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## An Ecolinguistic Analysis of Metafunctions of Language in Pakistani COVID-19 Advertorials

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### Abstract

*This study examines the language used in advertorials of Covid 19 from an ecolinguistic perspective. Through the ecolinguistic study of advertorials on Covid 19, the elements of fear and xenophobia are dredged up. Regarding Covid 19, little research has been carried out on advertorials. This study applies Halliday's (1970) metafunctions of language proposed in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) on Covid advertorials from the perspective of ecolinguistics. Fifty Covid 19 related advertorials from ten different Pakistani websites were selected. Five advertorials from each website were chosen. Ecolinguistic analysis of Halliday's three metafunctions was adopted as the analytical framework. The findings of the study indicated that the Covid 19 advertorials are exploited to accentuate and propagate xenophobia and fear in the ecosystem through different lexical choices. The findings of this study provide a guideline of didactic inferences for future researchers in the field.*

**Key Words:** Advertorials, Covid 19, Ecolinguistic Analysis, Metafunctions, SFL

### Introduction

In this perilous time, the entire race of humans is in a state of war against a lethal, invisible and implacable enemy. Health systems are overwhelmed, and there is no cure yet. The toll of mortality and infection is rising exponentially. The pandemic has not only jeopardized lives and health but also has “society-dissolving effects”. Our production, distribution, supply lines are cut and locked down, academia is closed, and the response to the crisis is compromised. The task of reversing the viral spread is temporary, but the societal impacts that it will have will last for generations. It is a battle where at first, people have to isolate themselves in order to halt the spread of the virus and on the other side, they have to reassemble and reemerge as soon as possible to restart the stalled systems.

Covid 19 pandemic in 21<sup>st</sup> century is a disease caused by Corona Virus, identified in Wuhan city of China in Dec 2019. In 1918, almost a century ago, fifty million people were killed by an influenza pandemic, and even today, this pandemic reminds us that in the mundane, the greatest hazards stay (Horby, 2018). This viral outbreak has touched every corner of the world and is still grasping its paws everywhere. People are suffering from this havoc, and the death ratio is increasing day by day, creating xenophobia and fear ecologically as well as globally, and the perception regarding the survival of the ecosystem is affected. The transmission of this virus has affected people and has threatened the senses of people (Robson, 2020).

Experience of the world shaped by mass media is almost always a powerful one (Prima, 2014).

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Websites, newspapers and television are almost replete with the news of Covid 19. Zeitgeist records and modern technologies accentuate the influence of media. As individuals, this has changed the mindset of people. Whereas consolation for dehumanization, xenophobia and misrepresentation is not provided by social media (Robson, 2020). Xenophobia and fear have been accentuated in the lives of the people. Ex-president Donald Trump's resentful attack on China over the Covid 19 outbreak has raised the risk of fright and xenophobia as he held China responsible for producing the virus, which is considered the epicentre of the outbreak (Shurafa, Darwish & Zaghouni, 2020). This dehumanizing perspective creates an incorrigible and disconcerting place for the people to live in. Through linguistic features, fright and xenophobia can be diminished by an active role of advertorials. The peace of ecology is destroyed due to the pandemic news. Media outlets with good linguistic choices contribute to the international xenophobia narrative (Robson, 2020). However, Zizek (2020) doubts the validity of news on social media and states not to blindly trust the rumors as they can cause fear.

This study analyses Pakistani advertorials to find how the choice of words invigorate fear and xenophobia in the lived environment. Since environment and ecosystem is dealt with within ecolinguistics, so ecolinguistics analysis is carried out in this research study. Ecolinguistics is the study of the relationship entwined between ecology and language and highlights the interface between the two. Michael Halliday's "New Ways of Meaning: The Challenge to Applied Linguistics", delivered at the 9th World Conference of Applied Linguistics in 1990 (Dash, 2019), was a critical crack in ecolinguistics. To maintain the ecology in which the language befalls, he unbolted conduit for linguistics, and hence to govern the world view, the role of ecology must be utilized. The main purpose of ecolinguistics is to dig out the text and language dealing with ecological issues (Wu, 2018). Ecolinguistics provides a framework to analyze the discourse that helps in sustaining life. Language provides and develops solutions to environmental issues. It unfolds and widens the choice of vocabulary to change oasis into deserts or vice versa. Permadi (2013) supported that since the 1970s, ecolinguistics analysis has been

exposing the negative influence of language, hidden ideologies and awareness regarding harmonious discourse.

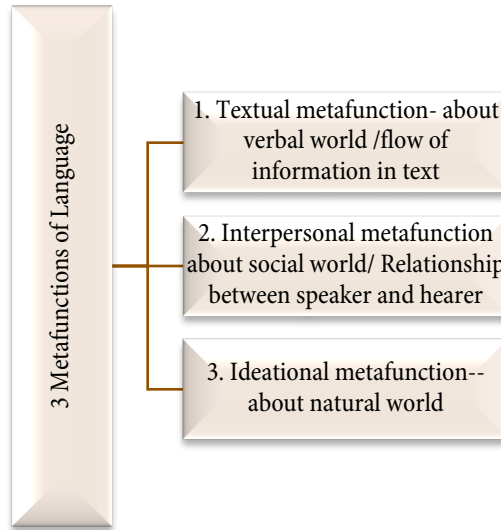
The approach of ecolinguistics to systemic functional linguistics focuses on the treatment of life-dependent ecosystem. According to Stibbe (2015), ecolinguistics makes an analysis of the language of the stories we live by, judge it in accordance with ecosophy and contributes to dredge up the new stories that we live by. This study focuses on the discourse related to advertorials of covid 19 accentuating fear and xenophobia among people. The exposure and presence of these aspects can be seen easily in advertorials relating to covid 19. For building a peaceful society, ecolinguistics can play a role to solve ecological problems by challenging as well as unveiling these stories.

From the perspective of ecolinguistics, the theory of systemic functional grammar/ systemic functional linguistics (SFL) developed by Halliday during the 1960s is used mostly (Almurashi, 2016). Analysis of discourses related to ecolinguistics has an impact on how humans interact with other humans and other related species in ecology. By investigating different aspects of grammar that help in forming and constructing a reality that is harmful to the health of species was proposed by Halliday (1990) for carrying out ecolinguistic analysis.

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and Critical discourse analysis (CDA) have an intersection and a link between language and ecology. Critical discourse analysis makes use of SFL to analyze discourses and texts due to the focus it lays on social and language usage. An interpretive and descriptive framework is developed by SFL, thus observing language as a meaning creating and making resource (Salama, 2014). In this regard, Malinowski (1923) aptly said that SFL has its roots entwined in ecology and language as proposed. Systemic serves as a network of systems for meaning-making, while functional is concerned with practical and contextualized use of language. Thus according to Ali (2019), SFL is concerned with language choice for writers/speakers. The proposed choices then make concrete forms of language (Jihan, 2019). The ultimate asset of language is its function, and this can semantically be grasped in interpersonal, ideational

and textual meanings. So to analyze the language of advertorials related to Covid 19, the data is analyzed by applying Ecolinguistics SFL theory. The three

metafunctions as proposed by [Halliday \(1970\)](#) are stated as:



**Figure 1:** Meta-functions of Language ([Halliday, 1970](#))

This study is carried out to determine Pakistani advertorials related to Covid 19 as a source of fear and xenophobia among people, to define [Hallidays \(1970\)](#) metafunctions of language and to explore meaning propagated by advertorials, as well as to analyze the SFL approach. There have been many research studies carried out on advertorials ([Golan, 2014](#); [Natalia, 2016](#); [Oliver & Molina, 2019](#); [Zhou, 2012](#)), but there is a niche related to the Ecolinguistic approach to SFL discourses about Covid 19. So, this study tries to fill this gap and analyses a corpus of 50 advertorials to know how language is used to cause the masses to be feared because of covid 19 spread.

**Literature Review**

Functional linguistics and social semiotics emerging in the mid of twentieth century highlighted language as a socio-semiotic tool for the representation of the social as well as the physical world, thus shaping the attitudes and perception of its users. Language is a social semiotic tool and has an important pivotal role in constructing human-nature relationship, which shapes the ideological concepts on what we do about and with ecology and how we deal with nature. Ecolinguistics, emerging in the 1990s, is the latest linguistic research paradigm dealing with the nexus

between ecology and language. It exposes discourses propagating damaging ecological ideologies as well as their representation to a humanly egalitarian society.

Different research works have been carried on Ecolinguistic analysis of advertorials in different lived social and cultural contexts. [Qoriah \(2018\)](#) carried out a research study on HIV AIDS slogans and applied a systemic functional approach. Much officialdom used slogans to advertise information regarding HIV cases. The findings of the mentioned study showed that 50 percent of material processes, 38 relational, 6 mental and 6 verbal processes of Halliday’s SFL approach were found. This study is in congruence with the study mentioned above, as this research also deals with the information presented through advertorials by investigating the language’s effect on ecology through the SFL approach.

Representation of SARS in two renowned newspapers- The South China Morning Post and The China Daily was investigated by [Duan \(2007\)](#). Transitivity systems of SFG were applied. Significant word pattern differences were found. It was found that South China Morning Post treated human health with a broader perspective while SARS as a national struggle standpoint was found through the China Daily discourse.

English National Daily Press dealing with the same event was investigated by [Trew \(2018\)](#). Illustrations regarding ideological conflict and the ideological process by using linguistic expressions were done. The findings showed that diversified responses to events were there as compared to suggested by headlines, i.e. divergent treatment of the carnival events is most sharp due to different political rotation and niche.

Salmonella-in-eggs affair as press hysteria was analyzed by [Fowler \(1991\)](#). Findings suggested that the great egg scare was neither an epidemic nor a medical phenomenon. The fear propagated through the discourses of newspapers. The role of media was multifaceted concerning the salmonella affair, which was proved.

Another researcher, [Makoni \(2012\)](#), used the SFL approach to analyze Zimbabwean pamphlets. The pamphlets had data on family planning and contraception for the manifestation of ideology, power and language in them. Ideological assumptions were found in the images and texts of the pamphlets. Findings demonstrated that women required protection, reproductive regulation and intervention as they were at risk.

[Stibbe's theory \(2015\)](#) was used by [Isti'annah \(2019\)](#) to explore the language used in websites related to tourism. Halliday's SFL theory (1970) on Ecolinguistics and [Martin and White's theory \(2005\)](#) was used to evaluating language. The Indonesian government's official website was used to select and collect sample data for research. Highlighted by choice of words, the beauty of Raja Ampat was highlighted to grab the tourists' attention. Through the use of language, the fauna was glorified to attract tourists.

Climate Change at Egypt by Ali Masris was written by [Ali \(2019\)](#). Climate issues in Egypt were analyzed through SFL theory. The negative impact of climate change on the agricultural sector was highlighted. The role of the genre by using SFL theory in the production of structures of texts was investigated by [Tian \(2020\)](#). For the identity construction role of this text, the structure was deficient. From Tsinghua University and Peking University, data on public communication was collected. The study found that texts play an

important role in the construction of identity at the university level.

The niche left out will be filled by the findings of this research. Covid 19 since is an issue of great survival, and how by use of media-advertorials, fear and xenophobia is created to protect environment and people from this disease is highlighted. Words in Covid 19 advertorials as a cause of disturbance in ecology are researched, and answers to the developed goals and questions are sought after analyzing the data.

### Research Objectives

1. To know as to how various metafunctions are employed by newspapers for accentuating xenophobia and fear among people
2. To examine how the choice of lexis in the advertorials causes a disturbance in ecology in the context of Pakistan?

### Research Questions

1. How are various metafunctions employed by newspapers for accentuating xenophobia and fear among people?
2. How does the choice of lexis in the advertorials cause a disturbance in ecology in the context of Pakistan?

### Methodology

The study at hand is qualitative research and through the SFL model (1960), including three metafunctions (1970), namely interpersonal, ideational and textual functions were applied to the language of advertorials related to Covid 19. The data collection method was on the basis of a closely observed phenomenon. The shreds of evidence with pictorial and linguistics evidence were observed and downloaded, which is encompassed under the random sampling technique. Ten different Pakistani websites were consulted for the collection of data, and the period from which the data was collected was from March 2020 to March 2021. The websites were high rated ones and were a source of authentic information during the times of this pandemic. Five advertorials from each website were selected. The paragraphs, as well as the lines imbuing xenophobia and fear, were chosen to apply the three mentioned metafunctions. The sentences

were extracted, and experts of the field were also assisted for confirmation and validity.

### Results and Discussion

The results of the findings show that all the advertorials collected had a theme of the outbreak of Covid 19 and the possible causes of its spread and its effect on ecology. The dominance of fear and fright is imbued in the texts, thus leading to xenophobic assumptions. The functions of language, i.e., Interpersonal, ideational and textual, require semantics ground for the analysis, which is discussed one by one below as:

#### Ideational meta-function

The Ecolinguistics approach to SFL relies heavily on the function of language rather than on the structure of language (Salama, 2014). Ideational metafunction uses language to understand, organize and express perceptions regarding the world through relational, material and mental processes. The cognitive realities of content are related to language and give precise message and meaning to the reader and the writer (Duan, 2007).

#### Relational Processes

The participant may be a person or thing in a relational process. This identifies characteristic features, participants, physical appearance and interest (Duan, 2007). Through lexical choices, the description of Covid 19, e.g., kill, do not leave, sick,

deadly, and contract hypes fright among people. The descriptions show the fright and dominance of the deadly virus over the lives of humans. Neither euphemistic nor idiomatic expressions are employed in the Covid 19 advertorials, thus exemplifying the texts as a direct representation of xenophobia and fright among the masses around the globe. For example

*“Covid 19 crisis”*

*“It kills people of all ages...”*

*“Diseases can make anyone sick...”*

*“Do not leave the house for 7 days at all.”*

*“It’s likely most people will contract coronavirus.”*

*“The outbreak of deadly virus...”*

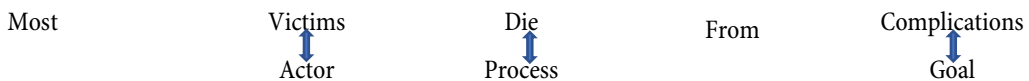
*“Coronavirus outbreak”*

With the horrible descriptions (deadly, outbreak, kills, sick), the fact is evident that in the environment, i.e., ecological system, the deadly virus spread is predominant. Language accurately serves the purpose of creating fright and xenophobia among people. The choice of words creates a sensation of fear, as can be seen from the quoted examples. All the descriptions exemplified introduce the fear of Covid 19 through the use of media, i.e., advertorials.

#### Material Processes

It deals with the process, i.e. verb, actor, i.e. subject and goal, i.e. object and the beneficiary recipient, occasionally (Duan, 2007). It shows actions through the verb. For example

**Table 1.**



In another example, the same can be seen as

**Table 2.**



Help prevent the spread of diseases  
Process circumstance

In the sentence i.e., stay home when sick, you, although is absent but is understood to be you and serves as an actor.

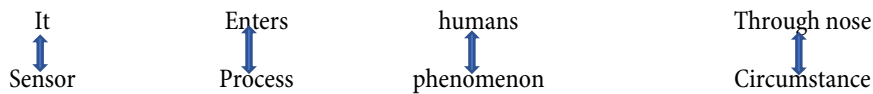
### Mental Process

It deals with thinking, feelings and perceiving situations (Lashari & Bughio, 2014). Advertorials of Covid 19 exploit language directly to induce fright by using words such as leave-14 days, stay-sick. Covid 19's dreadful results are also highlighted through the usage of certain verbs like spread, attack, transmitted, find, enter, bursts, die, infected, avoid kill, drown, cover, stay, contract, leave and grapple.

The danger being infused through the virus is pinpointed through the use of words (infected,

attack, drown), causes panic among people, thus destroy the ecological tranquillity. In order to refrain them from being victims of this deadly virus, words like stay, cover, precautions are used. In the advertorials, not only the element of fear is propagated but also precautionary and safety measures to be adopted are proposed. But in order to refrain people from gatherings, causes, reasons and effects are presented so that they can be minimally exposed to the deadly threat. For example

Table 3.



*The use of such lexicons has led people to be scared about the lived ecosystem of the people.*

### The Interpersonal Meta-function

Interpersonal metafunction establishes a relationship between reader and text, which is about the audience and the addresser, modality and the mood by making use of imperatives, questions to make the text closer to reality so that the audience can be attracted (Lashari & Bughio, 2014). The following examples illustrate the examples of words denoting xenophobia and fear among the people:

*“Coronavirus attacks respiratory system”.*

*“Got symptoms-even mild ones?”*

*“Maintain distance to keep your loved ones safe.”*

*“There are simple things you can do to help keep yourself and others healthy”.*

*“With every passing hour, the world continues to grapple with the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic”.*

Modality lies in between extreme negative and positive. The speakers' judgment is objectively delivered towards the topic (Lashari & Bughio, 2014). It is evident from the examples above that the elements of fright and xenophobia are abounding in the text, e.g. attacks, symptoms, help, uncertainty, plan. Extreme pessimistic and negative views can be seen through the choice of words that are not objectively based.

The readers are being addressed in the second person pronoun You, as can be seen in the advertorials of Covid 19. Through the contribution between the participants', i.e., reader and the writer, an atmosphere of fear and xenophobia is inculcated. The text describes emotional signals, which causes the readers to have fear in their minds about coronavirus. The readers are made to evaluate the events or actions in the text to play the role of a participant in the text as You in the imperative is used. The imperative mood is used to give orders to be obeyed by the readers, as can be seen in the examples cited above. With interrogatives and imperatives, the elements of fear are infused in the minds of the readers, and no solace is found by readers as the text is highly xenophobic and frightening.

### Textual meta-function

All the statements stated in the advertorials of Covid 19 are related to participants as well as to readers. As a narrator, the feelings of the audience are depicted by the writers. Through sentences, chains of events are linked. Clues and events are left so that the reader can guess and describe the fear of Covid 19. About the novel virus, the change in the state of the minds of readers can be seen.

*“Novel coronavirus first spread to human from an animal-thought to be a snake -at the South China seafood wholesale market.”*

Coherence can be seen in the sentences. The virus is related to snake in the market of China.

*“Some people who have travelled to places where many people have gotten sick with COVID 19 may be monitored by health officials to protect their health and the health of other people in the community.”*

People get sick, and their movement outside houses is further linked with the officials dealing with health. A chain of fright running through the sentences can be seen where coherence is visible in all the sentences.

### **Conclusion**

The Covid 19 advertorials were analyzed by the three metafunctions of language. The interpersonal metafunction reveals that the readers are addressed directly. The participant “you” suggests that the advertorials hold xenophobic emotions among the people. The textual metafunction has cohesive links,

and it augments the comprehensibility of the readers so that they can understand the texts. In the third, ideational metafunction, profound information is related to circumstantial and mental processes, thus generating fear among the masses. The language of the advertorials accentuates xenophobia and fear, and it is evident after analyzing the discourse by [Halliday's \(1970\)](#) metafunctions of language. As a result, people are indecisive and in the panic about whom to meet, touch, hug, protect and avoid in the ecosystem. To invigorate and sustain a global narrative of xenophobia and fright, an ecolinguistic analysis through metafunctions of texts was used to analyze the advertorials. The findings show that SFL can be used in ecolinguistics to analyze the language of any kind of discourse related to the environment. The use of desensitizing and demagogic language is utilized to imbue fear in the minds of the people. The texts, through their language, are an example of ripping the humans apart and making them strangers to those with whom they are connected in ecology. The language was alarming as a negative language of xenophobia and fear.

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