

Ambreen Mahmood*

Masroor Sibtain†

p-ISSN: 2663-3299

e-ISSN: 2663-3841

L-ISSN: 2663-3299

Vol. V, No. IV (Fall 2020)

Pages: 113 - 122

Exploring Feminism and Marital Relations in “*The Optimist*” by Bina Shah: A Transitivity Analysis

Abstract:

The current research paper tries to explore feminism and marital relations in an English short story by Bina Shah in a Pakistani context. Halliday’s Trnsitivity System (2004) as textual analysis supported to identify the feminine and feminist traits in English fiction. The high frequency of material process (66) out of 200 clauses presented Raheela as a feminist, whereas the Relational process (56) reflected her feminine traits. The participants of the processes and circumstances made the institution of marriage clear; the desire and choice for marriage, sending marriage proposal and accepting proposal were all by the groom, his parents and bride’s parents, but the bride had no right to express her choice and is generally supposed to follow her parents. Marital relation was built without the compatibility of the participants of marriage. The research helped to identify the writer’s reflection of feminism and unfolded Asian culture with respect to marriage.

Key Words:

Transitivity, Textual Analysis, Feminism, Marital Relations and The Optimist

Introduction

The current study provides a textual analysis of *The Optimist* (2007), a Pakistani English short story was written by Bina Shah through [Halliday \(2004\)](#) model of textual analysis. According to Halliday (2004), “language provides a theory of human experience” (p.29). The study uses [Halliday’s transitivity System \(2004\)](#) to explore feminism and marital relations in English fiction work in the Pakistani context where patriarchy is dominant in homes and relations.

[Halliday \(2004\)](#) mentions that “experience and interpersonal relationships are transformed into meanings, and the meaning is transformed into wording” (p. 25). Therefore, the transitivity analysis of the linguistic expressions of the story describes the experiential meanings of the characters and their relations. The story unfolds the issue of an arranged marriage between two cousins, Adnan (resident of Pakistan) and Raheela (who resides in England), describes their unusual married relation and ends with a semi-broken marriage where Raheela flies to England, leaving Adnan at the airport and Adnan still has a hope to meet her one day.

Marriage in Pakistan is considered an institution under Islamic Law. Culturally, the wedding knot is tied between husband and wife, but their families are also in alliance with each other. People’s beliefs and attitude towards marital status shape their behaviors in marital relationships. The ideologies concerning marital relations can affect the behaviors and attitude involved in marital processes ([Foran and Slep, 2007](#)). Bina Shah picked the topic of Pakistani marriage between a Pakistani groom and an overseas bride. Being a Pakistani, the

writer describes all steps of Pakistani marriage; searching potential bride, sending a proposal and fixing a marriage are all set in a sequence in a short story. She spotlighted the patriarchal society where females have no choice for all described steps of Pakistani marriage; though the protagonist Raheels lives in England, but her Pakistani parents compel her to get marry by emotional blackmailing, but the bride performs rebellious acts to prove herself as feminist.

There are three narrations in this short story of thirteen pages. The first and third narrations are made by Adnan, and the second narration is made by Raheela. The first narration starts with Adnan’s awareness of his

*PhD Scholar, The Women University, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: ambreenejaz899@gmail.com

†Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government Graduate College of Science, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.

bride's hate for him. Many times, his bride Raheela utters hate words to him, and he remains silent. She openly calls him a fool, and he blinks his eyes to avoid weeping. The story represents Pakistani characters in unusual role positions, typically arrange marriage proposal and atypical marital relationships. Interestingly, the story reflects feminine descriptions from the point of view of a boy but feminist actions by a British national Pakistani girl marrying in Pakistan. Therefore, the story is identified as a feminist text representing Raheela as a feminist protagonist and Adnan as a submissive husband hoping to have true love from his wife.

Such characters and events in the story have incited the researcher to apply the transitivity analysis to explore the text of the short story, *The Optimist*. The transitivity system helps to understand the characters, their actions and the events in which they perform the activities. The objectives of the current research are to deconstruct the text by textual analysis, identify the feminine and feminist features of the short story and correlate the characters' role along with their ideologies concerning marriage in Pakistani culture.

The textual analysis leads to exploring the feminine and feminist traits, patriarchal institution of marriage and the notion of sexuality in *The Optimist*. The study is of importance that the story represents Pakistani culture, and the writer Bina Shah as a feminist, highlighted the issue of arranging the marriage between persons of two separate cultural background. The study helps to understand the text in detail and provides insights to analyze the discourse of English fiction critically in the Pakistani context.

Theoretical Framework

The current research paper banks on M. A. K. Halliday's concept of transitivity, which is a common and reliable method of clause analysis. Transitivity is the major notion in Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) which presents language as functional. [Halliday \(1994\)](#) considers language as "a network of systems or interrelated sets of options for making meaning" (p. 15). Through the theory of transitivity, Halliday has presented the language-view as a system of meanings with choice ([Neale, 2002](#)). [Halliday \(1985\)](#) has introduced three metafunctions of language; Textual metafunction, Interpersonal metafunction, and Ideational metafunction are listed. The notion of transitivity is the element of an ideational metafunction. Further, transitivity has three components as processes, participants and circumstances. The six processes named material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioral and existential are part of processes of transitivity. Halliday considers transitivity to understand the experiential meanings of the participants with respect to the relevant process and circumstance ([Martin, 2013](#)).

The transitivity system is considered as a source of textual, content and discourse analysis of the literary text. This paper looks into the relationship between linguistic features and meanings in English short story. Through Halliday's transitivity framework, the study seeks to discover how some linguistic choices can represent the characteristics of a feminist text in general and particularly, it focused on identifying verbs as per the type of the process. Overall, the paper attempts to unveil the feminine and feminist traits and marital relations in English short story by analyzing participants' roles involved in each process.

Methodology

The current study is in the paradigm of mix methods research where the transitivity system helps to identify the characters' appearance, feelings, emotions and actions through processes, participants and circumstances. For the current study, the close reading of the text *The Optimist* was done. The text was broken into clauses for textual analysis. [Halliday and Matthiessen \(2004\)](#) consider the clause as the basic unit of grammar. Transitivity is the textual analysis unfolds the experiential meanings of the characters, cultural aspects and marital relationships of Pakistani society. For the present study, the following research questions are:

1. How does the transitivity system reflect feminine and feminist traits in English Pakistani fiction?
2. How do linguistic features represent feminism and marital relations in English Pakistani fiction?

The theme of the story is feminism; therefore, the extracts representing feministic features and characters’ engagement towards feminine and feminist ideologies were chosen. From those extracts, two hundred clauses were made selected to explore feminism and marital relations.

Analysis and Findings

Applying transitivity analysis is a bit tricky because it is very necessary to figure out the main verb in the clause complex to interpret the accurate ideological message of the writer. In the clause, “*I chose one*”, *chose* is identified as a material process, whereas in “*She chose to tell me*”, the focus is on *tell* that is a verbal process. Therefore, careful selection of the clauses led towards a reliable understanding of the text. The linguistic analysis of the text provided a general view of the text and major characters Raheela, Adnan and their parents, but Raheela appeared as the protagonist. She is rebellious in her actions and is also daring enough to reflect her hate for her husband in the Pakistani context. Adnan, her husband, tries to be an optimist and ignores her disdain towards him. Therefore, the clauses representing Adnan and Raheela’s experiential world were selected. The transitivity analysis of the two hundred clauses provides the frequency of six processes, circumstances and participants.

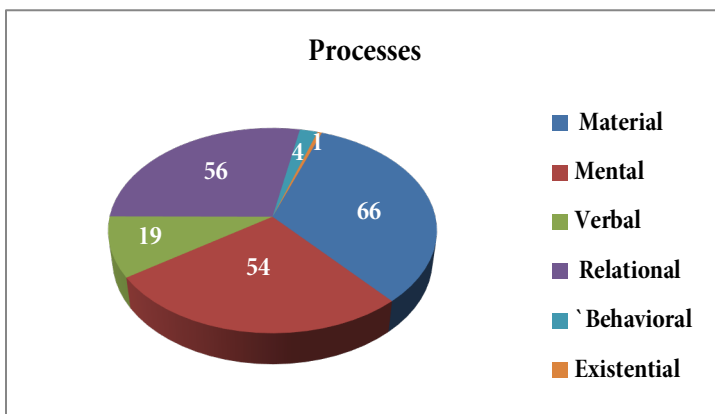


Figure 1: Frequency of Processes in The Optimist

The results show that the Material process is the most frequent process and is found 66 times (33%) out of 200 clauses. The high frequency of the material process represents a lot of actions being performed by the participants in a particular event.

The second highest frequency lies with the Relational process as it is found 56 times (28%). Such a frequency shows that the author has concentrated on describing the nature of things and attributes associated with the characters of the story. The author focused on every minute detail in order to take the readers along with her. Among these Relational processes, 35 are Attributive, 14 are identifying, 07 are possessive, while no causative relational process could be found. A high number of attributive relational process exists to represent the feminine features and description of the matrimonial event.

The third most frequently used process is the Mental process which is found 54 times (27%). The frequency shows that the characters are fully aware of their emotions, feelings and have the power to express those sentiments.

The verbal process is found 19 times (10%). The frequency denotes that due space was given by the author to the participant so that they may speak out their heart or give wind to their minds. The dialogic communication between different characters reveals their relationship with each other, whether they share a

bond of harmony and understanding or lack of it. Out of 200 clauses, just 19 times verbal process reflects the less talk of the participants.

By observing the frequency of behavioural process, which is found 4 times (2%) only, it could be anticipated that the characters are self-centred and are not ready to give space to each other in a social world for new relationships. Last but not least, indeed, is an existential process that could be traced only once (01%) in the whole selected clauses of this short story.

After identifying the processes, it is important to know who is responsible for the relevant action or the process. To explore the answer to the research questions, the classification of the roles of the participants are required. Therefore, the frequency of the participants' roles was counted, which helps to identify the ideology of the participants concerning feminism and marital relations.

Table 1. Participants' Roles and their Frequency in *The Optimist*

Participant	Frequency	Percentage
Actor	57	16.52%
Goal	42	12.17%
Beneficiary	6	1.73%
Range	3	0.86%
Senser	54	15.65%
Phenomenon	38	11.01%
Sayer	19	5.50%
Reciever	6	1.73%
Verbiage	4	1.15%
Behaver	4	1.15%
Existent	1	0.28%
Token	14	4.05%
Value	14	4.05%
Carrier	35	10.14%
Attribute	35	10.14%
Possessor	7	2.02%
Possessed	7	2.02%
Total	345	100.17%

Analyzing the frequency of participant roles, it is revealed that 57 actor roles are present. Among these 57 actor roles, Raheela is the most frequently found actor in the selected text. She is given this role 31 times (54.3%)

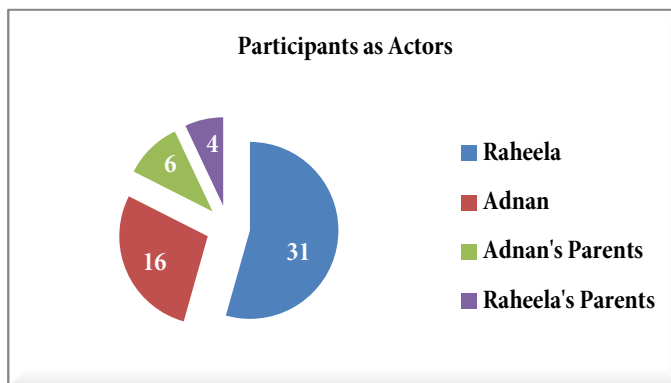


Figure 2: Frequency of Actor Role in *The Optimist*

The second highest process is the Relational process which is divided further into attributive, identifying and possessor processes.

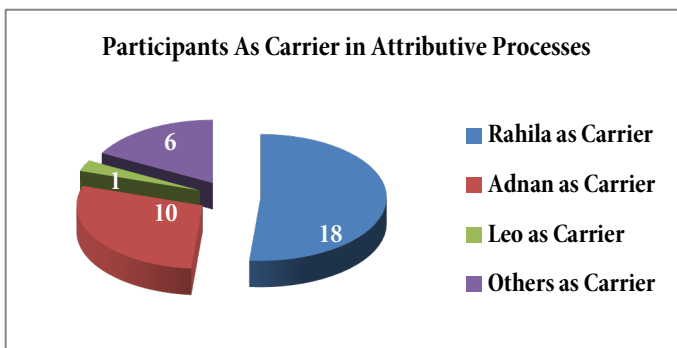


Figure 3: Frequency of Carrier Role in Attributive Processes

Out of 35 attributive processes, Rahila carries the highest number, which mentions how much description is present related to the protagonist. In the text, the word ‘Leo’, a Zodiac sign, was mentioned as a carrier once to relate the feelings of a character of the short story in a general context. The term ‘others’ covers *Pakistani men* and Raheela’s parents from the text.

C32 We Leos are extremely romantic people

C135 Pakistanis, especially Pakistani men, are not exactly the epitome of charm and intelligence

C136 they’re so thick

14 identifying and 07 possessor processes added the weights in relational processes. The role of the relational processes is discussed in the discussion in detail.

A total of 54 sayer roles was found. Among all the participants of this short story, Raheela was found as a sayer with the highest frequency, 28 times in 54 sensor roles. Adnan was found 18 times, and both parents were found 8 times as sayer by sharing equal frequency. However, the verbs were limited and repeated throughout the text. The verbs ‘love’, ‘want’, ‘understand’ and ‘know’ were repeated many times to give high frequency to the sayer role, but such verbs reflect the high determination and strong headedness of the characters.

All the verbal processes which could be found during the analysis brought forth the participants who were assigned the Sayer roles. The frequency of these roles covers the contribution and communication of the relevant participants. Total of 19 sayer-roles was located. Raheela was the most frequent sayer by performing this role 10 times.

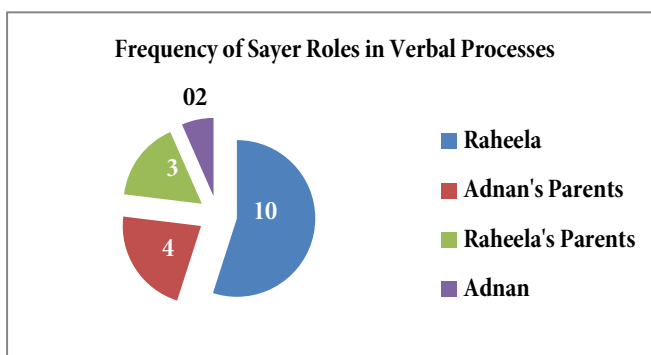


Figure 4: Frequency of Role Sayer in Verbal Processes

The second highest frequency of sayer role lies with Adnan's parents. They are found as sayer 4 times. Raheela's parents can be positioned as the third most frequent sayers by performing this role 3 times. Here Adnan is the participant who got only two chances to be a sayer in the whole selected text.

After analyzing the Behavioural processes, it becomes easy to notify the participants of their frequency in the role of Behavers. Total 4 behavers were found. Raheela was found as behavior three times, whereas Adnan's parents were placed in the role of behavior once.

Existent is another participant role that could be uncovered after the analysis of selected clauses in terms of transitivity processes. Only one existent role could be traced while analyzing the whole selected text from this short story. The identification of circumstances with their frequency further helped to identify the intensity and expression of the processes and their participants.

Table 2: Circumstances and their Frequency in 'The Optimist.'

Circumstances	Frequency	Percentage
Extent	12	8.57%
Location	66	47.14%
Manner	22	15.71%
Cause	12	8.57%
Contingency	14	10.00%
Accompaniment	9	6.43%
Matter	4	2.86%
Angle	1	0.71%
Total	140	100.00%

Looking at the frequencies of circumstances found in the selected clauses, it came out that a total of 140 circumstances could be traced in the text that is selected for analysis, including Circumstance of Location, as the most frequent of all other types of circumstances, emphasized the place or event in which the process was going on. The second most frequent circumstance is the Circumstance of Manner, which is present 22 times (15.71%), indicating that the way the things happened or the verbiages were delivered by the respective sayers and behavers showed different behaviours in various circumstances. To highlight the relationships clearly, the author used the 'how' aspect in this short story. The circumstance of Contingency is the third most frequent circumstance located 14 times (10.00%) like *apart from the occasional cigarette, besides, as if, whether, in alarm, even if, though, knowing that, in her excitement*, It shows the conditions in which certain actions took place. The circumstance of Extent and Circumstance of Cause is located 12 times (8.57%) each in two hundred clauses. The circumstance of Accompaniment is found 09 times (6.43%) like *with him and his family, with him, with servants and the weather and everyone with good values, with the rest of my family, with a heavy cold, with her*, Circumstance of Matter is present 4 times (2.86%) and Circumstance of Angle is found only once (0.71%) like *by nature*. Overall, circumstances were found to complete the processes in a given context and clear the events, situations and characters in the short story, The Optimist.

Discussion

Raheela is the central character of the story; her character was found with the highest frequency for the leading participant of all processes except the existential process. Out of 66 material processes, 57 are performed by the actors, whereas only nine are without actors. Raheela is the protagonist of the story, as the whole story revolves around her actions. She is authoritative and assertive. Being a rebellious child of her parents, she refused to marry a man of her parent's choice. She used to go and drink at the club. She used to stay out of the home. She had an illicit physical relationship with an English man. She did not allow her husband to touch her

on her wedding night. It was Raheela who took the initiative to have sex with her husband, and in the end, she left him without even informing him.

C128 I'm not doing this.

C12 My new wife arranged her features into a smile.

C115 I'd gotten drunk on gin and tonic at the club.

C134 I wouldn't bother coming home from work.

C139 One night, I picked up an English guy

C156 Raheela didn't let me touch her on our wedding night.

C160 I'd have sex with you?'

C169 She took me into her arms

C200 What she had done.

A noteworthy aspect of the story is to reflect the highest frequency of actor roles that are assigned to a female character instead of a male character. It shows that the female represented in the story is strong enough to bring some change through her actions or she is this much free to act that she could follow her will, dreams and desires. The types of actions performed by Raheela in C12 show that she has full command on her features, she can control or mold them as she wants. This ability shows her strength at her nerves as she arranged her features of anger into a smile for others. Raheela's action of picking the English guy in C139 is the loudest of all. On the cline of dynamism affecting an animate thing as goal is the most active position which an actor could ever take. Though she never did such a thing before this. It is the height of the element of revenge in her personality that she loses herself only to take revenge from Adnan and his family that how they can get a virgin when she is unwilling.

She appears to be quite dominating in C156 as she is the one who didn't let her husband to touch herself on their wedding night. It is quite opposite action by her because generally girls don't do so on their wedding night. In Pakistani culture, it is not an appreciable act on the part of bride to resist her husband. She lives in England; this could be the reason that she learnt from the western culture to resist the dominating position even in marital relationship. By all her actions, her character came out as a feminist to ask equal rights; she mentioned not to ask for her choice of being married. The second highest frequency of actor roles lies with Adnan who is positioned as actor 16 times (28.0%) as in:

C15 I can never keep my emotions off my face.

C23 But I was born in July, the sign of Leo the optimist.

C62---as long as I made her happy.

C162 and run my fingers up her legs.

C163 In the morning I awoke with a heavy cold,

C170 and let me make love to her.

Adnan is a less active or effective actor in comparison with Raheela as he affects animate beings (her) twice, only in C62 and C162. Otherwise, most of the time it is inanimate goal that is affected by him. His emotions, his heart, her legs are the goals that got affected by Adnan. The rest of the examples show that mostly there is no goal that is affected by Adnan as an actor like in C23 and C163 as cited above. The third most frequent actor role is Adnan's parents found 6 times (10.71%) as actor out of the 200 clauses.

C119 They'll make me wear hijab, for God's sake,

C120 and they'll never let me work!'

C146 they weren't going to get the little virgin

C167 that my mother had prepared for our wedding breakfast.

Here C119 and C 120 communicate about the supreme authority that usually lies with Asian parents-in-law, especially in Pakistan, by which Adnan's parents can allow or forbid their daughter in law for anything. It is up to them whether they permit her to do the job or not. Rather they can even force her to wear a hijab. So

these examples show that as an actor, they got effectuality towards their daughter-in-law mainly. They mainly intended to exercise their authority towards their daughter-in-law as if she is the only being without her own will. In other clauses like C97 and C 98, there is no goal that could be affected by them. In C146, though, they are in the role of the actor, but it seems that the goal is more powerful. Here the context is very important as it is the thought of Raheela. She is quite sarcastic here about her future husband and in-laws because she was not willing to marry, so she ruins her virginity in order to take a sort of revenge. Raheela's parents appear in the role of actor 4 times (7.14%). The least role of Raheela's parents as actors reflects almost no actions done by the bride's parents.

The high attributive processes are present to highlight the characters who carry particular attributes. Raheela was found 18 times carrier for her personality. Interestingly, it was Adnan who mentioned her beauty, delicacy and tenderness in her personality.

C36 she was an Aries, another fire sign like me

C172 she was soft and tender and so brave,

Such attributes made her character feminine, but her own actions and verbiage turned her into a feminist. Only two times, she carried her attributes to present herself as an awarded British female.

C70 I really wasn't a troublemaker.

C150 I was a grown British woman with rights and freedom, not a Pakistani village girl.

Adnan was identified for his attributes of male supremacy and considered suitable for marriage on the basis of his income and settled earning status.

C48 I was proud to tell them

C88 How he was well settled in a good job in a travel agency.

Identifying process is just to introduce the characters, their relationships and their personalities.

C129 I'm an optimist by nature.

C38 It's Raheela.

C114 We're your parents.

Though it is just to describe the characters, this process unfolds the psychology of the characters well. Relational processes help to identify the power of Asian parents for the institution of marriage. With the help of this process, it is a boy who selects the female for marriage, introduces her to his family, his parents accept happily and send a proposal, the girls' parents accept the proposal. The relational process presents how much marriage is important for Pakistani parents and how male and females consider the institution of marriage.

C18 That's the difference between a man and a woman.

C42 'It's a bit complicated', said Mum.

C44 'It's not'. Dad put in from the doorway.

The mental process is to reflect the mental presence of the characters. Perception (*I saw her photograph*), affection (*she hated me*), cognition (*I know*) and volition (*we want the best for you*) repeatedly reflect the mental processes and identified characters as senser. Raheela being feminine, accepted her parents' decision of her marriage, but she did not hesitate to reject her husband in solitude. She boldly expressed her hate towards her husband, which reflected her as a feminist because, in a usually married relationship, the female could not express her hate to her husband openly, although she would not be willing by heart.

C6 I can't stand the sight of you, Adnan.

C124 that I wanted nothing to do with him.

Even before accepting the proposal, she proved to be rebellious to get marry a Pakistani boy.

C108 that I didn't want to get married,

C109 that I loved England,

C110 I didn't want to go to Pakistan

In the role of senser, Adnan can only feel or has the feeling of love for Raheela. He wanted to marry Raheela. To clasp her feet in his hands is one of his desires as senser. He remembers every detail of Raheela's first picture, which he ever saw.

C196 how much I love her,

C161 I wanted to clasp her feet in my hands

So it is quite evident from the above-cited clauses that Adnan being a senser, is passive in his desires and feelings, but Raheela presents her feelings and emotions of disdain without hesitation.

Out of 200 clauses, just 19 verbal processes reflect less communication of the participants. Raheela proved to be the most verbal participant by expressing her hate for her husband, rejecting the marriage proposal and arguments with her parents. She is loud and clear in her point of view; circumstances of manner and location made it more clear.

C20 and then she finished off with a string of creative curses in three different languages, English, Urdu and Punjabi

C158 She said, pointing at the couch.

C173 even that first night she didn't cry

Adnan was found almost silent as he uttered just for two times; he talks to his parents about his marriage and makes future promise to tell her about his love for her. It reveals that being a boy, his voice was heard as it was his choice for marriage, but he was unheard of by his wife because she just humiliates him and does not allow him to express his emotions towards her.

As a behavior, Raheela's role is very limited but impactful. She made fun of her husband and turned out to be carefree for her virginity, parents, religion and relationships.

C164 while Raheela laughed

C127 I do not care

There is only one existential process in the selected text of the short story, but it reveals the status of women in society. The clause and the process are louder to place the women generally in society and particularly in marital relationship.

C115 There's no question of asking you.

Halliday commented about the existential process "that something exists or happens" (2004:256). Therefore, the process discloses the reality of Pakistani society where women have no choice to question their rights; usually, they are not asked for their match-making. Those, who raised their voice for their rights, are considered as bold, liberals and rebellious. In this story, Raheela denied to get marry with boy of her parents' choice, wanted to stay in England and left her husband in the end. So, her every act speaks about her feminist attitude where as her description by other characters of the story presented her as a feminine.

Conclusion

The transitivity analysis helped to answer the research questions by discussing processes, participants and circumstances. The relational processes and existential process presented feminine traits whereas material, verbal, mental and behavioral processes turned feminine character in feminist. The readers discover Raheela as feminine from Adnan's point of view; he describes her beauty and personality. Raheela, through her actions, verbiage and behavior represented her as a feminist for the reader of English fiction. The linguistic features representing participants and circumstances reflected the marital relationship between a Pakistani boy and a British girl and explored the concept of feminism in English fiction by a Pakistani feminist writer. Bina Shah being feminist presented a strong female character, but at the same time, she presented a supportive and submissive male in her story, which is a bit unusual characteristic of Pakistani men. Adnan was in love with Raheela, and he was optimist enough to get the love of her wife even when she had left him.

References

- Foran, H. M., & Slep, A. M. S. (2007). Validation of a self-report measure of unrealistic relationship expectations. *Psychological Assessment*, 19(4), 382-396.
- Halliday, & Michael, A. K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar*. 2nd ed. New York: *Routledge, Chapman and Hall*
- Halliday, A. K. (1985). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (2nd ed.). London, Melbourne, Auckland:Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. (2004). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (3rd ed.). London:*Arnold*.
- Martin, J. R. (Ed): *Interviews with Michael Halliday: language turned back on himself*. London: Bloomsbury;2013
- Neale, & Amy C. (2002). More delicate Transitivity: Extending the process type system networks for English to include full semantic classifications. Cardiff: *Cardiff University Dissertation*.
- Shah, B. (2007). The Optimist in Muneeza, S. (Ed.). *And the world changed: A contemporary short stories by Pakistani women* (pp.169-181). Karachi: *Oxford University Press*