectual and imaginative appeal (Indede, [2009](#)). The pragmatics features like invisible meaning, context, deixis, referencing, presupposition and

pragmatics markers are the elements that give shape to the entire pragmatic analysis.

The invisible meaning deals with meaning in context which is not actually the referential meaning of the words. Certain factors affect and highlight invisible meanings, including shared assumptions and expectations, during communication. From the shared assumption and expectation readers get the clue of understanding more than the linguistic utterances. In this regard, the poems have multiple instances of such invisible meaning. For instance, "shalwar kameez, old-fashioned Pakistan, bazar, unknown girl, shaded rooms, English grandmother, stitched kameez, western perns, sofa cloth, cling to the side of the train,". These words are pregnant with invisible meanings and shared assumptions in their brevity. The speaker of the poems deploys the language with multiple references to the culture which are in line with her inconsistent state of mind in terms of her identity. The shalwar kameez and bazar (a marketplace) refer to the local culture of the poet. These words also portray the culture which is local to the speaker and she is living far away from it. A sort of desire of the poet is depicted in the poem for her homeland and her attire. This kind of language use can also be termed appropriation, in which the standard rule of the English language is not followed. However, the writer being apart from her local culture addresses her nostalgic feeling and a sort of attachment has been portrayed with it. Similarly, "the shaded rooms, English grandmother dining room, stitched kameez" are the words through which readers can see the depiction of the indigenous culture of the poet. The shalwar kameez is repeated in both the poems which the female wear in Pakistan. The emphasis on the cultural may be because of the other cultural attire which may not be suitable to the author or speaker. The English grandmother and Western perns differentiate between the traditional norms of across the

borders. The poet's grandmother belongs to England, so the speaker did not call her pin name, which is common in Pakistani culture. It seems like the writer has no inclination toward her rather she seems an unknown lady to her.

Deixis mean pointing out something (place, person, time) via language. According to George Yule (2016), deixis are "used to point to people (us, them, we, I, those, these), place (here, there), and time (now, then, last week)". The poem has more use of the personal deixis as compared to spatial and time deixis. The speaker of the poem is a first-person narrator, so most of the time talks about herself and her familial relationship and experience. The multiple instances of personal deixis include, "They sent me shalwar kameez, I, my birthplace, us and them, she squeezes, my plans, I sleep," etc. These instances are the reflection of the first-person narrator and her point of view. 'They' refers to the aunts of the speaker who are living in Pakistan and they have sent them presents. This also identifies the familial relationship and belongingness of the speaker which is put forward in one word (they). However, the subjective I and the possessive my point to the speaker itself. Similarly, the use of the third person singular 'she' emphasizes the event that happened in the bazaar, which is the eyewitness of the author. There is very little use of spatial deixis as hardly readers can find the words which deal with it, yet there is no use of time deixis.

It is straightforward to use words to refer to persons, places, and times. However, words do not relate to anything, but people do. A reference is when a speaker or writer uses language to help a listener or reader identify something (Yule, 2016). The act of referencing in the poems is depicted in a beautiful manner. The speaker of the poem refers to the local spots in the area she has been born. For instance, "the Shalimar Garden, Lahore, neon bazaar" etc. The Shalimar Garden is one of the famous

gardens in Pakistan situated in Lahore which is the hometown of the poet. The speaker refers to the Shalimar Garden as everyone in the hometown must visit the park. It is like childhood memories which remain still in everyone's minds for a lifetime. The poet living abroad refers to her childhood memories and conflicted identity as she is feeling alien there. Lahore is obviously his birthplace and city which cannot be perished from her mind referring to the entire life she wants to spend there.

When readers use he or Jennifer a referring term like this, they normally believe that our listeners would know which referent is intended. In a broader sense, we build our language message based on broad assumptions about what our listeners already know. Presuppositions are what a speaker or writer believes to be true or known by a listener or reader (Yule, 2016). The sort of presupposition used in the poems is comparatively less than the other pragmatics features. The instances are "peacock blue, sailed to England, I saw Lahore", these words are used in terms of presupposition. The peacock-blue is presupposed bird of and a design on her clothes which are being gifted by her aunts. the other instances like sailing to England are a sort of presupposition that they are already there in England. However, in the other statement like "I saw Lahore" the picture of Lahore is presupposed present in her mind and she has already seen this place.

## **Conclusion**

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The poems of Muniza Alvi "The Unknown Girl

and Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan" are the poem under investigation in the study. The researchers explored the poems in two dimensions, first is the impact of language on the identity of the poet. Secondly, the pragmatics analysis of the poem has been explored. The post-colonial impacts on the language are vividly present in Pakistani writing in English, especially in the texts under consideration. The poet is a Pakistani anglophone and dweller of London and has never felt that culture as their own, yet felt alien to it. This is the reason that the state of her mind is inconsistent regarding her identity. This experience of living abroad has impacted her writing. She has beautifully expressed her thought and the element of identity crisis in her two poems which is discussed in the data analysis section. The writer has described her indigenous culture and the traditional way of life in her hometown. This depiction of the writer witnesses the way she thinks of her identity and her life there in England.

Additionally, in the pragmatic analysis, all the elements are not present in the poems. However, some of the elements are used more as compared to others. For instance, the poem is pregnant with the invisible meaning and personal deixis while presupposition and referencing are used very less in quantity, yet the pragmatic markers are totally absent in the poems. The pragmatic features in combination have positive impacts on the overall meaning and message of the poem.



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