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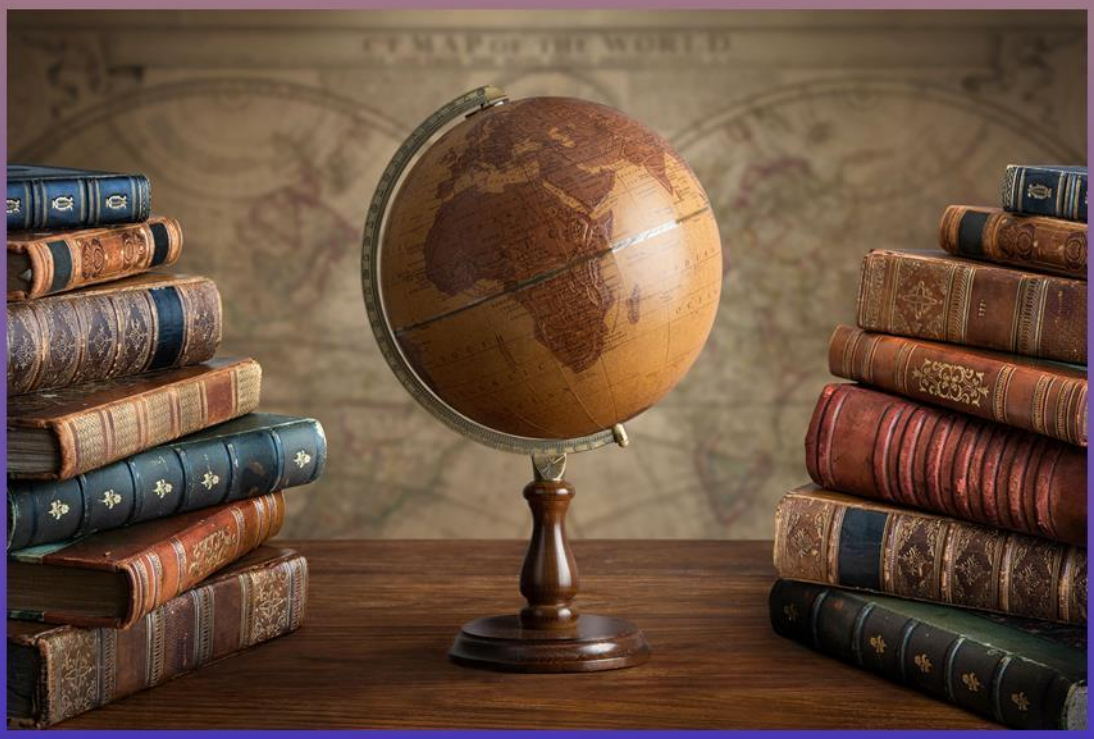

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TRACING THE PATH OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN KASHMIR: A LINGUISTIC JOURNEY

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Abstract: This study embarks on an in-depth exploration of the origins and growth of the English language in Kashmir, tracing its establishment and evolution within the region's unique socio-cultural landscape. From its inception in London to its significant presence in the valleys of Kashmir, the journey of English in this region is marked by a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and socio-political forces. The research offers a comprehensive analysis of these forces, examining how they have intricately shaped the trajectory of English in Kashmir. Through a detailed investigation into language acquisition processes, the formulation of educational policies and the multifaceted societal influences that have driven the spread of English, this study seeks to unravel the dynamic relationship between English and the indigenous languages of Kashmir. By illuminating the linguistic landscape of Kashmir, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of language dynamics within diverse cultural contexts. It sheds light on the intricate tapestry of linguistic evolution and interaction in this picturesque region, offering insights into the historical roots of English in Kashmir, its contemporary significance, and the implications of its presence on local language communities. Through a multidimensional analysis, this study provides valuable perspectives on the complex nature of language evolution and interaction in Kashmir. It seeks to enhance our broader comprehension of linguistic diversity and cultural exchange, offering a nuanced understanding of the factors that have shaped the linguistic and cultural fabric of the region.
Keywords: Proliferation; Missionary; Linguistic landscape; British colonialism; Cultural diversity

1 INTRODUCTION

The journey of the English language in Kashmir is a complex and multifaceted narrative, set against the region's intricate history, rich cultural heritage, and diverse linguistic landscape. As one of the most linguistically rich areas in South Asia, Kashmir has long been a melting pot of languages, each reflecting different facets of its socio-political and cultural history. The introduction and subsequent proliferation of the English language in Kashmir represent not just a linguistic shift but also a profound transformation in cultural and educational paradigms that have had lasting implications on the region's identity. English first entered Kashmir during the British colonial period, a time when the subcontinent was experiencing profound changes due to colonial rule. However, unlike in other regions of India, where English was quickly institutionalized as a language of governance, education, and the elite, its introduction in Kashmir was more nuanced and layered with resistance. The Valley's remote geography and strong cultural ties to Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit traditions initially made the penetration of English slower and more contested.

The earliest encounters with English in Kashmir were largely through missionary activities and the establishment of missionary schools. These institutions introduced English not just as a subject but as a medium of instruction, aiming to create a class of educated individuals who could engage with colonial administration. However, the adoption of English was met with considerable ambivalence. While the local elite recognized the practical advantages of learning English—such as access to administrative roles and broader economic opportunities—there was also a significant concern about the potential erosion of indigenous languages and cultural identity. Despite these concerns, English gradually took root, especially in urban centers like Srinagar. Over time, it became associated with modernity, progress, and social mobility. The ability to speak English was increasingly seen as a marker of education and sophistication, creating a new social stratification based on linguistic proficiency. This shift was further accelerated in the post-colonial period, as Kashmir's political significance on the global stage grew. English emerged as a vital tool for diplomacy, communication, and access to global knowledge, further embedding it in the region's socio-cultural fabric.

The role of educational policy in the spread of English in Kashmir cannot be overstated. Post-independence, the Indian government's policies emphasized English as a key component of the national education system. In Kashmir, this was reflected in the growing number of English-medium schools and the inclusion of English as a compulsory subject in the curriculum. The establishment of these institutions was often viewed as a necessary step towards integration with the broader Indian state and participation in global economic and intellectual discourses. However, this proliferation of English has had complex consequences. On one hand, it has provided the younger generation with access to global opportunities and a broader intellectual horizon. On the other hand, it has contributed to the marginalization of indigenous languages such as Kashmiri, Urdu, and Dogri. The dominance of English in educational and professional spheres has often led to a decline in

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the use of local languages, particularly in formal and academic contexts. This linguistic shift has sparked concerns about cultural dislocation and the potential loss of Kashmir's rich linguistic heritage.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the need to strike a balance between the benefits of English and the preservation of local languages. Cultural and educational initiatives have been launched to revitalize indigenous languages, ensuring their transmission to future generations. These efforts are part of a broader movement to assert regional identity and cultural autonomy in the face of globalization and linguistic homogenization. The story of English in Kashmir is emblematic of the broader tensions between globalization and cultural preservation, between modernity and tradition. It highlights the complex interplay of historical, cultural, and socio-political factors that influence language evolution in a region that has long been at the crossroads of different civilizations. By tracing this journey, we gain not only insights into the dynamics of language change but also a deeper understanding of the ways in which language, culture, and identity are intertwined in the ever-evolving narrative of Kashmir.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of the English language's journey in Kashmir is a multifaceted endeavor, encompassing various historical, cultural, and socio-political dimensions. This literature review aims to synthesize existing research on the origins, growth, and impact of English in Kashmir, examining key themes such as language acquisition, educational policy, cultural identity, and linguistic diversity. Through this review, we seek to situate the study within the broader context of linguistic studies and provide a foundation for understanding the unique trajectory of English in the region.O. David Allen's work, "The State and Prospects of the English Language in India," published in the Journal of the American Oriental Society, provides a comprehensive analysis of the historical development, current status, and future trajectory of the English language in India. Written in the mid-19th century, this work offers valuable insights into the early stages of English language propagation in the Indian subcontinent, particularly in the context of British colonial rule.

Eric Biscoe's *Fifty Years Against the Stream* offers a detailed account of the challenges and successes of a mission school in Kashmir, shedding light on the broader socio-cultural and educational landscape of the region during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This work is not just a historical narrative of the school's development but also a reflection on the intersection of education, colonial influence, and local culture in Kashmir. Biscoe's narrative is set against the backdrop of British colonial rule in India, a period marked by significant socio-political changes and the spread of Western education. The book begins by detailing the establishment of the mission school in Kashmir, emphasizing the initial resistance from the local population and the challenges faced by missionaries in gaining acceptance.

M. Mahmood's *Language Politics and Higher Education in India* provides an in-depth analysis of the complex interplay between language policy and higher education in India, exploring how linguistic diversity and language politics have shaped the educational landscape of the country. The work examines historical and contemporary issues related to language use in Indian universities, the role of English and regional languages, and the impact of language policies on access to higher education and social mobility. Mahmood begins by tracing the historical development of language policy in India, particularly in the context of colonialism and the post-independence period. He discusses the British colonial legacy, highlighting how the introduction of English as the medium of instruction in higher education created a divide between the English-speaking elite and the majority of the population who spoke regional languages. The work delves into the language debates that occurred during India's struggle for independence and the subsequent framing of the Indian Constitution. Mahmood explores the tension between the need to promote Hindi as a national language and the desire to preserve linguistic diversity. He analyzes the compromises made in the Constitution, which led to the adoption of a multilingual framework that recognized both Hindi and English as official languages, while allowing states to promote their regional languages.

V. Ramanathan's 1999 article, *"English Is Here to Stay": A Critical Look at Institutional and Educational Practices in India,* published in *TESOL Quarterly,* offers a critical examination of the entrenched role of English in India's educational system. Ramanathan explores the implications of this dominance for social equity, cultural identity, and educational practices. The article is significant in its analysis of how English functions not just as a language, but as a powerful social tool that influences various aspects of life in India.

David Crystal's *Language and the Internet* is a foundational text that explores the transformative effects of the Internet on language use and communication. Crystal, a renowned linguist, examines how digital communication has influenced the evolution of language, focusing on the emergence of new linguistic forms, the sociolinguistic implications of online communication, and the broader impact of the Internet on language learning and literacy. Crystal begins by discussing how the Internet has catalyzed the development of new linguistic forms. He highlights the rise of abbreviations, acronyms, emoticons, and emojis, which have emerged in response to the constraints and opportunities of text-based online communication. These linguistic innovations reflect the need for brevity and clarity in environments such as email, instant messaging, and social media, where users often prioritize speed and efficiency.

The literature on the English language in Kashmir provides a rich and diverse body of research that spans historical, cultural, educational, and socio-political perspectives. While English has undoubtedly played a significant role in shaping the linguistic and cultural landscape of Kashmir, its impact is multifaceted and complex. The existing scholarship highlights

both the opportunities and challenges posed by the spread of English, underscoring the need for further research that addresses the tensions between linguistic diversity and the global dominance of English. This literature review serves as a foundation for the current study, which aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on language evolution and interaction in culturally diverse regions like Kashmir.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Charting the Historical Pathways

The historical roots of English in Kashmir trace back to the colonial era when the British East India Company established control over the Indian subcontinent. During this period of British rule, English emerged as the language of administration, commerce, and education, gradually influencing various regions across India, including Kashmir. According to David O. Allen "It becomes therefore an interesting question, how far are these conquests likely to extend the knowledge and use of the English language in those countries? [1]. English language exerts an influence in the world far beyond any other language. Because England had many colonies and territories in Southern Asia, it's likely that the English language will become very important globally in the future. "To some this prospect has appeared so pleasing and gratifying that they are cherishing the opinion that the English language will be everywhere generally understood, and at a late public anniversary a popular orator chose for his subject- "The English the future universal language" [1]. During the British colonial period, English was introduced as the language of administration, education, and governance. The colonist "with native speakers of the language sets English language standards for countries in the outer circle (e.g., India and parts of Africa), where English is used nonnatively but extensively and has been given official-language status" [2]. Despite the end of colonial rule, English continued to retain its significance, particularly in formal education and government institutions. In Kashmir, the introduction of English can be linked to the British colonial presence and the establishment of educational institutions by the British authorities. English-medium schools were established in Kashmir during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, primarily to educate the children of British officials and the local elite. These schools played a crucial role in spreading the English language among the educated class in Kashmir.

The British influence on the education system in Kashmir resulted in the incorporation of English as a subject in the curriculum of schools and colleges. As a result, proficiency in English became increasingly valued as a marker of education and social status in Kashmiri society. The partition of India in 1947 and the subsequent political developments in the region also contributed to the spread of English in Kashmir. Following independence, English continued to be used as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges, and it remained an important language for communication in various domains, including government, business, and media. Overall, the historical roots of English in Kashmir can be traced back to the colonial legacy of British rule, educational initiatives, and evolving socio-political dynamics in the region. "It is due to the dominant position that the English language came to acquire during the post 150 years as the sole official language, as the medium of instruction at all the levels of education and as the link language of the educated elites in different parts of the country"[3]. Today, English remains an integral part of the linguistic landscape of Kashmir, playing a significant role in both formal and informal communication. Writing in a newspaper column Sahil Sharifdin audaciously comments that the "English language was born in England about fifteen centuries ago and it reached Kashmir only a century ago. Although it reached the Valley late, yet the inhabitants of the valley are taking to it at terrific speed" [4].

3.2 English-medium schools

The foundation of the school by Rev. J. Hinton Knowles in 1880 represents a significant milestone in the Kashmir history. This event represents more than just the founding of an educational institution; it symbolizes a significant shift in the educational landscape and social fabric of the region. Reverend J. Hinton Knowles's decision to establish the school reflected a broader movement towards the spread of English language in Kashmir. The school had far-reaching implications for the socio-economic development of Kashmir. To make this school functional Rev. J. S. Doxey had gathered five boys and provided them with instruction, laying the initial groundwork for the school's establishment. This early effort paved the way for the formal establishment of the school under Rev. J. Hinton Knowles, setting the stage for its growth and development as an educational institution. Initially, the school faced vehement opposition, with various individuals and groups making concerted efforts to undermine and dismantle it. This opposition manifested in multiple forms, ranging from vocal criticism and disparagement to active attempts at sabotage. Opponents of the school sought to discredit its mission and impede its progress through a variety of means. Some critics launched smear campaigns, spreading rumors and false accusations aimed at tarnishing the reputation of the school and its founders. Others resorted to intimidation tactics, threatening supporters and attempting to instill fear among those associated with the institution. Additionally, there were instances of bureaucratic obstacles and legal challenges designed to obstruct the school's operations and impede its ability to function effectively.

At first opposition was very strong against the school, and all sorts of efforts were made to smash it. One of the pupils, having been seriously ill with typhoid, was of course weak from after-effects. Mr. Knowles, therefore, kindly lent this boy

his own horse to ride to and from school. As soon as this fact became known tales were spread that the boy was a convert, and pressure was brought to bear upon his parents to take him away from the Mission school, while the State school offered him a post as a teacher. This boy, after being a short time in the State school, left it and returned to his old school [5].

At another point in time, the school faced a harrowing ordeal when three former students, who had successfully acquired English proficiency through their education at the institution, were unjustly imprisoned simply for their endeavor to "learn the language" [5]. This distressing incident underscored the extent of opposition and hostility towards English education prevalent in the community at that time. The imprisonment of these former students exemplified the draconian measures taken by opponents of English education to suppress its spread and intimidate those who sought to pursue it. "On another occasion a master with a party of boys spent a night in the lock-up" [5]. It reflected a broader resistance to the adoption of English as a medium of instruction and a rejection of the opportunities and aspirations associated with English proficiency.

The perception of English as a tool of cultural imperialism stems from historical contexts. The English language was imposed alongside colonial endeavours, often at the expense of indigenous languages and cultures. "English has been viewed as a threatening force, to many of the languages of the world, and to the cultural identity of different peoples of the world..." [6]. English (along with other European languages) was spread across the globe through conquest, trade, and missionary activities. As a result of this, the preachers in Kashmir viewed English language as a tool of cultural imperialism, associated with Western dominance. Historical circumstances, such as colonization, can significantly influence people's attitudes and preferences toward languages. In Kashmir, there was widespread aversion to the English language due to its association with British colonialism in India and the apprehension of potential colonization in Kashmir itself. The imposition of English during the colonial period often led to the marginalization or suppression of indigenous languages, contributing to negative perceptions among the Kashmiri people. They advocated for the preservation of local languages, such as Kashmiri or Urdu, to maintain cultural identity and resist outside influence. In some cases, preachers rejected English due to religious beliefs or interpretations. They perceived the language as promoting secular or materialistic values that conflict with their religious teachings. As a result, they may discourage its use among their followers.

Despite facing such formidable opposition, the school persevered, buoyed by the dedication and determination to promote English language. Through resilience and steadfastness, the school weathered the storm of hostility and gradually gained recognition and acceptance within the community. Over time, the unwavering commitment of its founders and the positive impact of its educational initiatives helped to dispel misconceptions and win over skeptics. Ultimately, the initial opposition served as a test of the school's resilience and strengthened its resolve to fulfill its mission of catering the English language. By overcoming these challenges, the school emerged stronger and more resilient, laying the foundation for its long-term success and enduring legacy in the community. The imprisonment of the members served as a stark reminder of the enduring value and significance of English language. Their unwavering commitment to learning, even in the face of persecution, epitomized the transformative power of education and the resilience of the human spirit. The incident galvanized the school's supporters and highlighted the urgent need to advocate for the freedom to pursue education in English without fear of reprisal or persecution. It spurred renewed efforts to challenge oppressive policies and advance the cause of English education as a means of empowerment and social progress.

Educational institutes play a significant role in promoting the English language in Kashmir, contributing to its acquisition, usage, and integration into various aspects of society. English is often included as a compulsory subject in the curriculum of schools and colleges in Kashmir. Educational institutes design language courses that emphasize reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in English, ensuring comprehensive language acquisition. They employ qualified English language teachers who are trained to deliver effective instruction. In his work Hindi is our ground, English is our sky: Education, language, and social class in contemporary India, Chaise LaDousa delves into the intricate relationship between educational institutions and the formation of language ideologies and socio-linguistic identities. LaDousa aims to delineate the distinct domains occupied by English within the educational landscape, shedding light on its respective role and influences. He elucidates how schools serve as crucibles for the cultivation and dissemination of language ideologies, shaping individuals' perceptions and attitudes towards English language. Through curricular content, instructional methods, and language policies, educational institutions actively contribute to the construction of language. Kashmir's adoption of the English language reflects a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by various socio-cultural, economic, and educational factors.

3.3 Current Scenario of English Language

At present the increasing prominence of English in Kashmir can be attributed to several key factors. In recent times, Kashmir has been experiencing a notable trend of leaning towards the English language. This increasing inclination towards the English language is characterized by a growing interest among the populace, particularly the younger generation, in acquiring proficiency in English. Motivated by a blend of personal aspirations and professional opportunities, a significant portion of the younger generation is displaying a keen inclination towards acquiring foreign language proficiency. This trend encompasses various pathways: some students embark on this linguistic journey during their schooling years, while others pursue it in public or private institutions after completing their formal education. English-medium schools are seen as a pathway to acquiring the language skills necessary to compete on a global scale. English-medium education has gained attraction in Kashmir, driven by aspirations for quality education and socio-economic mobility.

Many parents and students perceive English-medium schools as offering better academic opportunities and preparing students for competitive examinations and global careers. Many competitive exams, both within Kashmir and at the national level in India, are conducted in English. Students attending English-medium schools may have an advantage in these exams, as they are already familiar with the language and terminology used in the exams. Parents often aspire for their children to excel academically and professionally. Sending their children to English-medium schools may be seen as a way to fulfill these aspirations and provide them with opportunities for a brighter future. English-medium education is often associated with higher academic standards and better-quality instruction. Many parents perceive English-medium schools as offering a more rigorous curriculum and better educational outcomes for their children compared to schools that use local languages as the medium of instruction. They have better resources, curriculum standards, and teaching methods, which appeal to parents and students seeking a more rigorous educational experience.

English-medium education has garnered attention in Kashmir as a means to foster proficiency in the English language. This approach to education, conducted primarily in English, has become increasingly popular among students and parents alike in the region. The emphasis on English-medium education is driven by aspirations for social mobility and success in a competitive global environment. Proficiency in English is often viewed as a marker of social status and can enhance opportunities for higher education and employment both within Kashmir and abroad. English-medium education has gained traction in Kashmir as a means to develop proficiency in the English language and equip students with the skills needed to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and globalized world. While efforts to preserve and promote local languages remain important, English-medium education offers students a pathway to broader educational and socio-economic opportunities.

Furthermore, the emergence of language exchange programs, cultural exchanges, and study abroad opportunities has fueled the desire among Kashmiri youth to master foreign languages. These initiatives provide immersive experiences and practical exposure to the target language, allowing learners to develop fluency and proficiency in a real-world context. Overall, the increasing interest in foreign language acquisition among the youth of Kashmir reflects their aspirations for personal growth, professional advancement, and global engagement. This trend not only enriches the linguistic diversity of the region but also empowers individuals to navigate an interconnected world with confidence and proficiency in multiple languages.

3.4 The Impact of Mass Media

The media, especially digital and social media platforms, have become instrumental in promoting the usage and literacy of the English language in Kashmir. English-language newspapers, television channels, and online content serve as key mediums for the normalization and dissemination of English language norms and expressions. In recent years, the proliferation of digital and social media platforms has significantly expanded access to English-language content in Kashmir. Websites, blogs, and social media channels provide a wide array of English-language news, articles, videos, and interactive content, catering to diverse interests and demographics. In conversation with my childhood friend Mohamed Yousuf who has managed to develop impressive English language skills through his contact with media, despite not having a formal education.

Well, growing up, I didn't have access to formal education due to various circumstances. However, I was always drawn to television shows, movies, and music in English. I guess you could say I learned by immersion. I would watch cartoons, listen to songs, and eventually, as I got older, I started watching movies and TV series with subtitles. I think exposure to mass media played a significant role in my language development. I was constantly exposed to different accents, vocabulary, and expressions through various forms of media. It helped me pick up on colloquialisms and slang, which are essential for everyday communication.

This accessibility allows individuals in Kashmir to engage with English-language content on a daily basis, contributing to their exposure to the language and its usage patterns. Neil Postman's book "Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business" [7] analyses the impact of television and entertainment media on language and communication. He comments that "the telegraph introduced a kind of public conversation whose form had startling characteristics: Its language was the language of headlines--sensational, fragmented, impersonal. News took the form of slogans, to be noted with excitement …". David Crystal, a linguist specializing in English language and communication, has written about the role of mass media in language development. His book Language and the Internet explores how digital media, including social networking sites and online communities, are shaping communication in English and other languages. He aims "to explore the ways in which the nature of the electronic medium as such, along with the internet's global scale and density of use, is having an effect on language in general, and on individual languages in particular. It seems likely that these effects will be pervasive and momentous as in the case of previous communication technologies …" [8]. Crystal's work delves into the ways in which digital media, such as social networking sites, online forums, and instant messaging platforms, have revolutionized communication practices and influenced linguistic norms. In Language and the Internet, Crystal examines the impact of digital communication technologies on the English language, highlighting phenomena like abbreviations, emoticons, and new vocabulary arising from online interactions. He explores how these digital mediums facilitate language evolution, allowing for the rapid dissemination of linguistic innovations and the formation of new linguistic communities. Crystal also examines the impact of digital communication technologies on the

English language, highlighting phenomena like abbreviations, emoticons, and new vocabulary arising from online interactions. He explores how these digital mediums facilitate language evolution, allowing for the rapid dissemination of linguistic innovations and the formation of new linguistic communities. This surge in interest can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, globalization has opened up new avenues for international communication and collaboration, making foreign language skills increasingly valuable in various fields such as business, tourism, and diplomacy.

According to D. Crystal, "language being considered global does not merely depend on the number of people who speak it; rather it depends mostly on who the speakers are … [9]. Additionally, the rise of technology and digital connectivity has facilitated easier access to language learning resources and online courses, empowering individuals to pursue language acquisition at their own pace and convenience. Globalization and technological advancements have facilitated greater interconnectedness and communication across borders. English, as a global lingua franca, has emerged as the primary language of international communication, commerce, and diplomacy. Consequently, there is a growing recognition of the importance of English proficiency in accessing global opportunities and participating in the global economy. Moreover, there is a growing awareness among the youth about the importance of multilingualism in a rapidly changing global landscape. Many recognize that proficiency in foreign languages not only enhances their employability but also broadens their cultural horizons and fosters intercultural understanding.

English-language newspapers and magazines also play a vital role in shaping language usage and literacy in Kashmir. These publications cover a wide range of topics, including local news, politics, culture, and entertainment, in English, thereby catering to a broad readership with varying language proficiency levels. By providing news and information in English, these media outlets contribute to the normalization of the language and facilitate its integration into everyday communication. Similarly, English-language television channels and radio programs offer a platform for broadcasting news, entertainment, and educational content in English. Through television shows, documentaries, and talk shows, viewers in Kashmir are exposed to diverse linguistic expressions and accents, further enriching their understanding and usage of the language.

Furthermore, the rise of social media platforms has revolutionized communication patterns in Kashmir, providing a space for individuals to interact, share ideas, and consume content in English. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube host a plethora of English-language content, including posts, videos, and live streams, allowing users to engage with global trends and discussions in real-time. Media exposes people to English language in various forms such as news broadcasts, movies, TV shows, music, and online content. This exposure helps individuals become familiar with English vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Media introduces learners to a wide range of vocabulary. Through exposure to diverse topics and genres, individuals can learn new words and phrases, understand their meanings, and see how they are used in context. Media can serve as a tool for language acquisition. By listening to English speakers and observing how language is used in different contexts, learners can improve their English skills, including listening comprehension and speaking fluency. The media landscape in Kashmir reflects a growing trend towards the promotion and dissemination of English language usage and literacy. As digital and social media platforms continue to evolve and expand, they are likely to play an increasingly significant role in shaping linguistic norms and expressions in the region.

4 CONCLUSION

The linguistic journey of the English language in Kashmir reflects a complex interplay of historical, sociocultural, and geopolitical factors. Through tracing its path, it is aimed to gain insights into the multifaceted nature of language dynamics in the region. English in Kashmir has evolved from its colonial origins to become an integral part of education, administration, commerce, and communication. Its adoption and adaptation reflect the region's diverse linguistic landscape and its engagement with global trends and influences. However, the journey of English in Kashmir is not without challenges. Questions of linguistic identity, language policy, and cultural preservation continue to shape its usage and reception. Looking ahead, it is essential to recognize the evolving nature of language and the importance of linguistic diversity in Kashmir. While English serves as a bridge to the wider world, efforts to preserve and promote local languages and dialects are equally crucial for maintaining cultural heritage and fostering social cohesion. Ultimately, the linguistic journey of the English language in Kashmir underscores the intricate relationship between language, identity, and society. By acknowledging and understanding this journey, we can better appreciate the richness and complexity of Kashmir's linguistic landscape in the present day and for generations to come.

5 FURTHER STUDY

To expand on the study of English in Kashmir, consider these areas: Historical Development Focus: Analyze the evolution of English from colonial times to present. Method: Review historical documents and educational policies. Sociolinguistic Impact Focus: Investigate how English affects social status, cultural identity, and communication. Method: Conduct surveys and media analyses. Educational Policies Focus: Evaluate the impact of English-medium education on student outcomes and access. Method: Analyze curricula and conduct case studies of educational institutions. Digital Influence Focus: Explore the role of digital platforms in English usage and learning. Method: Study online

communication patterns and digital language tools. Cultural Perspectives Focus: Examine English ' s representation in Kashmiri literature and media. Method: Perform literary and media content analysis. Policy Recommendations Focus: Develop strategies for balanced language policies and inclusive education. Method: Review existing policies and consult with educators and policymakers. These areas offer a focused approach to understanding the complex role of English in Kashmir.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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Abstract: This study examines the theme of violence in Mark Ravenhill's *The Cane*. It focuses on how historical acts of discipline and institutional violence shape personal relationships and public retribution. The analysis highlights Ravenhill's critique of societal systems and individual roles in sustaining cycles of violence. The play revolves around Edward, a retiring schoolteacher, whose history of corporal punishment faces scrutiny. The play reflects changing societal attitudes toward authority and discipline. Set in Edward's home, the narrative portrays family conflict and an angry mob, symbolizing the breakdown of traditional order in the face of public judgment. The research situates the play within debates about systemic violence and its effects on modern society. A qualitative method was used, focusing on close textual analysis of the characters, dialogue, and symbolism. Key interactions between Edward, Maureen, and Anna were studied, alongside the mob's presence. Secondary sources, including essays on Ravenhill and studies on violence in drama, contextualize the play within broader discussions of theatrical and social themes. Ravenhill critiques systems that perpetuate harm and society's tendency to replace one form of control with another. The study identifies the play as an exploration of violence that spans past and present. It highlights the cyclical nature of violence, as societal norms and personal actions reinforce systems of harm. Ravenhill challenges audiences to confront these cycles and the ethical ambiguity of individual accountability within systemic failings. In the play, Ravenhill portrays the collapse of order as a result of unresolved historical violence. The play critiques institutional authority, intergenerational trauma, and society's inability to reconcile past wrongs. By merging personal and public conflict, Ravenhill questions the roots of violence and the possibility of true justice in systems of enduring power.
Keywords: Power; Violence; Conflict; Family microcosm; Societal tensions; Profession and integrity

1 INTRODUCTION

Mark Ravenhill's *The Cane* is a gripping exploration of social disintegration and historical reckoning, set in a contemporary context where the private and public spheres of conflict intersect. Premiered in 2012, the play delves into the complexities of power, authority, and accountability, situating its narrative within the domestic space of a retiring teacher, Edward. The work captures the tension between the protagonist's family members and an external mob protesting against Edward's involvement in corporal punishment during his teaching career. Ravenhill's focus on the past's reverberations in the present speaks to broader themes of collective memory, historical violence, and the mechanisms through which societal order collapses. Historical violence—whether through systemic practices like corporal punishment or institutional injustices—has been a recurring motif in many of Ravenhill's works. In The Cane, this theme takes on both a personal and societal dimension, presenting a microcosm of how unresolved historical grievances disrupt contemporary social harmony. As the play unfolds, the audience witnesses the clash between generations, ideologies, and interpretations of justice, illustrating how the legacy of historical violence perpetuates cycles of conflict.

Ravenhill, known for his provocative works, uses the play to critique societal structures that allow power to be maintained and enforced. Outlining his aim as a playwright, he strives "To capture the truth of this new world we live in …" [1] Peter Billingham highlights what he sees as the distinctive feature of Mark Ravenhill's plays—their strong moral and political engagement. He sees him as a politically committed playwright who "often in active resistance to what he perceives as the listless vacuity of many postmodern narratives" [2]. According to Billingham, Ravenhill's work stands apart from many other contemporary playwrights because it actively resists the emptiness or superficiality that characterizes much of postmodern storytelling. Hartl describes Ravenhill's theatre as deeply engaging and thought-provoking. It is not about relativism or easy agreements. Instead, it creates a space for opposing ideas and forces to collide. His "theatre includes opposing ideas, forces, energies can be fully experienced, embodied and examined …" [3] His work encourages witnessing and grappling with these issues, rather than avoiding them.

Despite its powerful commentary, The Cane has received limited scholarly attention compared to Ravenhill's other works, such as Shopping and Fucking and Faust is Dead. This relative oversight leaves significant gaps in understanding the ways in which Ravenhill interrogates the intersections of historical violence and contemporary societal conflict in The Cane. Specifically, how does the play articulate the collapse of social order through the lens of historical violence? Furthermore, how do the personal conflicts within the family reflect broader public tensions surrounding accountability and justice? This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the dual dimensions of

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conflict in The Cane. It explores how historical violence functions as a catalyst for both familial and societal disintegration and interrogates the mechanisms through which Ravenhill dramatizes these fractures.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze how historical violence shapes both personal and public conflict in The Cane. This includes examining how Ravenhill employs the characters and setting to reflect the lingering effects of corporal punishment and its moral implications. It investigates the interplay between personal and societal narratives of justice and accountability in the play. Analyzing the dramaturgical strategies Ravenhill uses to depict the collapse of social order, such as the use of spatial dynamics, dialogue, and symbolism. By achieving these objectives, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on the relationship between historical trauma and contemporary conflict, offering new insights into Ravenhill's exploration of societal breakdowns. This paper argues that The Cane illustrates the collapse of social order by portraying how unresolved historical violence fuels cycles of personal and public conflict. Through the microcosm of Edward's household and the external protests, Ravenhill critiques the intergenerational transmission of trauma and the societal failure to reconcile with its violent past. The play's layered narrative and dramatic techniques reveal how the personal and public dimensions of conflict are inextricably linked, culminating in the disintegration of familial and societal cohesion.

This study holds significance on multiple levels. Academically, it addresses a gap in the scholarship on Ravenhill's lesser-explored works, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of his oeuvre. Thematically, it sheds light on the enduring impact of historical violence on contemporary society, providing insights into the ways collective memory and unresolved grievances shape present-day conflicts. Moreover, the study has broader implications for understanding the mechanisms of social breakdown and reconciliation. By analyzing The Cane, this research contributes to discussions on the importance of acknowledging and addressing historical injustices to prevent their perpetuation in future generations. It also offers a lens through which to examine contemporary debates on justice, accountability, and intergenerational trauma in other contexts, extending its relevance beyond the confines of literary criticism.

The scope of this study is confined to a textual analysis of The Cane, focusing on the play's portrayal of historical violence and its impact on personal and public conflict. While the analysis draws on broader sociological and psychological theories of trauma and conflict, the primary focus remains on the dramatic text and its elements. The study does not encompass a performance analysis of the play, nor does it engage extensively with audience reception or adaptations. Furthermore, while the research situates The Cane within Ravenhill's broader body of work, it does not provide a comparative analysis with his other plays. This limitation ensures a focused exploration of the play's unique engagement with the themes of historical violence and social disintegration.

The study employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in close reading and textual analysis. It examines the play's narrative structure, character development, and use of dramatic techniques to unpack the layers of conflict and historical reckoning. The analysis is informed by theoretical frameworks on trauma, memory, and social conflict, including the works of scholars such as Cathy Caruth and Pierre Nora. The study contextualizes The Cane within its historical and cultural milieu, drawing on secondary literature on the history of corporal punishment and its social implications. By combining textual analysis with contextual insights, the study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the play's engagement with historical violence.

The paper is organized into the following sections: first section provides background information, outlines the research problem, objectives, thesis statement, significance, scope, and methodology. Second section explores the history of corporal punishment and its representation in The Cane, situating the play within broader societal debates on justice and accountability. Third section analyzes the microcosm of Edward's family to examine how personal grievances and generational divides mirror broader societal tensions. Fourth section investigates the portrayal of the external mob and its role in dramatizing the collapse of social order. Fifth section examines Ravenhill's use of space, symbolism, and dialogue to depict the interplay between historical violence and contemporary conflict. Final section summarizes the findings and discusses their implications for understanding the relationship between historical trauma and societal breakdown. By adhering to this structure, the paper provides a systematic exploration of how the play interrogates the enduring impact of historical violence on personal and public realms, offering a comprehensive analysis of Ravenhill's provocative drama.

2 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Corporal punishment—the infliction of physical pain as a discipline tool—has a complex history. Once common in schools, religious institutions, and the military, it has become increasingly controversial. Today, corporal punishment is largely seen as outdated, though still legal in some countries. Historically, corporal punishment was seen as essential for discipline, especially in schools. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, teachers commonly used a cane to maintain order. In the UK, corporal punishment in state schools was legal until 1986. Private schools continued using it longer. In the U.S., "corporal punishment persisted in parts of the South until the late 20th century" [4]. Over time, societal attitudes shifted. Advances in psychology and a growing awareness of children's rights contributed to the decline of corporal punishment in schools. Internationally, organizations like UNICEF have called for a global ban, framing corporal punishment as a violation of children's rights [5]. While still legal in some places, corporal punishment is largely considered a relic of the past.

The decline of corporal punishment in educational settings began in the mid-20th century, spurred by a growing recognition of children's rights and the evolving psychological understanding of the harmful effects of it. In Britain, for

example, corporal punishment was officially abolished in schools in 1986 (for England and Wales), marking a significant shift in attitudes toward children's autonomy and well-being. Similar movements were witnessed in other Western nations. Despite this, corporal punishment continues to be practiced in some parts of the world, including in certain families, schools, and even prisons, particularly in more conservative societies. The play reflects Foucault's theory that systems of power and punishment change with societal values. In Discipline and Punish, Foucault explores how the shift from physical punishment to psychological forms of discipline reflects changing attitudes toward authority. "The body was, in this system of punishment, the main target, the main instrument of the punishment. The body, in its action, in its movements, in its gestures, was not simply the object of the penalty, but its most immediate and most spectacular effect." [6] Foucault's, focus on physical punishment in earlier systems of control, highlighting how punishment was once directly inflicted on the body as a form of visible spectacle. "Discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies. The major effect of the disciplinary system is that of creating, for the first time, a real distinction between individuals." [6] Foucault's exploration of how power and control have evolved from the overt physical punishment of the body to subtler forms of psychological control that target the mind and Behaviour.

Corporal punishment has a long and contentious history, evolving from its widespread use as a means of discipline and deterrence to its growing rejection in modern legal and educational systems. The societal shift away from physical punishment—be it in schools, prisons, or homes—reflects broader changes in attitudes towards justice, accountability, and human dignity. Mark Ravenhill engages deeply with these issues, using the device of corporal punishment not just as a plot element, but as a lens through which to explore complex themes of justice, guilt, and societal transformation. One of the key aspects of the play is its exploration of the complexities surrounding individual culpability and collective responsibility. In this sense, the play challenges conventional notions of justice by questioning who should be held accountable for acts of violence or harm in institutional settings. In The Cane, the act of corporal punishment is not presented as a straightforward moral violation but rather as part of a complicated web of power dynamics, societal expectations, and personal histories. Ravenhill's characters are reluctant to fully condemn the teacher, revealing the way in which societal attitudes toward punishment are often influenced by broader social and cultural contexts. For instance, the teacher at the heart of the scandal is portrayed as a product of a system that condones authoritarianism and harsh discipline, suggesting that his actions are symptomatic of wider societal values rather than isolated misconduct. In a pivotal moment, one of the characters, a parent of a student who was allegedly abused, comments: "We used to think he was strict, but fair. Now, we look back, and we realize that the system we upheld let this happen" [7] This statement underscores the play's critical examination of the institutional and societal factors that enable acts of corporal punishment, highlighting the difficulty of assigning individual blame when the larger system is complicit.

Additionally, Ravenhill uses the character of the teacher to challenge the audience's understanding of justice. The teacher, who once appeared as a respected figure within the institution, becomes a symbol of moral ambiguity as the play progresses. His insistence that he was acting in the students' best interests complicates the audience's ability to fully condemn him, as it suggests that his actions, however brutal, may have been driven by a misguided sense of duty. As Ravenhill explores the teacher's justifications for his behavior, the line between legitimate authority and abusive power becomes increasingly blurred. In one of his monologues, the teacher reflects, "Punishment is necessary for order. Without it, chaos reigns. But perhaps the line between discipline and cruelty is thinner than I thought" (24). This moment encapsulates the central tension of the play—the conflicting notions of discipline and cruelty, authority and abuse, and justice and harm.

3 EDWARD'S FAMILY MICROCOSM AND SOCIETAL TENSIONS

Mark Ravenhill's *The Cane* delves deeply into the intersections of the personal and the political, offering a layered exploration of family dynamics as a microcosm of societal tension. The play magnifies the domestic sphere of Edward's family, where intergenerational grievances and personal resentments mirror broader societal conflicts such as institutional accountability, power structures, and evolving cultural values. Through a close reading of Edward's interactions with his daughter Anna and wife Maureen, Ravenhill crafts a penetrating commentary on the tensions that pervade modern society. This analysis examines these dynamics through primary textual evidence and secondary interpretations.

One of the central themes in The Cane is the generational conflict between Edward, a retired schoolteacher, and Anna, his estranged daughter. "The Cane begins as a painteresque study of domestic banalities but soon morphs into a masterly and fascinating account of power, masculine control, and female resistance." [8] Anna's arrival at the family home is ostensibly to help, yet her presence quickly becomes a catalyst for confrontation. "Whether the past can be measured against today's moral standards is the question the play probes. It's a dilemma that persists, along with themes of patriarchal authority, violence and gendered power dynamics." [9] The generational divide between Edward's adherence to tradition and Anna's progressive, critical perspective drives much of the play's conflict. Edward's justification of corporal punishment reflects his belief in the value of authority and discipline, stating, "It wasn't violence. It was control, it was guidance. It was… care" (18). This defense highlights his inability to see the harm caused by his actions, presenting a stark contrast to Anna's insistence on accountability: "You're blind to the harm you caused" (20). Through this clash, Ravenhill dramatizes the tension between older generations who defend past practices and younger ones who demand moral reckoning.

The tension within Edward's family mirrors broader societal struggles over historical accountability. The protests outside Edward's home, mentioned repeatedly as a background force, serve as a public manifestation of this reckoning.

Yet, Ravenhill does not present the issue in simplistic terms. While Anna represents the push for justice, her relentless interrogation of Edward often tips into cruelty. "How can you sit here," Anna demands, "knowing what you've done, knowing what people think of you?" (25). This moment captures Anna's intensity but also reveals her lack of empathy for the emotional toll on her parents. Ravenhill uses Anna to explore the complexities of modern movements for justice, which, while necessary, can also alienate and dehumanize individuals in their pursuit of accountability. Maureen, Edward's wife, adds another layer to the family dynamic. While initially loyal to Edward, Maureen becomes increasingly conflicted as the play progresses. Her silences are often more revealing than her words, reflecting a passive complicity that Ravenhill critiques as insidious. When Anna accuses her of "looking the other way" during Edward's tenure as a disciplinarian, Maureen defensively responds, "I didn't know. I didn't see" (30). Yet her hesitation suggests otherwise. Maureen's breakdown later in the play—marked by her desperate plea, "Can't we just be left alone?" (34)—underscores the immense personal cost of societal reckoning, particularly for those caught in the crossfire between past misdeeds and public condemnation.

The titular cane serves as a powerful symbol of the violence that underpins institutional authority. Its physical presence in the home—described as "stained, worn, and splintered" (16)—reflects both the enduring legacy of Edward's actions and the decay of the authority he once wielded. Anna's demand to destroy the cane becomes a pivotal moment in the play. "Burn it," she commands, as if its destruction could erase the years of pain it symbolizes (37). Edward's refusal, however, reveals his inability to separate his identity from the power he once held. "It's not just a stick," he protests. "It's who I was" (39). This moment encapsulates Edward's deep denial and resistance to change, a microcosmic reflection of how institutions struggle to adapt to evolving ethical standards. The protests outside Edward's home also reflect Ravenhill's critique of collective justice movements. While they represent necessary societal progress, the mob mentality they invoke complicates the narrative. Edward remarks bitterly, "They don't care about me. They just want something to burn" (p. 43), a line that captures his growing isolation and bitterness. Ravenhill presents the protests as both a reckoning and a spectacle, forcing audiences to question the balance between justice and compassion in societal change. Ravenhill uses the microcosm of Edward's family to explore wider societal tensions. Through intergenerational conflict, shifting power dynamics, and symbolic objects like the cane, The Cane interrogates the cost of progress and the messy, unresolved nature of accountability. Edward's family becomes a battleground where personal grievances intersect with systemic critiques, leaving audiences to grapple with the unsettling realization that reconciliation, much like justice, is rarely straightforward.

One of the central conflicts in The Cane is between Edward, a retired schoolteacher facing a public backlash, and Anna, his estranged daughter, who arrives ostensibly to reconcile but quickly becomes an agent of confrontation. The generational divide between Edward and Anna underscores larger societal rifts. Edward's adherence to traditional values and institutional loyalty stands in stark contrast to Anna's progressive, almost accusatory stance. Edward's defense of corporal punishment epitomizes his alignment with outdated disciplinary measures: "It wasn't violence. It was control, it was guidance. It was… care" (47). His justification echoes the broader defense of institutional practices that, while normalized in their time, are now condemned as abusive. Ravenhill's staging of this dialogue reveals the inability of older generations to reconcile their past with contemporary ethical standards. As Edward insists on the "good" he did for his students, Anna retorts, "You're blind to the harm you caused" (66). This clash underscores the tension between historical accountability and personal denial. The microcosmic setting of the family home becomes a stage for unresolved historical traumas—a dynamic reflective of broader societal reckonings with colonialism, systemic abuses, and institutional decay.

4 POWER DYNAMICS WITHIN THE FAMILY

In *The Cane*, Mark Ravenhill's exploration of power dynamics within Edward's family serves as a microcosm of broader societal hierarchies. The family, a foundational institution within society, is depicted as a battleground where authority and subjugation constantly shift. Edward's role as the father and patriarch reflects his prior position of power in the school system, an institution where hierarchical control was his domain. However, as the play progresses, his authority begins to deteriorate, and the intricate web of family relationships exposes the vulnerabilities of established power structures. Central to this unraveling is Anna's return to the family home, which not only destabilizes Edward's authority but also forces a re-examination of Maureen's complicity in enabling his dominance. Through this, Ravenhill comments on the broader forces at play within society that maintain systemic power imbalances.

Edward's role as the patriarch of the family, though initially powerful, starts to erode as the tension between past and present authority becomes palpable. His fatherly role mirrors his former position as a schoolmaster, a figure whose word once carried immense weight. However, as the play unfolds, Edward is repeatedly confronted with reminders of his past actions, especially through Anna's accusations and the broader questioning of his legacy. This questioning is an essential theme in Ravenhill's work, as it reflects the broader societal trend of examining the morality and integrity of those in power. For instance, when Anna accuses Edward of "not being able to face what you've done," her words not only point to his personal failures but also to the broader failure of societal structures that allowed such authority to go unchecked (56). This comment highlights how Edward's private life and professional life intersect, illustrating the way power structures within the family reflect those within institutions like schools, where figures of authority go unchallenged until their power is questioned.

Maureen, initially the supportive wife, becomes a key figure in the power struggle within the family. Her hesitation to confront Edward about his past suggests a deep-seated internal conflict, a recognition of her own passive complicity.

Early in the play, Maureen is depicted as loyal to Edward, but this loyalty begins to fracture as Anna's presence forces her to reassess her role in maintaining the family's façade. When Anna accuses her of "looking the other way" regarding Edward's actions, Maureen's silence in response speaks volumes (64). Her defensive silence is not merely an expression of personal guilt but a reflection of the broader societal tendency to ignore systemic injustice until it becomes impossible to do so. Ravenhill uses this silence to underscore how complicity often functions on a subconscious level, where individuals may become numb to the inequalities around them until they are directly confronted with them. This dynamic highlights the insidious nature of passive complicity, a theme that is central to the play. Maureen's breakdown and eventual emotional collapse mirror the psychological toll of maintaining the status quo in oppressive systems. Her inability to voice her dissent earlier in the play reflects the internalized acceptance of Edward's authority, a reflection of how many individuals in society accept hierarchical power structures without challenging them until forced to do so. The tension between Maureen's internal conflict and her public support of Edward illustrates the subtle mechanisms of control that operate within families and, by extension, society at large.

The power struggle within the family ultimately culminates in Anna's assertion of dominance. As the play progresses, Anna shifts from a passive observer of her family's dysfunction to an active disruptor of the established order. She asserts control not only over the narrative surrounding Edward's past but also over the family's present dynamic. Her intellectual dominance is evident in the way she dismantles Edward's attempts to defend himself, particularly when she confronts him with specific details about his actions that force him to confront his own culpability. When Anna takes control of the narrative, she positions herself as the moral authority in the room, a reflection of the broader societal trend in which younger generations begin to challenge the authority of older, entrenched systems. As she states, "You can't just pretend it didn't happen, can you?" (77), Anna makes it clear that the past cannot be ignored, and the responsibility for addressing past wrongs falls on those who have been complicit in maintaining the status quo.

The most overt representation of violence in *The Cane* is the titular cane itself, a symbol of institutional power and punishment. The cane is described as "stained, worn, and splintered" (45), evoking the decayed nature of the power it represents. It serves as a reminder of Edward's previous position of authority, where corporal punishment was a regular tool of discipline. The cane, thus, functions as a symbol of violence that is tied to Edward's professional life as a schoolmaster, but also to the history of systemic violence in institutions. Its presence in the home is an unsettling reminder of past abuses, where power was maintained through force, both literal and figurative. The cane's continued existence in the house represents how Edward's past, and the violence it embodies, continues to haunt the family.

Anna's demand to destroy the cane is a pivotal moment in the play, symbolizing her desire to sever ties with this violent legacy. She views the cane not only as a physical object but as a reminder of the toxic power dynamics within her family. When she declares that she wants to "destroy" it, Anna is not only rejecting Edward's authority but also attempting to break free from the cycle of violence and oppression that the cane represents (67). However, Edward's refusal to destroy the cane signals his inability to relinquish control and the power it symbolizes. This refusal also underscores the idea that individuals who have been complicit in systems of violence often struggle to let go of their power, even when it is no longer justified or relevant.

The psychological violence in *The Cane* is equally important in understanding the play's exploration of power dynamics. Edward's insistence on maintaining the cane and his refusal to acknowledge the damage it represents are forms of emotional manipulation. By holding onto the cane, Edward keeps the memory of his past power intact, even though the present reality of his life is far removed from his former position of authority. This emotional manipulation extends to his relationship with Maureen, who is depicted as complicit in maintaining the facade of the family's stability. Maureen's silence when Anna accuses her of "looking the other way" regarding Edward's past actions reflects her internalized complicity in the system of repression that the cane symbolizes (64).

Moreover, Maureen's emotional breakdown towards the end of the play suggests the toll that years of emotional violence and repression have taken on her. Her silence, in the face of Anna's accusations, becomes a form of passive violence against herself. She is trapped in a cycle of denial and self-deception, which is a consequence of the deeply ingrained power structures within the family. The cane also serves as a symbol of symbolic violence, representing the wider societal structures of authority and control. As psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva notes, objects like the cane are "abject" because they confront individuals with their "deepest repressions" [10] The cane's physical presence in the family home forces the characters and the audience to reckon with the violent history that it symbolizes—one that cannot be easily dismissed or forgotten. Anna's desire to destroy it represents a desire to confront and abolish the societal structures that perpetuate violence, while Edward's refusal signifies the ongoing struggle to maintain those structures.

The titular cane serves as a potent symbol throughout the play, embodying both Edward's authority and the violence inherent in institutional discipline. "*The Cane* is a play for our troubled times. lt reveals a paradox in which the eradication of one form of violence leads to the release of an altogether more dangerous force." [11] Its physical presence in the house—hidden yet omnipresent—parallels the way systemic abuses are often buried within societal frameworks. Ravenhill's description of the cane as "stained, worn, and splintered" evokes a sense of decay that extends beyond the object itself to the institutions it represents (45). Anna's demand to destroy the cane becomes a pivotal moment in the play, symbolizing her desire to break free from the cycle of violence and repression. Edward's refusal, however, signifies his inability to let go of his identity, which is inextricably tied to his past actions and the power he once wielded. The cane, therefore, functions as what psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva terms an "abject" object—one that "confronts us with our deepest repressions" [10] Its presence forces both the characters and the audience to confront uncomfortable truths about the persistence of violence in human relationships and institutions.

In *The Cane*, Mark Ravenhill uses the microcosm of Edward's family to explore the broader societal tensions of historical accountability, generational conflict, and the decay of institutional authority. Through the interplay of personal grievances and systemic critiques, Ravenhill crafts a narrative that is both intimate and universal. The play challenges audiences to consider the costs of progress and the complexities of justice, leaving us with the unsettling realization that reconciliation may be as fraught as the conflicts it seeks to resolve.

5 CONCLUSION

In *The Cane*, Mark Ravenhill portrays themes of historical violence, institutional abuse, and personal conflict. The collapse of order within the family mirrors broader societal ruptures. This study explored how Ravenhill uses the cane symbol and character dynamics to show how historical violence shapes both personal relationships and public conflict. The thesis argued that the collapse of order in *The Cane* is not only a personal tragedy but also reflects how entrenched systems of authority and violence shape individuals. Edward's patriarchal authority, Anna's rebellion, and Maureen's complicity critique the persistent influence of past violence on the present. This study found that the cane functions as a symbol of personal and institutional violence. Edward's refusal to part with the cane represents his clinging to authority. Anna's desire to destroy it symbolizes a call for liberation. "Over the course of the play, the cane has taken on such a great symbolic stature..." [12] Maureen's emotional repression illustrates how historical violence affects personal relationships. Ravenhill shows how personal and public histories of violence intertwine. Characters struggle with complicity and resistance to authority. The play reveals that individuals internalize and perpetuate systemic injustices. The findings suggest that Ravenhill critiques the cyclical nature of violence. The play emphasizes that personal trauma is connected to broader societal forces. It encourages viewers and readers to consider how personal conflicts are linked to larger structures of power. The play calls attention to how individuals must confront these legacies, especially when they are complicit in sustaining them. While the study explored violence and power in *The Cane*, it focused on family dynamics and symbolism. It did not fully explore the broader social and political contexts influencing the characters. The analysis also didn't examine every possible interpretation of the cane. Future research could expand on these aspects and provide more insight into the play's themes. Future research could compare *The Cane* with other Ravenhill works, focusing on power and violence. A study on family structures in authoritarian regimes might also deepen understanding. Trauma theory or postcolonial studies could offer new perspectives on historical violence's impact on personal and public conflict. The play explores how historical violence shapes personal relationships and societal structures. Through the metaphor of the cane, Ravenhill shows how authority, complicity, and resistance are influenced by past abuses. The play critiques the past and warns of ignoring structures of power. It forces us to confront uncomfortable truths about the persistence of violence. The cane represents how history continues to shape our present actions and relationships.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF MORPHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF ENGLISH AND BALTI ADJECTIVES

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Abstract: This study aims at focusing on the linguistic properties of adjectives in English and Balti language, employing a CA approach to identifying the similarities and dissimilarities of the mentioned languages' adjectives. The investigation involved a parallel contrastive analysis of adjectives, with data sourced from linguistic texts in both languages. The findings revealed that similarities and differences are evident across various dimensions of adjectives, including their classifications by form, formation, semantic, and syntactic positions. Morphologically, Baltis exhibit reduplication as a distinctive feature, which is absent or rarely applied in English. Thus, the two languages differ significantly in applying the reduplicative adjectives and the affixation systems particularly in using the prefixes. Understanding these contrasts is crucial for addressing learning difficulties. By recognizing both the similarities and, more prominently, the dissimilarities in adjective structures, educators and learners can mitigate trials in the pedagogical process of English adjectives. Awareness is fundamental in reducing the linguistic trials faced by Balti speakers acquiring English as a L2, ultimately enhancing the overall effectiveness of language education.
Keywords: Contrastive analysis; Morphology; Balti adjectives; English adjectives linguistics

1 INTRODUCTION

English, as an International lingua franca, holds a crucial position in instructive systems worldwide, frequently serving as a mandatory requirement from primary to tertiary levels for enrollment, graduation and certification [1,2]. Consequently, various non-English-speaking countries across the globe have integrated English proficiency into key domains of life, including employment and livelihood advancement, making its mastery a critical skill for employment seekers and professionals [3]. In short, English is now considered the language or instruction, trade, medicine, lingua franca, technology and prosperity across the globe accordingly.

However, mastering English as a foreign language presents significant trials for enrollees, particularly those from non-English-speaking territories. One of the chief hurdles lies in the structural and systemic variations and differences between English and its learning enrollees' L1 [4]. These disparities, principally in linguistic characteristics such as morphology, phonology, syntax, and semantics etc, complicate the progression of language acquisition or SLA, for instance, translating certain Indonesian adjectives into English, such as kemerah-merahan (rendered as reddish in English), exemplifies how variations and dissimilarities in derivational morphology and affixation systems generate pedagogical or instructional trials [5].

A CA approach offers valuable insights by systematically comparing linguistic systems to identifying the similarities and differences between the enrollees' L1 and L2. Such comparisons underscore the obstacles posed by linguistic differences and the facilitative part of linguistic similarities [6]. The influence of learners' first language (L1) on their second language (L2) acquisition frequently results in interference or Interlanguage problem where L1 traits are unconsciously transferred to L2 practices, further complicating the language education process [4,7].

For the Balti language enrollees of English, the differences and variations in adjectives' characteristics—including their forms, formations, meanings, and syntactic positions—present specific linguistic trials. Some languages frequently employ reduplicative adjectives, a feature absent in English. Moreover, the formation of derivational adjectives differs significantly, as English primarily relies on prefixes and suffixes, whereas various languages include a broader range of affixes, such as prefixes, infixes, confixes, and suffixes. Differences also extend to the positional and functional roles of adjectives in statements. For instance, Indonesian adjectives frequently serve as predicates lacking linking verbs, unlike their English counterparts, which require explicit syntactic constructions.

Given these complexities, comprehending the similarities and distinctions in adjective structures between English and other languages like Balti, Urdu and Shina etc is pivotal for effectual language pedagogy. A meticulous grasp of these linguistic features can enhance the teaching of English to Indonesian and other specific learners, addressing specific problem areas and minimizing translation and linguistic errors [8,9]. Therefore, this study critically examines the forms, formations, meanings, and positions of adjectives in both languages through a contrastive analysis framework, aiming to provide practical insights for improving English language pedagogy for Balti speakers.

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2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The comparative study of two distinct linguistic systems, such as English and Balti, with a focus on contrasting their adjectival properties, necessitates adherence to foundational linguistic theories to ensure a robust and scientifically grounded examinations. To achieve this objective, this study employed the theoretical framework of CA as its principal analytical approach.

2.1 Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH)

In the domain of applied linguistics, several theoretical models are integral to SLA studies, including CAH, Error Analysis (EA), Transfer Analysis (TA), and Interlanguage (IL) [10]. These frameworks collectively address the linguistic challenges faced by second language learners, offering sequential paradigms to describe and analyze their linguistic performance.
This research prioritizes CA, a framework devoted to examining linguistic features such as the form, formation, meaning, and syntactic positioning of adjectives in English and Balti. CA operates within the comparative linguistics discipline, aiming to identify the similarities and divergences between linguistic systems [11]. As Davies [12]notes, "CAH is a theory in SLA focusing on the comparative study of the primary and secondary language systems to identify their structural characteristics." Similarly, Raji [13] and Al-Sobhi [14] emphasized that contrastive linguistics, a subfield of linguistics, systematically compares two or more linguistic systems or subsystems to elucidate both their commonalities and dissimilarities systematically. The central premise of CA posits that a systematic comparison of a learner's L1 and the L2 can illuminate linguistic similarities and discrepancies, thereby facilitating the enhancement of effective pedagogical materials [15]. The approach is especially applicable for identifying areas of linguistic interference, enabling instructors and linguists to predict errors and tailor pedagogical strategies accordingly [16].

3 FACTORS AND SOURCES OF ERRORS

3.1 Interference or Interlingual Transfer

In SLA, interference, or inter-lingual transfer, occurs when learners' L1 systems influence their L2 production and this phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the early stages of learning, where structural discrepancies between the two languages contribute to errors [17]. Selinker and Gass [14] highlighted that learners must navigate differences while disregarding similarities, as these do not pose major challenges. Interference typically arises from established linguistic habits in the primary language / L1 that variance with the targeted language's linguistic rules. This divergence frequently results in negative transfer, where existing patterns lead to erroneous structures in the SL [18,19]. For instance, morphological, phonological, and syntactic differences frequently generate learner errors, particularly in areas like word formation and order [20].

3.2 Intra-lingual Transfer

Intra-lingual transfer, which originates from within the target language itself, represents another major source of error. Unlike inter-lingual errors, intra-lingual errors stem from incomplete knowledge or overgeneralization of rules within the targeted or associated language. Brown [16] states that Intra-lingual transfer manifests as learners acquire portions of the L2 system, leading to overgeneralizations and subsequent errors. These errors often arise during the transition from initial learning stages to more complex linguistic structures.

4 METHODOLOGY

CAH has been applied in this study to assess the similarities and dissimilarities of Balti and English adjectives. The required data had been collected from the text books particularly from the Balti grammar 'Short Sketch of Balti Grammar by Lobang' published by Universitat Bern and Essential Grammar in Use by Murphy. The targeted area of the current study is just the uses, formation and affixation in English and Balti adjectives. CA is an effective approach to compare and contrast the phenomena is research studies systemically [21].

4.1 CA of Adjectives in English and Balti

4.1.1 English adjectives

In English, adjectives are lexical items that describe or modify nouns and pronouns, adding semantic nuance to their referents [22]. They can occur in attributive and predicative positions, form comparative and superlative degrees, and are modifiable by intensifiers (e.g., very happy) or derivational processes (happy – happier – happiest). By contrasting these features, this study highlights the structural and functional nuances of adjectives in both languages, providing insights into the linguistic challenges faced by Balti learners of English.

4.1.2 Balti adjectives

In Balti, adjective is known as Phshatpa that serves a similar function but exhibit unique linguistic features. In both languages, adjectives are placed before the nouns and pronouns etc.

English: Nice man: (Nice = adjective + man = noun)

Liakhmo mi (Liakhno = adjective + Jmi = noun)

The adjective formation of both English as Balti is given with the below examples.

Natpa	Sick	Kinza is sick.	Kinza nadpa yod.
Skambo	Dry	The wood is dry.	Di Shinpo skambo yod.

Adjectives in both English and Balti serve the common linguistic function of modifying or describing nouns, pronouns, or other substantives. Both languages utilize intensifiers and qualifiers, such as 'more' (pa-xy), 'extremely' (tiaq), and 'very' (ashin). However, morphological distinctions arise in comparative and superlative constructions. English employs suffixes (-er, -est) or modifiers (more, most) to adjectives of varying syllabic lengths [23]. In contrast, Balti employs lexical items (do/deo pa, Do gisha) or the prefix gangma pa- for superlative formation and utilizes reduplication structures like (Gangma + pa + gisha) Gangma pa gisha.

English:	Good	Better	Best
	Beautiful	More Beautiful	Most beautiful
Balti:	Liakhmo	do pa liakhmo	Gangma pa liakhmo
	Gisha	Do pa gisha	Gangma pa gisha

4.2 Classification of Adjectives by Form

Both English and Balti exhibit similarities and dissimilarities within the morphological classification of adjectives.

4.2.1 Simple or base adjectives

Both languages define base adjectives as morphologically unaltered forms with inherent adjectival functions.

Examples:	**English:**	Happy	Big	Small
	Balti:	Thad	Chhogho	Xhonxy

4.2.2 Compound adjectives

In English, compound adjectives arise from combinations of adjectives with other lexical classes (e.g., nouns, verbs, adverbs) or adjectives themselves, often joined by hyphens [24]. In Balti language, compounds are limited to adjective-adjective combinations reflecting related meanings and combinations of adjectives with other lexical classes like English.

English:	Well known	Part time	Midnight
Balti:	Ming yod	Nngin fed	Xhan fed

4.2.3 Reduplicative adjectives

A reduplicative adjective is a word that repeats a syllable or part of a word, often with a slight change. Reduplication is a type of informal wordplay in English that can be used in a variety of ways, including imitate sounds: ding-dong and Suggest alternative movements: flip-flop etc. Reduplication is a productive morphological process in Balti language as compare to English. Reduplication is rarely used in English but their found similarities in this phenomenon in both English and Balti accordingly.

Examples: Balti: Sing-sang Toq-Taq Hiling-Halang Piling-Piling

4.3 Formation of Adjectives

4.3.1 Affixation

English predominantly employs prefixes (e.g., un-, non-) and suffixes (e.g., -er, -est) for adjectival formation, while Balti does not apply prefixes but suffixes (-chan, -mo, bo-, fo-) are found in Balti commonly practiced in daily discourses.

Examples:	**English:**	loyal – disloyal,	valid – invalid	
	Balti:	Suffixes: Khhash-chan	Drakh-mo	Skam-bo

4.3.2 Derivational process

Adjectives derived from verbs and nouns in English and Balti involve distinctive affixation strategies. English relies heavily on suffixes (e.g., -able, -ous, ing), while Balti employs no prefixes but with suffixes (-chan, fo, bo, khhan, rim etc).

Examples:

English: (verbs)	create – creative,	satisfy – satisfactory		
Balti:	Chham	- Chhamkhhan,	Sning –Sningchan,	Khsum -Khsumrim

4.3.3 Semantic classification of adjectives

English adjectives are commonly divided into descriptive (denoting qualities) and limiting (restricting scope) categories [22,25]. Both categories enrich language by either specifying or elaborating on nouns.

Descriptive adjectives: Describe qualities (beautiful, tall, and green etc).

Limiting adjectives: Restrict scope (five, my, this, the).

Both categories enrich language by either specifying or elaborating on nouns. Balti semantics follows a similar dichotomy but are influenced by broader lexical and affixation systems contrastively.

5 CONCLUSION

The CA highlights several distinct features of adjectives in Balti and English, which contribute to trials and linguistic errors for Balti native enrollees of English as an L2. These differences are evident at both the morphological and syntactical levels in discourses. Morphologically, Balti employs reduplication for adjectives to denote repetition or emphasis, a feature absent or rarely applied in English particularly in the textual discourses. This can lead Balti learners to inappropriately transfer this rule to English or IL problem. Additionally, the affixation systems in the two languages differ significantly. While English adjectives utilize both prefixes and suffixes, but absent of infixes, vice versa, Balti adjectives are formed using a range of suffixes particularly. At the syntactical level, notable differences were also emerged in the placement and formation of adjectives in discourses. Although both Balti and English language recognizes attributive and predicative adjectives, their usage varies considerably on specific grammatical structures for similar expressions. These differences in form, formation, meaning, and positioning underline the potential trials faced by Balti learners of English. The findings of this study can serve as a foundation for further research into Interlanguage and common translation errors between the two mentioned languages, particularly in the use of adjectives. Additionally, the results may inform the development of lesson plans to address the specific needs of enrollees navigating the complexities of adjective usage in English and Balti.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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THINKING AND PRACTICE OF CHINESE COMPREHENSIVE COURSE TEACHING IN THE INTRODUCTORY STAGE

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Abstract: Comprehensive Chinese course is the core of the language course, in the introduction stage of Chinese comprehensive Chinese teaching, teachers should seize the entry stage of students' learning characteristics, on the basis of intensive practice, practical teaching principle, flexible design teaching activities, implement effective teaching, and actively teaching reflection, in order to breakthrough and innovation.
Keywords: Introductory; Chinese comprehensive course; Teaching mode

For international students who just study Chinese, Chinese learning in the entry stage is very important, which directly affects the state of Chinese learning and the formation of good learning habits, and is also an important guarantee for students to successfully enter the next stage of learning. Therefore, how to grasp the learning characteristics of students in the entry stage and implement effective teaching has put forward high requirements for Chinese teachers [1].

Comprehensive Chinese language course is the core course of the introductory language course. The so-called "synthesis" reflects the synthesis of various aspects, one is the synthesis of teaching content. Comprehensive courses not only require the introduction of language knowledge content, Mainly involves the teaching of basic knowledge such as pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar; There are also skills such as listening and speaking skills and reading skills, It also involves cultural aspects such as Chinese surname culture, homophonic culture, address culture and other Chinese people are familiar with their daily life but for the Chinese students in China with cultural differences and strategies such as communication strategies, learning strategies, emotional strategies and other aspects of the teaching content; Second, the synthesis of skill training, That is, in the comprehensive class, students need to be trained in listening, speaking, reading, writing and other speech skills and speech communication skills; Third, the synthesis of training objectives [2]. The ultimate goal of comprehensive course teaching subject to the overall goal of international Chinese teaching, namely through the professor of language knowledge and language skills training, cultivate the students' learning ability, form effective learning strategy, so that students have certain language comprehensive use ability, with primary level 3 teaching goal, for example, to make learners to understand and learn related language material life, can use more complex sentence patterns, organize short paragraph of familiar topics of communication, communication and description. These are the teaching objectives set to improve the learners' comprehensive language utilization ability; fourth, the synthesis of teaching methods. Because the teaching of comprehensive courses involves the training of students 'speech skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and the overall goal of improving students' comprehensive use of language, it is necessary to apply a variety of teaching methods to adapt the training of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills for teaching. Therefore, a good comprehensive class, must be arranged, comprehensive and thoughtful, and can not ignore one or the other. The following combined with the teaching experience and practice in recent years, how to improve the effectiveness of the initial stage of comprehensive class classroom teaching, improve students' comprehensive language use ability, talk about their own thinking and exploration [3].

Based on years of teaching experience and practice, I have developed some insights into how to improve the effectiveness of comprehensive language instruction in the initial stage. To enhance students' ability to use the language comprehensively, several key strategies should be employed. These include creating a balanced and interactive classroom environment, integrating real-life language usage into lessons, focusing on both accuracy and fluency, and fostering a strong understanding of cultural nuances. Furthermore, employing diverse and student-centered teaching methods, such as task-based learning and collaborative activities, can significantly improve students' engagement and practical language skills.

By focusing on these elements, Chinese language teachers can better support international students in their language acquisition journey, ensuring they are well-prepared for the challenges of subsequent stages in their Chinese learning process.

1 CLEAR TEACHING OBJECTIVES, TEACHING OBJECTS, DO TEACHING IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR APTITUDE

In the pre-class stage, teachers should carefully study the curriculum standards and teaching materials used, clarify the specific requirements of the course, formulate teaching objectives that meet the actual needs of students, including knowledge, ability and accomplishment, and refine the teaching objectives into specific, operational and measurable course objectives of each course, such as cognitive language knowledge, what knowledge students need to master and how much the accuracy; in terms of skills, what are the specific requirements of various skills of listening, speaking,

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reading and writing, and how to reflect the learning results, etc.

Before teaching, teachers also need to have a full understanding of the teaching objects, so as to adjust the teaching methods in time, teach students in accordance with their aptitude, better complete the teaching tasks, and achieve the teaching objectives. Take the students of this semester as an example. All the students in this class are Mongolian students. The students are introverted and do not like to speak and express. Relatively speaking, the classroom atmosphere is relatively dull. Based on the personality characteristics of the students in the class, how to improve the students 'interest in learning, let students like learning, love Chinese, and take the initiative to open, improve the opening rate, that is, improve students' interest in learning, stimulate their desire to express, is the key problem we need to design in advance and actively solve. In the teaching process, considering the individual differences of students and according to the performance of different students, I carefully design the teaching links, conduct personalized and targeted teaching for students, and teach students in accordance with their aptitude. Students who are ashamed to speak should be encouraged to give timely and positive teaching feedback, and praise students' learning performance, so as to enhance their confidence in learning Chinese. At the same time, consciously cultivate students who like to open, so that these students can play a demonstration role in classroom teaching activities, and lead everyone to better complete teaching activities. In addition, the teaching links are also carefully designed, such as appropriately increasing teachers and students' questions and answers, text exercises, role playing and other teaching activities, so that students can talk more and practice more, constantly enhance learning confidence in the practice, form a virtuous circle, and finally achieve the goal of improving the language use ability. After more than two months of joint efforts of teachers and students, now the enthusiasm of the first class of students has been significantly enhanced, the classroom atmosphere is more active, and the students' language expression ability has also been significantly improved [4].

In addition to enhancing students' interest and participation, it is equally important to create a supportive and encouraging learning environment. The relationship between teacher and student plays a crucial role in motivating students to overcome their shyness and actively engage in class. As a teacher, it is important to establish a trusting rapport with the students, showing genuine care for their progress and well-being. By being patient and offering constructive feedback, teachers can help students feel more comfortable expressing themselves in Chinese. Moreover, utilizing positive reinforcement, such as acknowledging small achievements and improvements, can significantly boost students' self-esteem and encourage them to keep making progress.

To further improve the overall effectiveness of teaching, it is also vital to integrate diverse, interactive, and engaging activities that cater to different learning styles. These activities should not only focus on language skills but also include cultural insights and real-life applications of the language. For example, organizing group discussions on Chinese culture, conducting language games, and incorporating multimedia resources can make lessons more dynamic and relatable. These methods allow students to see the practical use of their language skills in everyday situations, which strengthens their motivation to continue learning. By carefully structuring the classroom dynamics and teaching strategies, teachers can help students build a more solid foundation in Chinese and foster a lasting passion for the language [5].

2 GRASP THE TEACHING PRINCIPLE OF INTENSIVE TEACHING AND PRACTICAL PRACTICE, AND FLEXIBLY DESIGN TEACHING ACTIVITIES

The Chinese teaching in the entry stage, especially the Chinese teaching with the purpose language, must grasp the teaching principle of "intensive teaching and more practice"."Intensive lecture" requires teachers to explain knowledge points as accurately and concise as possible in class, and to avoid lengthy, complicated and excessive explanation. Language knowledge can be conditioned through physical objects, pictures, PPT demonstration, action demonstration introduction, situation setting introduction and other ways, so that students can understand and master the essentials of knowledge, and create conditions for students to effectively practice language practice."More practice" means that students do a lot of practice in class and after class to cultivate their proficiency in language use. The purpose is to promote learning through practice, that is, to internalize the knowledge into their own skills through practice and improve their language communication ability. Therefore, in the teaching design, I pay special attention to the design of practice. In practice, the practice is required to meet the standard of "quantity" and design different types and sufficient practice for students to use and practice; secondly, pay attention to the level and diversity of practice, which includes both basic exercises and challenging exercises to meet the learning needs of different students [6].

In order to adapt to the characteristics of the second language teaching, in the implementation of the teaching link to promote learning through practice, we should try to realize the communicative teaching process, that is, let the students learn the language in the natural language environment as far as possible, and consciously turn our teaching into students' imperceptible and unconscious implicit learning. This requires teachers to take results-oriented in teaching, aim at effective output, and provide enough language input for students as much as possible. In the teaching process, by creating a specific language environment, creating a credible and usable teaching atmosphere, students can gradually acquire Chinese grammar rules in the real and natural context, and internalize the rules into language knowledge to output, so as to realize the input-internalization- -output cycle, and finally realize the output drive. Taking the study of numbers as an example, it seems like a simple problem, but for international students, the correct reading and usage of numbers and how they can be used in real life are not easy to master. For example, the difference between building 3 and floor 3; the different usage of 8 doors, 8 buildings and 8 units are often used in life. In the teaching process, we consciously expand these knowledge content to teaching, through pictures, small videos, campus environment real

scenes and other teaching means to create teaching tasks that fit the actual situation, and transfer teaching for students. At the same time, we pay attention to the practicality of Chinese learning, so that students can use, learn and realize the seamless link of learning and application. We start with the people and things that students are most concerned about and most familiar with, From room number, telephone number, mobile phone number, passport number, license plate number to standing numbers such as fire number, first aid number, alarm number, etc., Also pay attention to the correct use and expression of the numbers in real life, On how to correctly tell your address, how to ask the teacher's phone number or address and other questions closely related to life, Lead the students to conduct progressive practice, Help students to form the habit of learning and using immediately, And guide the students to use the learned grammar and knowledge points in the new situation, Ensiders within your learning content into your own knowledge, To communicate, to express, To achieve an effective output [7].

To further enhance the effectiveness of language teaching in the entry stage, it is essential to create a well-rounded and immersive learning experience for students. One way to achieve this is through the integration of task-based learning, where students are given practical tasks that require them to apply the language knowledge they have acquired. This could include activities such as role-playing real-life scenarios, writing dialogues, or completing problem-solving tasks. Such tasks help students to see the direct connection between their classroom learning and everyday situations, thereby boosting their motivation to practice and apply the language. Additionally, incorporating technology into the learning process, such as language learning apps or interactive online resources, can further enrich the students' experience by offering varied, accessible practice opportunities outside of the classroom. By blending traditional teaching methods with modern tools and real-world applications, teachers can better support students in developing both their language skills and cultural understanding.

Moreover, continuous assessment and feedback play a key role in ensuring that students are progressing effectively. While formal assessments such as quizzes and tests are important, regular informal assessments through observation, peer feedback, and teacher-student interactions provide valuable insights into how well students are mastering the language. It is important for teachers to give timely and constructive feedback, focusing not just on correcting errors but also on highlighting strengths and areas of improvement. This approach helps to maintain students' confidence and encourages a growth mindset. By fostering an environment where students feel comfortable making mistakes and learning from them, teachers can help them become more resilient learners and more confident in their ability to use Chinese in a variety of contexts [8].

3 ATTACH IMPORTANCE TO TEACHING FEEDBACK, TIMELY REFLECT ON TEACHING, AND HAVE THE COURAGE TO BREAK THROUGH AND INNOVATE

Teaching feedback is the students' evaluation and opinions on the teaching content, teaching methods and teaching effect. Through teaching feedback, teachers can understand the students' mastery of knowledge and find out the problems existing in teaching, so as to adjust teaching strategies in time and better guide teaching. The International Chinese Teacher Professional Ability Standard also has clear requirements for teachers' reflective consciousness. As an international Chinese teacher, we should pay attention to teaching feedback, have the consciousness of reflection, and consciously put this reflection throughout the whole teaching process.

In the teaching process, we take the classroom questions, classroom practice, homework correction, group learning show, interviews, a variety of ways to obtain effective teaching feedback, according to the students' feedback and advice on the teaching content and teaching link timely summary, analysis and solve problems in teaching, constantly correct their teaching plans, seek optimization of teaching, improve the quality of classroom teaching. Timely induction, analysis and summary of teaching feedback, this teaching reflection process is not only a process of self-examination and evaluation, but also an opportunity for learning and growth. In the process of reflection, we can check the omissions and fill the gaps, and find our own shortcomings, such as whether the explanation of knowledge points is accurate and clear, whether the teaching methods are suitable and diversified, whether the classroom interaction is sufficient and effective, and so on. At the end of each teaching cycle, we can summarize the effective practices and what need to be improved, through communication and discussion to the next teaching; we can also learn from the successful experience and innovative practices of others, reflect on the advantages of teaching, learn from each other, integrate these experiences into our teaching, enrich teaching means, improve teaching effect, learn and innovate in practice teaching, and realize self-breakthrough [9].

The above combined with the specific teaching practice talked about the introduction stage comprehensive course Chinese teaching thinking, Due to the large number of international students in the entry stage of our university, This stage is also an important basic stage for international students to move towards the middle and advanced stage, therefore, Teachers should strengthen their sense of responsibility, Improve their own teaching ability and teaching level, Actively explore new ideas and new methods of teaching Chinese as a foreign language in the new era, Innovative teaching modes and teaching methods, Focus on the students' personalized learning needs in the teaching process, Help them to increase their interest in learning, Develop their ability to learn independently and jointly, Make them maximize the gains in the entry section, Lay a solid foundation for the next stage of Chinese learning.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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THE IMAGE OF THE BED IN KAFKA'S THE TRIAL: AN ANALYSIS OF K'S STATE OF EXISTENCE

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Abstract: This paper takes the core image of the "bed" in Franz Kafka's The Trial as a starting point to delve into the multiple connotations it symbolizes regarding the protagonist Joseph K's suspended state of existence. The "bed" is not only the site of K's mundane life and the awakening of his "sense of guilt," reflecting his cyclical entrapment in sin while in pursuit of truth, but also serves as an irony to his so-called "freedom"—the freedom of movement granted by his arrest actually constitutes a paradoxical punishment. Ultimately, the "bed" directs K toward an absurd "death" sentence, highlighting the groundlessness and "thrownness" of his existence. As a key symbol, the "bed" profoundly reveals K's absurd living condition: neither able to integrate into the secular order nor capable of reaching the supreme truth.
Keywords: Kafka; The trial; Bed; Existential state

1 INTRODUCTION

In the landscape of modernist literature, few images carry as much symbolic weight as the bed. Often dismissed as a mundane, domestic object, the bed in literature frequently transcends its physical function to become a site of profound psychological, existential, and even metaphysical significance. It is where life begins and, ideally, where it ends. It is the space of intimacy, illness, dreams, and death. In Franz Kafka's The Trial, the bed assumes a central symbolic role, functioning not merely as a setting but as a metaphor for the protagonist Joseph K's entire existential condition. From the moment K is arrested in his bed on his thirtieth birthday to the final moments of his life, the image of the bed—whether physically present or implicitly evoked—serves as a constant reminder of his suspended, liminal state between life and death, guilt and innocence, freedom and imprisonment.

Literary theory has long recognized the layered significance of imagery [1]. Metaphor, imagery, and symbol are often regarded as interconnected conceptual tiers: an "image" can be transformed into a metaphor once, but if it is continuously presented and re-presented through repetition, it evolves into a symbol—even becoming part of a symbolic or mythic system. As Gu Zuzhao observes, imagery is a signifying vehicle aimed at expressing philosophical ideas through symbolism and suggestion, characterized by absurdity and multiplicity of meaning. The prominent American scholar Fredric Jameson once declared, "The inevitable tendency of modernism is symbolic." Hence, it can be asserted that the predominant form of modernist literature is the art of imagery. As a foundational figure of Western modernist literature, Franz Kafka employed imagery with deliberate and exquisite skill. In The Trial, through repetitive use, he expands the dominant image of the "bed" into a core symbol reflecting the protagonist Joseph K's suspended state of existence. This image, through rich variations, unfolds the theme of "death," achieves synthesis of meaning through repetition, and implies "profound dimensions not expressed outwardly."

Kafka's use of the bed is not arbitrary. It is deeply embedded in the narrative structure, character psychology, and philosophical underpinnings of the novel. The bed is the site of K's arrest, the locus of his introspection, the symbol of his bodily limitations, and ultimately, the counterpoint to his death, which occurs not in comfort but in a desolate quarry. This disjunction—between the expected and the actual, the symbolic and the real—mirrors the broader absurdity of K's trial and, by extension, of modern existence itself. The bed, in Kafka's hands, becomes a liminal space: a threshold between the conscious and the unconscious, the social and the solitary, the temporal and the eternal.

This paper argues that the bed in The Trial functions as a polyvalent symbol that encapsulates K's existential condition. It is through the bed that Kafka explores themes of guilt, freedom, alienation, and death. The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 examines the bed as the root of guilt and worldly weakness; Section 3 analyzes the paradoxical relationship between the bed and freedom; Section 4 explores how the bed leads K toward his final judgment—death; Section 5 expands the discussion through philosophical and psychoanalytic lenses; Section 6 offers a comparative analysis with other modernist works; and Section 7 concludes with a reflection on the enduring relevance of Kafka's symbolic imagination.

2 THE BED AND THE AWAKENING OF "GUILT"

2.1 Bed: As the Root Cause of Guilt and Worldly Weakness

In The Trial, the "bed" is intimately and inextricably associated with secular life, which in Kafka's cosmos consistently symbolizes a state of "weakness, a lack of self-confidence, and an innate guilt." K's attachment to the bed, his initial desire to return to its comfort and normalcy, represents what might be called a "submission to the laws of the body:

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estrangement, compassion, carnality, timidity, and vanity." It is from this submission that guilt organically emerges [2]. As Kafka himself suggests in his diaries and aphorisms, "Guilt is the fragility of the body, the perpetual yielding to physical desires and needs." As a result, humans are condemned to perpetually live in a state of lack and ontological incompleteness, a fundamental flaw that becomes one of the primary roots of K's awakening "sense of guilt." The bed is where the body is at its most vulnerable, most naked, and most susceptible to its own needs—it is the throne of the id, and thus the birthplace of a guilt that is inseparable from embodiment itself.

Kafka emphasizes the central, disruptive role of the "bed" from the novel's unforgettable opening: K is arrested not in a public square or his office, but in bed, on a sunny morning—the symbolic commencement of a new life decade, his thirtieth birthday. The violation is compounded by the absurdity of the court's location: it is situated in the apartment of the court usher. In a typical Kafkaesque conflation of spheres, the court is a home, and the home is a court. This architectural confusion suggests an intrinsic, almost metaphysical link between K's "guilt" and the "bed," while also hinting at a deep structural similarity between the earthly, corrupt court and the domestic, private sphere. Both are sites of judgment, power dynamics, and unspoken rules. The bed, traditionally a sanctuary of rest, privacy, and intimacy, is violently transformed into a site of interrogation and accusation. This intrusion is not merely physical but ontological: it marks the precise moment when K's everyday, taken-for-granted existence is punctured by an incomprehensible and irrational authority, shattering his bourgeois complacency.

K's arrest is meticulously distinguished from that of a common criminal; as his landlady, Mrs. Grubach, intuitively grasps, "It seems to be something abstract, which I don't understand, and don't need to understand." This abstraction is key. Jacques Derrida, in his analysis of Kafka in Acts of Literature, points out that the "law" in The Trial is not a set of statutes but a vast, enigmatic system of signification that is perpetually deferred and ultimately undecidable—it is everywhere palpable in its effects, yet its source and meaning are always tantalizingly out of reach [3]. That more "abstract" entity is the true, unstated reason for K's arrest: it is the other "law," the hidden, transcendent Law that lurks in the shadows of the novel's palpable bureaucracy, the supreme truth that K never finds a way out of until his death—a kind of perfected existence that remains forever inaccessible. The différance and undecidability of the "law," as revealed by Derrida's deconstruction, are precisely what trap K in a perpetual state of "hesitation" and "suspension." The goal he pursues is itself an unreachable phantom, a horizon that recedes with every step he takes.

Kafka's personal writings reveal a man tormented by a belief in a higher, pure realm. He always believed that "there exists an absolute, sinless, perfect world," yet he also stated with devastating clarity: "There is a goal, but no way; what we call the way is hesitation." Thus, he condemns K in The Trial to an eternal wavering [4], "a form of perpetual unrest, constantly evolving upward toward perfection," a cycle that is both his damnation and his defining trait. Hence, K's life becomes a vicious cycle: the more intensely he seeks the truth of life and the law, the deeper his inexplicable guilt grows; and the deeper his guilt becomes, the more obsessively he must focus on the minutiae of life itself, seeking clues in the everyday. As long as K lives, his guilt only compounds. This inner, magnetic force pulling him toward the "law" is his inchoate sense of guilt. Though often consciously ignored or rationalized away by K, it operates incessantly beneath the surface, engaging in a covert, psychic struggle with his rational nature and his bodily instincts [5]. Whenever K's instincts lead him too far into indulgence—with women like Fräulein Bürstner or the court usher's wife—a surge of guilt emerges, compelling him to re-engage with the trial, to take it seriously. It is a psychological pendulum. Step by step, through this process, K is forced to confront his true self and finally realizes in a moment of bleak clarity: "He could no longer choose between accepting or rejecting the trial—for he was already in it, and he must proceed with extreme caution." The bed is the ground zero of this oscillation between desire and guilt.

2.2 The "Law" of Abstraction and the Eternal Suspended State

"All of Kafka's works poetically express the necessity of submitting to a transformation of the soul—no matter how terrifying that transformation may be," writes the scholar Erich Heller. K gradually, agonizingly, comes to recognize this "necessity," which is why he maintains a strange composure amidst the escalating upheaval. The scene of his "arrest" functions with the sudden, disruptive force of the night bell in A Country Doctor, jolting him out of a numb, ignorant, and arrogantly secular life. It violently pulls him into another kind of existence—one he had perhaps unconsciously desired but never had the courage or patience to consciously confront. From his arrest on his thirtieth birthday to his execution on the eve of his thirty-first, this single year carries more existential weight than the thirty that came before. It is a year compressed into a lifetime of anxiety. His rhetorical question near the end—"Could it be that the year-long trial taught me nothing? Do I want people to say after I'm gone that at the start of the case I wanted it to end, and at its end I wanted it to begin again? I don't want that."—signals a moment of tragic self-awareness. K finally, implicitly, admits his guilt. From outright denial to a weary, complex acceptance, K spends an entire year on this circular path in search of a guilt whose definition he never learns. Kafka's seemingly absurd narratives "are in fact an assault on our realm of consciousness," and K, in his flawed and stumbling way, "sought a path to a deeper world."

The bed, in this context, is not only the physical location of his arrest but also the metaphorical ground of his existential awakening. It is the site where the personal and the juridical catastrophically collide, where the body is both at its most vulnerable and most desired. The bed is the realm of dreams, sexuality, and the unconscious—all of which are implicated in K's amorphous guilt. Kafka suggests that to be human is to be guilty by virtue of being embodied, by virtue of having desires, weaknesses, and a body that demands care and offers pleasure. The law does not create guilt; it merely reveals what is already there, latent in the very condition of being alive. The court officials who invade his bedroom are merely externalizing an internal state. This reading aligns with a psychoanalytic interpretation where the

bed represents the subconscious, and the arrest is the eruption of repressed anxieties and self-doubt into the conscious world, shattering the ego's fragile defenses. The law, in this sense, is akin to a merciless superego, perpetually judging the ego for its failures.

3 THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN BED AND FREEDOM

The bed naturally metaphorizes restraint, confinement, and stagnation. It is a place of passivity and recumbency. Freedom, by its classical definition, suggests the opposite: limitless possibility for action, movement, and self-determination. Yet in Kafka's inverted world, freedom takes on an unusual and sinister meaning: freedom as punishment. Thus, the appearance of the "bed" at the very beginning of the novel implicitly establishes the awkward, paradoxical situation of K's freedom—or more precisely, the image of the "bed" constitutes a quintessential Kafkaesque irony, profoundly revealing the absurdity that underlies his newfound liberty.

His arrest, paradoxically, performs a perverse act of liberation. It transforms K from a man bound by the mundane shackles of identity, professional status, and social expectation into a "free man" in the most existential sense—one focused solely on the problems of basic existence and his own besieged self. On that remarkable morning, as the awareness of the "Law" violently awakens within him, K's free will is also ignited. He is imprisoned by the accusation, yet simultaneously liberated from the complacency of his former life. He is given a purpose, however terrible: to navigate the trial. This creates an existential paradox of the highest order: the Law, through its representatives, seemingly encourages the exercise of free will (even after arrest, K is free to continue working, banking, and acting as he wishes), yet guided by this very free will, every choice K makes is inevitably wrong, every path he takes leads him deeper into the labyrinth. One perceives one's freedom only through the errors one commits, and in exercising that freedom, one inevitably commits more unforgivable mistakes. It is a catastrophic feedback loop.

Regarding this addictive yet absurd mode of existence, Albert Camus remarked in The Myth of Sisyphus [6]: "Kafka's universe is indeed an unspeakable cosmos in which man indulges in the luxury of suffering, fishing in a bathtub knowing full well that nothing will come of it." This "persisting in the impossible" is precisely the task Kafka assigns to his protagonist [7]—although he is acutely aware of the fundamental split within the self, that "the 'I' that feels, perceives, and acts can never be defined through its feeling, perception, or action; it can be reduced to the minimum of a letter, yet can never become anything else." The split between body and soul manifests almost farcically in K's life: his soul strives to soar towards the law and truth, while his body—its desires, its fatigue, its needs—constantly drags him back to the earthly, sensual realm. Existence itself becomes torment; a life swept along by the current of habit and bodily routine turns into an abyss of meaninglessness, and the very legitimacy of continuing to exist is called into question. In this struggle, K becomes his own defendant, and by extension, the defendant of the whole world, put on trial for the crime of being human.

This newfound "freedom" also stands in direct opposition to a mechanical and habitual life. Before his arrest, K was passively carried along by social and customary forces, a cog in the bank's machinery, never needing to justify his actions or his existence. The arrest, while making him a defendant, also performatively tears apart the web of habit, pulling his life out of the grip of inertial routine. Everyday events are stripped of their traditional and logical justification; they are left without reason or explanation. The simple act of waking up in bed in the morning is forever transformed; a new, terrifying world unfolds before him. As the critic Maurice Blanchot observes, in this new world "here nothing is lacking: not silent resistance, not despair that is keenly felt but beyond words, and certainly not the unimaginable freedom in which the characters of the novel live until their deaths."

It is this "unimaginable" and terrifying freedom that allows K's existential experience to undergo a qualitative leap within a single year. He does not choose to retreat or escape into denial (at least, not permanently); instead, he confronts the abyss of existence head-on. Although he lingers at the edge of the abyss until ultimately being swallowed by the darkness of death, he has, in a crucial sense, truly entered—and exited—the trial in the full Kafkaesque sense. He has completed the absurd journey.

This section can be powerfully read through the lens of Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power and the panopticon. The bed becomes a micro-panoptic site where K is both the prisoner and his own warder, constantly watched by an internalized gaze and watching himself. His freedom is a meticulously disciplined one, shaped and constrained by the invisible, internalized structures of the law. The bed is where he is most himself—naked, private, authentic—and yet most alienated from himself, a paradox that Kafka explores with relentless and logical precision. The freedom he experiences is the freedom of the subject who is forever being observed and judged, a freedom that is itself the most effective form of confinement.

4 THE BED AND THE FINAL JUDGMENT—DEATH

4.1 Birthday and Bed: The Origin and Conclusion of Absurd Existence

Why was K arrested on his birthday, and specifically in bed? What does this meticulous chronological and spatial detail signify? In Hamlet, "to be or not to be" is the fundamental question, but in Kafka's disenchanted modern era, both life and death had become equally disgraceful, stripped of heroism or meaning. To live is "to live like a dog," mired in compromise and absurdity, and to die is equally devoid of transcendent value and meaning. Hence, with cruel symmetry, Kafka has K executed just before his next birthday, ensuring his life is bookended by these two traumatic events. We are born in bed—this is the beginning of life's contact with the world, a moment of vulnerability and

potential. Yet, in K's case, he cannot die peacefully in bed, achieving the classical ars moriendi; instead, he dies like an animal in a desolate quarry, hastily and unceremoniously disposed of, his death marked only by the world's profound indifference. Kafka deliberately severs the conventional, comforting bond between bed and a peaceful death, thereby revealing the raw absurdity and alienation of modern death. Guilt and innocence, action and paralysis, life and death—between these traditional opposites Kafka identifies a vast, ambiguous spectrum of possibilities, and it is these murky, in-between states that he explores with obsessive focus. Yet he never explicitly explains them, forcing the reader to dwell in the same uncertainty as his protagonist.

On the morning of his execution, "it was still early, but he was already exhausted," and "he considered his fatigue a bad sign." Exhaustion is a quintessential hallmark of Kafka's protagonists, a physiological manifestation of their spiritual condition. "Whenever it is time to take control of their own destiny, at the critical moments of life, they are overcome with weariness; fatigue paralyzes them at the very core of existence." This pervasive weariness is a form of passive resistance and a symptom of despair. The awareness of death permeates Kafka's writing [8], often foreshadowed through subtle details. Shortly after learning of his arrest, K finds himself unconsciously exchanging "meaningful glances" with the guard Franz, a moment of silent complicity that hints at a shared mortal fate. Later, the artist Titorelli drags out three identical paintings from under the bed—a location that again ties the symbol to K's fate—and forces them upon K. They depict barren wastelands under gloomy skies. He tells K, "Some dislike such themes, calling them too gloomy, but I believe there are always those like you who appreciate somber art." Though meeting K for the first time, the artist, as a creator of images, already intuitively recognizes his nature—clearly, K's aura of impending death has left an impression.

Kafka also employs persistent climatic hints to reinforce this mood. The morning of K's arrest is deceptively sunny, and the night of his death is clear and moonlit, but throughout the intervening year—the entire duration of the trial—there is no good weather. The author repeatedly uses phrases such as: "the weather was gloomy," "a light rain was falling outside," "snow falling outside the window, foggy and dark," "damp air, windy," "the rain had eased, but it was damp, cold, and dark." This incessant inclement weather is a favored motif in Kafka, creating intertextual echoes across his works and building a world that is physically and morally oppressive. Process determines outcome. The appearance of the prison chaplain in the cathedral heralds the end of K's entanglement with the Law—the worldly lawyer effectively hands K over to the priest, meaning K's death sentence is spiritually ratified. In fact, for K, there is no strict boundary between life and death: to live is to be in a state of dying (to the world, to himself), to die is to achieve a form of life (as a finalized, judged entity). The same held true for Kafka himself, for whom writing was a form of living and a constant confrontation with death.

4.2 Fatigue, Premonition and Suspension: Towards Absurd Death

Beyond his inevitable physical death, K's entire existence remains perpetually suspended in a state of "action without outcome." He is a paradigm of what Heidegger would call "thrownness" (Geworfenheit). He can neither fully enter and enjoy secular life nor attain the supreme truth he yearns for internally[9]. He becomes a rootless being, eternally hovering in a state of in-betweenness. Although he possesses a profession, an identity, and a social status, he is not truly integrated into the conventional order. He stands in stark contrast to the bank's deputy manager: the latter has a family, a vibrant social circle, frequently hosts colleagues and friends—he embodies the image of a successful, integrated bourgeois man. While K vies with him in petty business intrigues, he is in fact fundamentally excluded from the comforts and assurances of worldly life; what little confidence he retains at work can no longer conceal his inner insecurity, alienation, and profound weariness with life itself.

In the cathedral, K projects his own despair onto the priest, believing he "ascended the pulpit merely to extinguish the lamp—lighting it had been a mistake." "Yet, that was not the case." Kafka implies here that K feels his very existence is a mistake, an irrevocable error in the cosmic order. Humans cannot choose their existence; they are always-already "been" (i.e., born). In Heideggerian terms, being-in-the-world is a "falling," a state of having been "thrown" into a situation not of one's own making. To emphasize this "thrownness," Kafka not only deliberately withholds K's background, rendering him without origin or history (unlike the traditional novelistic hero), but also makes the events that befall him sudden, inexplicable, and devoid of rational causation. K has long been aware of the absurdity of existence on some level, which is perhaps why he so recklessly and defiantly challenges the Law; it is a reaction against the meaninglessness he intuits.

The Trial is thus a masterful story about the universal human condition: on the surface, it appears tragic, but it is fundamentally a theatre of the absurd, even a black comedy—for Kafka, in a world without God or ultimate meaning, there can be no true tragedy in the classical sense. The elements of farce are everywhere: K's uncle takes him to see the lawyer Huld for a serious consultation, but at the crucial moment, K becomes distracted and flirts with the lawyer's nymphomaniac secretary, Leni; the two executioners who come for him appear as figures of death but also of clownishness, with their "fat, flabby faces," as if performing a bad play, making it impossible for K to treat his own death with solemnity; their exaggerated, theatrical politeness during the execution ceremony is utterly farcical, turning the most terrifying moment of a life into a mockery and a humiliation. Death thereby becomes a form of liberation approached almost playfully—even death itself is rendered absurd. Although K's case does not progress legally, and he seems to have gone in circles, an essential internal change occurs within him. After all this turmoil, K arrives at a final, passive insight: he understands that he cannot attain the truth, and so he abandons struggle and effort, accepts the absurdity of his situation, and embraces his death. Yet it might also be said that, in doing so, K finally exercises a

choice: he rejects an absurd and groundless life, and in the end, by not resisting, he chooses his death. It is his ultimate and only authentic act.

5 THE BED AS A SYMBOL OF MODERN ALIENATION AND POLITICAL IMPOTENCE

To fully appreciate the richness of Kafka's symbol, we must also consider the bed within the broader context of modern alienation and the political powerlessness of the individual in the face of opaque, all-pervasive bureaucratic systems. The bed is the most private of spaces, the inner sanctum of the self. Yet in K's case, it becomes the very public site of his humiliation and subjugation. This inversion perfectly reflects the way modern life, particularly under the shadow of large-scale administrative states, erodes the boundaries between private and public, subjecting the individual to constant potential surveillance, judgment, and intervention by anonymous powers.

Kafka wrote as a legal official within the vast, decaying bureaucracy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His works are often read as uncanny premonitions of the totalitarian systems that would dominate the mid-20th century. The bed, in this socio-political light, symbolizes the ultimate vulnerability of the private self to the encroachments of state power. K's arrest in bed is not just a narrative device; it is a profound violation that echoes the arbitrary power of a regime that recognizes no sanctuary, not even the intimacy of the bedroom. This reading adds a crucial and chilling layer to the existential and psychological ones already discussed. The Law is not just metaphysical; it is also the very real, mundane, and terrifying power of the state to disrupt a life at any moment, without explanation.

Furthermore, the bed can be seen as a symbol of the body politic itself—a society that is sick, lethargic, lying in bed, unable to rise or act decisively against the forces that control it. K's personal fatigue and inertia mirror the collective ennui of a civilization in decline, where political action seems futile and meaning has evaporated from public life. The bed becomes a coffin for the living, a place where one passively waits for a death that is both desired and feared, administered by forces beyond one's control or comprehension. The "trial" is then the endless, paralyzing process of dealing with this faceless authority, a process that consumes life itself.

6 COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES: THE BED ACROSS LITERATURE AND ART

To further illuminate the profound significance of the bed in The Trial, it is illuminating to consider how beds and sleeping spaces function in other works by Kafka and in the broader landscape of modern art and literature[10].

In Kafka's own The Metamorphosis, Gregor Samsa's bed becomes his prison and sanctuary after his metamorphosis. It is the place of his isolation, his bodily shame, and his eventual death. It is the site where the family pushes his food in and, later, where they pile their unwanted junk, mirroring their view of him. In A Country Doctor, the bed is where the young patient lies, exposing his fatal, rose-colored wound, while the doctor is miraculously and terrifyingly trapped in bed beside him in a naked embrace. In both cases, the bed is a site of extreme exposure, vulnerability, and existential crisis.

Beyond Kafka, the bed holds significant power in other works. In Vincent van Gogh's famous painting The Bedroom, the bed is the stable, geometric center of a world that seems on the verge of emotional turmoil, representing a yearning for peace and stability amidst mental chaos. In Samuel Beckett's Endgame, Hamm is confined to a chair, but the imagery of ashbins and bare interiors creates a similar effect of constrained, barren existence. In Harold Pinter's The Homecoming, the living room becomes a site of psychological warfare, much like how K's boarding house becomes an extension of his trial; the domestic space is charged with threat.

These recurring motifs across media suggest that for the modern artistic sensibility, the bed is a fundamental symbol of the human condition—a place where we are most ourselves, yet most exposed to the external and internal forces that would define, judge, and ultimately destroy us. By placing The Trial within this broader context, we see that it is part of a continuous modernist exploration of anxiety, where the domestic space is no longer a haven but the frontline of existential conflict.

7 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In The Trial, Kafka endows the quotidian object of "the bed" with an immense and central symbolic charge. It is not merely the site where K.'s arrest begins; it is the very vessel that concretizes his condition of perpetual suspension, his "thrownness" into the world. Through this single, potent image, Kafka unfolds the multiple dimensions of K.'s existential plight with unparalleled economy and depth.

It is where his sense of guilt first awakens—on a deceptively bright birthday morning, still in the vulnerable state between sleep and waking, K. is seized by the Law. This abstract force crashes into his seemingly secure bourgeois life with brutal yet intangible power, hurling him into a vortex of trial where his identity and his sense of meaning are left radically uncertain. The bed also bears witness to the central paradox that turns freedom itself into punishment: K. is liberated from mundane concerns only to find every choice he makes tightening the Law's invisible net around him. His frantic exertions—clinging to his post as a bank clerk, shuttling through the corridors of the law courts, probing the labyrinths of human relationships for advantage—never allow him to anchor himself in any worldly order, nor to reach the remote, opaque "highest court" or "completed life" he dimly intuits.

K.'s existence is, at its bottom, an eternal in-between—poised between the intelligible everyday and an unknowable truth, a figure of groundless absurdity, forever "thrown" yet never arriving, always seeking yet never finding. The bed is the perfect symbol for this state. It is not a place of journeying (like a road) or of decisive action (like a courtroom); it is

a place of waiting, of stasis, of receptivity. It is where one is most passive, and yet where the most profound and disruptive events can occur.

Therefore, the bed is more than a piece of furniture; it is a stage for the entire drama of modern existence. It is where we are born, where we dream, where we love, and where we die. In Kafka's hands, it becomes the perfect symbol for the absurdity of a life lived under the gaze of an invisible law, a life that is always already guilty, always already condemned, yet perpetually and paradoxically free to feel the weight of that condemnation. It is a symbol that continues to resonate deeply in a world where individuals feel increasingly subject to opaque systems of power, where privacy is eroded, and where the search for meaning often feels like a trial without a verdict.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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EXPLORING THE BEAUTY WITHIN: EXPLORATIONS ON DEATH AND GRIEF IN "MANSION" AND "ARIZONA MIDNIGHT"

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Abstract: Death and grief are universal experiences that all individuals must confront, yet the way in which these topics are approached can reveal profound beauty within. Among the many poems that explore the different mindsets in the face of death, grief, and suffering, the "*Mansion*" by A.R Ammons and "*Arizona Midnight*" by Robert Penn Warren are indisputably in the vanguard. By examining the diction in both poems that portray tone, readers see a clear distinction. While both works incorporate elements associated with the desert—symbolizing desolation, barrenness, and a stark confrontation with mortality—they ultimately conclude on a positive note that transcends the somber nature of these experiences. In "Mansion," death is presented as a new beginning, framed through the accepting attitude of the persona. The uniformly positive tone throughout the poem suggests a life-affirming perspective towards death, transforming it into a natural progression rather than an end. Conversely, "Arizona Midnight" adopts a more negative tone from the outset, as the persona projects his grief onto the coyote and the surrounding desert landscape. This initial portrayal underscores a deep sense of loss and isolation, reflecting the weight of sorrow that can accompany such experiences. However, as the poem progresses, it spirals towards a positive direction, ultimately highlighting the inner resources one can tap into amidst suffering. This distinction between the two poems is profound because both poems essentially underscore the ultimate positive attitude towards death and the pursuit of hope amidst the depths of despair. They highlight how, even in the most tragic circumstances, one always has the inner resources to survive and prevail, despite being unaware of this possibility.
Keywords: Death and grief; Desert imagery; Tone analysis; A.R. ammons; Robert Penn Warren; Comparative poetry; Resilience; Transformation

1 INTRODUCTION

First and foremost, the two poems, "Mansion" by Ammons and "Arizona Midnight" by Penn Warren, differ significantly in terms of tone and mood. In "Mansion," Ammons maintains a consistently positive tone throughout the poem, while Penn Warren starts off with a negative tone in "Arizona Midnight" and only introduces positive aspects towards the end. Specifically, in "Mansion," the persona not only accepts that it is time to "cede" but also views it as a matter-of-fact event, as indicated by the opening line of the first stanza: "So it came time." This acceptance reflects a broader philosophical understanding of life and death, suggesting a deep-seated belief in the natural order of existence. While one might argue that separating oneself cannot be seen as a positive, the use of the word "choose" reinforces the active role the persona takes, suggesting a sense of agency in their decision. This choice indicates that acceptance is not passive resignation but a conscious, empowering act. Additionally, the wind in the poem is described as "glad" and eager to carry the remnants of the persona, creating a mutually ecstatic attitude where the wind "needed all the body it could get". This vivid imagery suggests a symbiotic relationship between the persona and nature, further reinforcing the idea that death is not an end but a continuation of existence. In fact, the mention of the "whirlwinding" further emphasizes the exuberant nature of the journey of death, devoid of negative connotations. That being said, Ammons uses a positive tone, portraying processes like decay and death as natural cycles in life, making these experiences seem less foreboding and more like an essential aspect of the human journey. On the other hand, "Arizona Midnight" begins with the persona projecting his own grief onto the coyote and personifying the stars as they "quiver whiter." The use of the verb "quiver" as opposed to more positive verbs like "twinkle" as well as the description of the sky's "blankness" as opposed to describing it in richer terms such as "darkness," creates a sense of hopelessness and deep pain. Despite the persona's attempts to protect himself using "the anti-rattler horsehair rope" and "grinding sand on sand," he is not shielded from his grief, and his wound only seems to deepen. This illustrates the futility of attempting to escape from one's emotional turmoil; instead, the pain becomes an inescapable part of the persona's existence. In fact, from "the only answer I have for the coyote would be my own grief, for which I have no tongue," readers can understand that the persona cannot even commiserate with the coyote or put parameters around his own pain, as he has "no tongue" to articulate his grief. This powerful imagery suggests a profound sense of isolation, as the inability to express one's suffering can exacerbate feelings of alienation. Even the prospect of tomorrow is described as "inflamed," as if it were a burning sensation or a fever that scars the narrator, further highlighting the depth of anguish that engulfs him. Accordingly, this stark contrast in tone, compared to "Mansion," underscores the profound suffering experienced by the persona in "Arizona Midnight," which is emphasized throughout the poem, justifying why said persona isn't taking a hopeful stance.

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2 CONTRASTING TONES: ACCEPTANCE VS. PROJECTED GRIEF

Despite the differences in tone, both “Mansion” and “Arizona Midnight” incorporate desert-related elements to emphasize the beauty inherent in death and grief as the poems unfold. This is noteworthy despite the general perception of the desert as devoid of life-affirming elements and therefore bleak and empty. Specifically, Ammons utilizes the noun “plain” instead of “desert” and proceeds to describe the “ocotillo” and “saguaro,” highlighting the adventurous nature of the landscape, suggesting that the desert is teeming with life and a vast array of vegetation. By choosing “plain,” Ammons invites readers to reconsider their preconceived notions about barren landscapes, revealing the underlying vibrancy that often goes unnoticed [1]. Furthermore, Ammons invites the reader to “fall with evening” and again to “watch the closing up of the day,” symbolizing an embrace of the passage of time. The climactic closing line, “morning breaks,” elevates the hope and optimism to another level. While some may argue that “break” typically carries negative connotations of fragility and shattering, there are multiple instances that suggest otherwise. For instance, the words “so” and “cede” in the first stanza can be interpreted as homonyms for “sow” and “seed,” justifying that “break” is closer to breaking into a blossom or a seed. This duality speaks to the transformative potential of endings, suggesting that from the fragility of life, new growth can emerge. The forces of nature, such as decay and death, merge with the cycles of nature, offering endless possibilities for new beginnings beyond that stage. In fact, the title “Mansion” serves as a metaphor for the richness of a world beyond death, where one can be elevated to experience luxurious things, further emphasizing the positive takeaway. It invites readers to envision death not as a finality but as an entryway into a more expansive existence. Likewise, in “Arizona Midnight,” Penn Warren establishes a somber tone, but its ending employs the image of the “cactus” to portray a positive change in the persona. The cactus, described as “lifting in blunt agony” [2], embodies the pain that echoes the despair within the persona, illustrating how suffering can coexist with resilience. Although the desert remains desolate and bleak, the cactus is able to lift itself up, symbolizing the strength that can emerge from adversity. Instead of listening intently to the wail of the coyote, the persona now “strains to make out the cactus,” realizing that the cactus can protect itself and sustain itself by holding water due to its piercing qualities that serve as its armor from intermittent rainfall. Despite these seemingly negative attributes, the cactus possesses its own “necessary beauty” and is equipped with all the inner resources to survive and thrive in harsh conditions. Similarly, grief itself can be seen as possessing its own necessary beauty, as humans, much like the cactus, possess emotional resources that can empower but are often overlooked [3-4]. Ultimately, both Ammons and Penn Warren incorporate elements from the desert to end their poems on a positive note, inspiring readers to find hope and see the beauty in phases like death and grief while believing in their ability to maintain a positive attitude.

3 THE INNER RESOILIENCE IN THE FACE OF SUFFERING

Ultimately, the poems “Mansion” and “Arizona Midnight” offer profound insights into the nature of death, grief, and suffering, while presenting a positive perspective towards death that readers can embrace and assimilate into their own lives. In the case of “Mansion,” the persona maintains a consistently positive attitude, embodying an acceptance that frames death not as an end but as a transformative passage. This perspective encourages readers to view mortality through a lens of possibility, suggesting that death can be a catalyst for renewal and growth [5]. On the other hand, although “Arizona Midnight” initially portrays a sense of hopelessness, marked by the persona’s projection of grief onto the coyote and the barren desert landscape, the journey toward a positive outlook becomes a central theme. This epiphany is vital, as it allows individuals to recognize that, even in the darkest moments, they have the agency to affirm life and harness their inner resources. Similar to immigrants or refugees starting anew in unfamiliar environments, individuals possess the potential to tap into their resilience and embrace the natural cycles of life and death, appreciating the depth and beauty that can emerge from even the most arduous situations.

4 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, both "Mansion" by A.R. Ammons and "Arizona Midnight" by Robert Penn Warren offer profound meditations on death, grief, and the often overlooked beauty inherent in these universal human experiences. While their tonal approaches differ significantly—Ammons maintaining a serene and accepting voice throughout, and Warren moving from despair toward revelation—both poets ultimately guide the reader toward a life-affirming perspective. Through skillful use of desert imagery, each poem transforms symbols of barrenness and isolation into landscapes of meaning, resilience, and renewal.

Ammons’s “Mansion” reframes death not as an end, but as a harmonious return to nature and a beginning within a broader existential cycle. The poem encourages an embrace of transition with grace and agency, suggesting that endings are inseparable from new possibilities [6-8]. Warren’s “Arizona Midnight,” by contrast, begins immersed in personal sorrow and a sense of irreparable loss, yet gradually shifts toward recognizing the latent strength within—both in the natural world and the human spirit. The cactus emerges as a powerful symbol of necessary beauty and innate resilience, reflecting the poem’s movement from projection of pain to recognition of inner resources.

Together, these poems illustrate that while the journeys through grief and confrontation with mortality may vary greatly in emotional texture, each can lead to a similar destination: a renewed sense of hope and an acknowledgment of the transformative power inherent in suffering. Both writers suggest that beyond the starkness of loss lies a deeper, often surprising beauty—one that empowers individuals not merely to endure, but to perceive and partake in the continuous

cycles of nature and spirit. In doing so, "Mansion" and "Arizona Midnight" each affirm, in uniquely resonant ways, the human capacity to find meaning, light, and even majesty amid life's most challenging passages.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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LEARNER IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF CHINESE AS A FOREIGN OR SECOND LANGUAGE (CFL/CSL): A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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Abstract: This study examines how learners of Chinese as a foreign or second language (CFL/CSL) construct and negotiate their identities within the socio-cultural context of China. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through written narratives and semi-structured interviews with international university students studying Chinese in China. The analysis focused on key themes such as linguistic self-confidence, cultural adaptation, and bilingual identity, with a word cloud employed as a supplementary analytical tool. The findings indicate that most participants recognized a close relationship between language learning and identity formation, acknowledging the influence of Chinese language learning on their linguistic and cultural selves. However, some learners viewed CFL learning primarily as foreign language acquisition rather than identity development. These results highlight the diversity and complexity of identity construction among CFL/CSL learners in a target-language environment. The study contributes to learner identity research and offers pedagogical implications for supporting learners' linguistic and cultural development in academic and social contexts in China.
Keywords: Social Identity Theory; Learner Identity; Chinese as a Foreign or Second Language (CFL/CSL); Narrative Inquiry

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, alongside the growing emphasis on the socio-cultural dimensions of education, researchers and professionals in the field of language learning have increasingly highlighted the importance of learners' identities in promoting a needs-responsive approach to learning. As Belcher and Lukkarila argue, the scope of needs analysis should be broadened to consider "not just what learners want to be able to do in a language but also who they want to become through language" [1]. This perspective foregrounds identity as a central component of language learning rather than a peripheral outcome.

According to Social Identity Theory, an individual's identity and self-image are shaped through affiliation with and participation in particular social groups or communities. Such groups provide individuals with a sense of belonging and orientation within the social world [2]. Social categories function as self-referential frameworks that enable individuals to conceptualize their roles within society [3]. Over the past few decades, identity research has expanded considerably across a range of disciplines, reflecting a growing recognition of identity as a dynamic and socially constructed phenomenon [4-5].

Within applied linguistics, the relationship between language and identity has been widely examined, particularly in multilingual and multicultural contexts [6-11]. These studies emphasize that language learning extends beyond cognitive processes to include social participation, positioning, and negotiation of self. While foreign or second language learning is influenced by multiple interrelated factors, including motivation, affect, cognition, and interaction [12]. Identity plays a mediating role in shaping learners' engagement with the target language and its speakers.

From psychological and pedagogical perspectives, foreign language learning has been conceptualized as a sociocultural phenomenon that brings about changes in learners' cognitive and psychological development [13-17]. Learning an additional language has been shown to broaden learners' perspectives, enhance communicative competence, and foster greater cultural awareness and tolerance, further underscoring the close relationship between language learning and identity construction [13].

Despite extensive research on learner identity in ESL and EFL contexts, comparatively limited attention has been paid to learners of Chinese as a foreign or second language (CFL/CSL), particularly within the target-language environment of China. To address this gap, the present study investigates how international university students learning Chinese perceive the role of the Chinese language and culture in their identity construction. Drawing on Social Identity Theory, the study explores learners' narratives to examine how engagement with the Chinese language and sociocultural context shapes their evolving linguistic and cultural identities.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Identity Theory (SIT), originally developed by Tajfel and Turner, is a social psychological framework that explains how individuals construct their self-concept through membership in social groups and participation in social contexts [2]. The theory emphasizes that identity is socially constructed through the process of social categorization,

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social identification, and social comparison. Through these processes, individuals develop a sense of belonging and position themselves in relation to others within specific social groups. Identity plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' self-understanding, interpersonal relationships, and patterns of participation. Identity matters because it shapes how individuals make sense of their experiences, including their engagement with learning and texts [18-19]. Learning is therefore inherently social, as it is influenced by how individuals perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others within particular communities.

In the field of language learning, Social Identity Theory provides a useful lens for understanding how learners negotiate their identities as members of linguistic and cultural groups. Language learning extends beyond the acquisition of linguistic knowledge and involves participation in social practices associated with the target language. Learners' beliefs about themselves, their willingness to engage, invest, and persist in language learning. Applying Social Identity Theory to the context of Chinese as a foreign or second language (CFL/CSL) allows for an examination of how learners construct and negotiate their identities within the sociocultural environment of China. As CFL/CSL learners interact with the Chinese language and culture, they encounter new social categories and group affiliations that shape their linguistic and cultural identities. This framework, therefore, supports an explanation of how identity construction mediates learners' language learning experience and their opportunities for academic and personal development in the target-language context.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Identity: Definitions and Characteristics

Identity has traditionally been understood as a constellation of characteristics, beliefs, experiences, and values through which individuals define themselves [20]. It reflects how people perceive themselves in relation to others and within the sociocultural environments they inhabit [21]. Spencer-Oatey conceptualizes identity as an individual's self-image, comprising multiple positively, neutrally, and negatively evaluated attributes [22]. Identity provides coherence between beliefs, values, and goals, and supports individuals' capacity to project themselves into the future. Importantly, identity is embedded within sociocultural contexts, and changes in these contexts can reshape how individuals define themselves. The relationship between language learning and identity has been a central concern in applied linguistics. According to Norton, language learners are engaged in an ongoing process of identity construction whenever they communicate [23]. Identity research has since expanded to include multiple dimensions such as social, cultural, and ethnic identity, reflecting the complex and dynamic nature of identity formation. From a poststructuralist perspective, identity is viewed as fluid, context-dependent, and shaped through social interaction rather than as a fixed personal trait [24-25]. Constructivist approaches further emphasize the relationship between identity and the social world, highlighting how learners' identities are continuously negotiated through participation in social practices. Research examining identity reconstruction through target language learning thus offers valuable insights into how learners acquire not only linguistic competence but also new ways of positioning themselves in the world.

3.1.1 Personal identity

Personal identity refers to individuals' sense of uniqueness and their perception of themselves as distinct from others [26]. Within identity theory, personal identity represents the most basic level of self-categorization and serves as a fundamental motivator of human behavior [27-28]. Although personal identity emphasizes individuality, it is inherently social, as individuals' self-perceptions are shaped by their roles and interactions within society [29]. Personal identity also interacts with group identity. As Deaux noted, individuals' emotions, beliefs, and ideals contribute to the formation of group identities, indicating that personal and social identities are mutually reinforcing [30]. In language learning contexts, personal identity influences learners' motivations, attitudes, and engagement, shaping how they respond to opportunities for participation and interaction in the target language.

3.1.2 CFL learner identity

CFL learner identity refers to the identity constructed by learners within the context of learning Chinese as a foreign language. For university-level learners, CFL identity encompasses beliefs, values, and commitments associated with studying Chinese and positioning oneself as a legitimate language learner. This identity is reflected in learners' attitudes, learning behaviors, and evolving self-perceptions as users of the Chinese language. From a sociocultural perspective, language learning is embedded in participation in social activities and interactions with others, objects, and events [31]. Learning a language is thus both a linguistic and social process, through which learners negotiate meaning and construct identities in relation to others [32-34]. CFL learners' identities are dynamic and continuously shaped by their experiences, opportunities for interaction, and engagement with the target language community. Research suggests that learner identity influences learners' needs, desires, and access to opportunities for using the target language [35]. In CFL contexts, identity plays a crucial role in shaping learners' willingness to participate, their investment in learning, and their ability to benefit from linguistic input. Consequently, understanding CFL learner identity is essential for supporting effective language learning and meaningful engagement.

3.1.3 CSL learner identity

Research on second language learning has consistently emphasized the close relationship between language learning and identity construction. Scholars have examined how learners negotiate and sometimes resist the social positions made available to them within specific sociocultural contexts [36-37]. Block believed that poststructuralist approaches are particularly valuable for investigating second language learner identity, as they allow researchers to examine the

complex social dimensions of language learning beyond linguistic competence [7]. Learning a second language has been conceptualized as a process of identity formation that shapes who learners are and what they can become [11]. For adult learners, second language learning often occurs after their identities have been largely established within their native sociocultural contexts, making identity negotiation particularly salient [38]. Studies in second language learning have demonstrated that language use and communication play a central role in the reconstruction of learners' identities, influenced by personal histories and cultural backgrounds.

3.2 The Present Study

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how CFL/CSL learners perceive the role of Chinese language learning in shaping their identities. By adopting a sociocultural and identity-oriented perspective, the study aims to contribute to both theoretical discussions and pedagogical practices in CFL/CSL education.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how learners of Chinese as a foreign or second language (CFL/CSL) construct and negotiate their identities through language learning experiences. Qualitative methods are well-suited to examining learners' perceptions, meanings, and lived experiences, which cannot be captured through numerical data alone. Narrative inquiry was selected as it enables participants to organize experiences into meaningful stories, offering insight into identity construction processes. As Patton notes, qualitative inquiry allows researchers to understand how individuals interpret their experiences and the significance these experiences hold for them [39]. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted to further explore themes emerging from the narratives and to allow participants to elaborate on their experiences in their own words while maintaining focus on the research questions.

4.2 Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted at one of the universities of China, a public research university located in Xi'an, China. This university offers Chinese language courses for international students across undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs, providing sustained exposure to Mandarin Chinese and Chinese culture.
As shown in table 1, seven international students (including the researcher) participated in the study. Participants were aged between 23 and 28 and had two to three years of experience learning Chinese. In terms of ethnic as well as linguistic background, the participants constituted Turkmen, Uzbek, Central - Southern - East Africans and Columbian. Their experience of using Chinese was almost entirely related to their education. Participation was voluntary, no remuneration was provided, and pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Table 1 Profiles of the Participants

Participants	Gender	Nationality	CL Study Years
NO	M	Cameron	2,5
RE	F	Turkmenistan	3
MA	F	Columbia	3
SA	F	Uzbekistan	2,5
ME	M	Zambia	3
PA	F	Uganda	3
EA	F	Turkmenistan	3

4.3 Data Collection Instruments

4.3.1 Written narratives

Written narratives constituted the primary data source. Following Pavlenko and Lantolf, learner narratives were used to explore identity construction processes that may not be evident through observation alone [40]. Participants responded in English to two open-ended prompts concerning the influence of learning Chinese on their sense of self and their present and future life orientations. No word limit was imposed to encourage reflective and authentic responses. These narratives served as the basis for identifying preliminary themes and informing the interview questions. Analysis of the written narratives further supported the interview findings and revealed two main thematic patterns:
1) Has the studying of the Chinese language as a Foreign or Second language, CFL/CSL, influenced the sense of who you are? If yes/no, how and why?
2) How has the knowledge of Chinese influenced your style of living, your activities in the present, and your prospects for the future?

4.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to deepen the understanding of issues raised in the narratives. Interviews consisted of three open-ended questions addressing learners' definitions of identity, perceptions of CFL/CSL learning, and views on identity reconstruction through language learning. Interviews were conducted in English, lasted between

one and one and a half hours, and were audio-recorded with participants' consent, then transcribed verbatim. The semi-structured interviews addressed three main areas:
(1) What defines your identity as a learner of CFL?
(2) How do learning and using the Chinese language as a foreign language influence your CFL/CSL learners' identity construction?
(3) How did you perceive your CFL/CSL learner identity?

4.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Written narratives and interview transcripts were compiled into individual case files and repeatedly read to identify recurring patterns, concepts, and meanings [41]. Coding was conducted both manually and with the support of MAXQDA qualitative analysis software to enhance analytical rigor. Related codes were grouped into six major themes: ability to communicate, job opportunities, cultural awareness, personal growth, behavioral change, and the development of new habits and routines. These themes provided insight into how CFL/CSL learners perceive identity construction through Chinese language learning.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Findings

The analysis of written narratives and semi-structured interviews revealed mixed perspectives regarding the influence of learning Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) on learners' identities. Of the seven participants, five reported that learning Chinese had influenced their sense of self and identity construction, while two participants perceived Chinese primarily as a communicative tool and reported no direct impact on their identity. Nevertheless, even those who rejected explicit identity change acknowledged that learning Chinese expanded their opportunities for communication, social interaction, and prospects.

5.2 Qualitative Analyses of Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were threefold: first, to investigate how learners of the Chinese language perceive and define identity; second, to evaluate the participants' understanding of the possible impact of learning CFL on their identity; and third, to investigate how the participants' experiences of the possibility of such an impact, as well as the main factors that influence it.

5.2.1 Define CFL identity

The semi-structured interview analysis transcripts and others reveal that students define their CFL learner identity as a positive and strong self of personality. It also shows that learning CFL influenced their identity, and they can define their identity as a CFL learner.
Mastery of a difficult language like Chinese boosted my self-confidence and provided a sense of accomplishment, which contributed to a positive self-image and a stronger sense of personal identity. (SK)

5.2.2 Influence of CFL learning on identity construction

The following is what the investigation revealed: of the total seven students, five held that learning the Chinese language as a foreign language has impacted their identity. However, two participants resisted identity construction through learning the Chinese language as a CFL; they believe that there is no connection between learning a language and identity construction.
No, it didn't. I think there's no connection between learning a language and identity construction. (PA)
These quotes indicate that language learning and identity construction are complex topics. This also shows that there is a relationship between language learning and identity construction, but it cannot impact all learners' identities.

5.2.3 Attitudes toward CFL learner identity

Participants who perceived identity change generally evaluated their CFL learner identity positively. They associated it with personal development, improved communication skills, and enhanced social and professional opportunities. Learning Chinese was described as empowering, particularly in facilitating friendships with Chinese speakers and enabling engagement in travel, business, and cultural activities.
I feel more positive toward it. Since I first began studying the Chinese language, I've noticed a number of positive shifts that have taken place. (ME)

5.3 Qualitative Analysis of Written Narratives

5.3.1 Factor 1: CFL influence on learners' identity construction

As shown in Table 2, most of the participants are aware of their identity construction through the CFL learning. The students' perspectives of their identities in relation to learning and using a foreign language can be explored from the points of view of social interaction, cultural understanding, and personal development. They declare that by learning CFL and experiencing its culture, they become more receptive and tolerant of otherness and difference, as well as more intelligent. In addition, their confidence increases when they converse in a new language. As a result, they can cope

with new and challenging situations. The participants of the study believe that learning a foreign language provides them access to knowledge and other non-material resources, as well as new opportunities.

Table 2 Statements Agreed with by Participants Included in Factor 1

Participant 1: It influenced my personal growth.
Participant 2: I felt like I was reorganizing my identity.
Participant 3: Before, I was more direct, but now, I am trying to be more polite; this is also one of the influences.
Participant 4: It caused me to listen to Chinese songs, watch Chinese films and series…
Participant 5: I must admit that without learning Chinese, I would not be the person that I am now.

The results are also consistent with previous research demonstrating the crucial role of linguistic, social, and cultural contexts in the formation of new identities, especially in SLA/FLA and the personal identity of language learners [42-43]. According to Norton, the learners of a language, the situation in which they are learning that language, and social interaction all play a role in the creation of the learners' identities [10].

5.3.2 Factor 2: CFL does not influence students' identity construction

Table 3 revealed that two participants declared that learning the Chinese language as a CFL didn't influence their identity; rather, it was a communication tool. However, for them, Chinese learning as a foreign language was not only about acquiring a new language, but also about culture-related interests. It is quite intriguing that NO and PA claim that learning and using Chinese has not affected their sense of self. As evidenced by the excerpts from their texts, they recognize that their knowledge of Chinese enables them to engage in numerous activities that would be impossible without it. They can watch films in Chinese, communicate in Chinese, study Chinese, read Chinese-language texts, and have guaranteed job prospects. Nonetheless, they do not believe that their identity has been affected by their knowledge of Chinese.

Table 3 Statements Disagreed with by Participants Included in Factor 1

Participant 6: There's no connection between language learning and identity construction. I am not sociable, so it's difficult to get along with others.
Participant 7: Language is a communication tool for me; it was a plus to understand Chinese culture.

It is noteworthy that, doctoral student, *NO* older than the other participants, most experienced, qualified, and studied in various places, is more reflective. This student has a belief that he has already completed his identity construction, and learning a new foreign language cannot impact his identity. However, he acknowledges that knowledge of Chinese allowed him to perceive life from a variety of angles and to find a position in society.

5.4 Generating the Word Clouds to Visualize the Semi-Structured and Written Narratives Data

To supplement the qualitative analysis, a word cloud was generated from the combined semi-structured interview transcripts and written narratives. This resulted in the word cloud shown in Figure 1. Frequently occurring words related to the research prompts (e.g., Chinese, language, identity) were excluded to enhance interpretive clarity. Prominent terms included phrases such as *personal growth, open-minded, polite, and lifestyle*, reflecting participants' emphasis on behavioral change, cultural awareness, and self-development. Consistent with previous research on visual analytic tools [44-45], the word cloud provided an immediate visual representation of dominant ideas emerging from the data. Although word clouds may oversimplify contextual meanings, their use in this study supported thematic interpretation and reinforced findings derived from narrative and interview analysis.

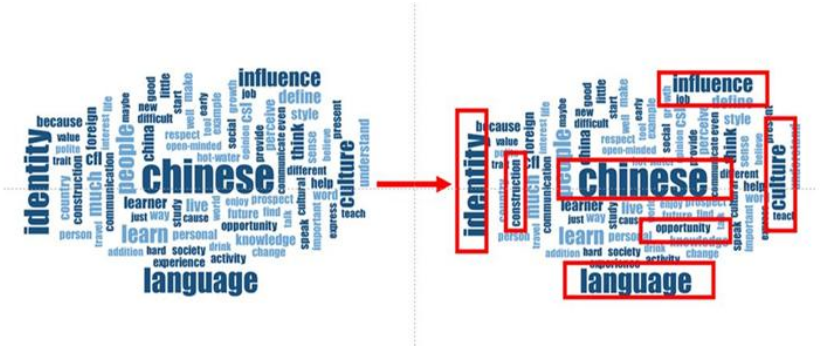

Figure 1 Word Cloud Generated from all Participants' Combined Semi-Structured Interviews Transcripts and Written Narratives

The use of the word cloud was primarily chosen as a technique to visually depict and synthesize significant ideas from the participants' responses, to have a better understanding of their learning experiences with CFL and how it has

influenced their identities. The creation and exploration of various word clouds using a word cloud application from the viewpoint of a researcher seems to have the potential to enhance data analysis and discoveries, depending on how the method is applied. This corroborates the findings of other researchers who have investigated the use of word clouds to facilitate data analysis [44,45-46].

5.5 Discussion

The findings indicate that learning Chinese as a foreign language can play a significant role in learners' identity construction, particularly by fostering personal growth, cultural awareness, and social engagement. Most participants demonstrated an awareness of the relationship between language learning and identity, supporting prior research in SLA and identity studies [10,12].

Participants who reported identity change emphasized the importance of social interaction and communication with Chinese speakers. Through language use, learners gained access to cultural and symbolic capital, enabling them to position themselves more confidently within both local and global contexts. These findings align with Norton's assertion that language learning involves investment in social identity and imagined futures. At the same time, the resistance expressed by some participants highlights that identity construction through language learning is not uniform. Learners who viewed identity as fixed were less likely to interpret language learning as transformative, even when acknowledging its practical benefits. This supports poststructuralist perspectives that identity is negotiated differently depending on individual histories and beliefs [7].

Overall, the study suggests that CFL learning influences not only linguistic competence but also learners' perceptions of themselves and their place in the world. Even when learners deny identity change, their narratives reveal shifts in attitudes, behaviors, and opportunities associated with language learning. These findings underscore the value of adopting a sociocultural perspective in CFL/CSL education and highlight the need for pedagogical practices that acknowledge learners' multiple and evolving identities.

6 CONCLUSION

This study mainly explored the influence of learning the Chinese language as a foreign or second language on identity construction of international students at one of the universities of China, and the possible reasons for the formation of their identity were analysed by using qualitative data analysis and a semi-structured interview as the main instruments. According to our findings, the processes of identity formation and language acquisition are interconnected. Language is not only a communication tool, but also an instrument for expressing and negotiating identity. Whenever they interact in a foreign or second language, language learners construct and negotiate their identities. However, the relationship between language learning and identity construction is a complex topic. While language learning can be a site for identity construction and negotiation, not all language learning experiences necessarily lead to identity construction.

Supporting linguistic and cultural identity development. The findings of the study highlight the intricate connections between language learning and identity construction. Educators and policymakers can use these insights to better support CFL/CSL learners in developing their linguistic and cultural identities, fostering a sense of belonging and confidence in their language abilities.

Although much has been accomplished, there is still a substantial amount of research that needs to be done. First, provide interesting research questions to know more about students' CFL identity. Secondly, involve more participants and create a larger data analysis. Finally, the findings should be supported by rich and triangulated data.

COMPETING INTERESTS

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