

## **Pragmatics of Back Mirror Discourse: Understanding the Need and Influence of the Inscriptions Written on the Vehicles in the Malakand Division**

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### **Abstract**

Languages play an important role in the identification and representation of cultural differences. This study aims to identify the cultural traces inscribed on the back mirrors of vehicles in the Malakand division. This research adopts a mixed-method approach for data collection and data analysis. The data has been collected through rigorous field activities and surveys. The data has been analyzed with the help of the Critical Discourse Analysis framework. After a thorough analysis of the data, it has been found that there is a heavy influence of cultural nuances, political ideologies, and local customs in the discourse of back mirrors. Similarly, the public perception also shows that such inscriptions are always written to express their personal feelings, religious, cultural, political, and family inclinations. This research is crucial to understanding this new yet important and unexplored dimension of Asian culture and discourse. In the future, researchers can further explore such discourse in other areas of Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Back Mirror Discourse, Written Inscriptions, Cultural Traces, CDA, Malakand.

### **Introduction**

Language is a purely human and non-instinctive system of communication in which humans share their emotions, ideas, and thoughts by using different symbols that we create voluntarily. It is not something that we are born with but something we develop through social interactions around us (Sapir, 1921). Language is usually used by human beings in a social context, and it helps in communicating their needs, ideas, and emotions to one another (Labov & Springer, 1970). According to Lange (1987), language and culture are interconnected, and many researchers claim that both culture and language are closely linked.

Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics in which meaning is studied in a specific situation or context. It plays an important role in communicating different genres of meaning to different kinds of people through the use of language. It presents an organized way of interpreting the meaning of language in context. Every language has a context, and it is the context that decides the meaning.

Linguistic context and situational context are two basic forms of context. "Linguistic context" is a linguistic environment in which words or phrases are interpreted. While situational context refers to a situation where the message is either conveyed or interpreted (Karthik, 2013; Hassan, 2022).

Culture and language are interconnected, and many researchers believe that culture and language are closely linked (Lange, 1987). According to Hall (2013), in applied linguistics and other related fields, language is a concept that is developing increasingly. Language and culture are all about the centrality of evaluation in investigating suspicion related to the world (Valencia, 2017). Elmes (2013) stated that first language learners captivated in their cultural relationship between language and culture commonly never come to question.

Similarly, in the current research study, the researchers are looking for cultural traces portrayed through the language inscribed on the back mirrors of vehicles in the Malakand division. The study will provide readers with an insight into the cultural traces that are represented through the language. The researchers have also analyzed how language can be used to portray culture in this specific sort of discourse that we have created and collected.

### **Research Question**

1. How has the culture been represented through the inscriptions on the back mirrors of vehicles in the Malakand division?
2. What is the influence of such inscriptions on the common public in the Malakand Division?

### **Literature Review**

It is frequently accepted that language is a part of culture. Jiang (2000) stated that without language, culture would not be possible. Language is influenced and shaped by culture. It is the symbolic representation of an individual since it comprehends their historical and cultural background, along with their means of living and their ways of living and thinking. Some individuals argue that language is the mirror of culture, in the intuition that people can observe a culture through its language. Language and culture build a living organism; language is flesh, and culture is blood. Deprived of culture, language would be dead; deprived of language, culture would have no structure (Khan & Hassan, 2024).

Khajieva (2024) addressed the basic aspects of pragmatics, which were drawn from the contributions of some scholars, such as Aznaurova and Adams (1990), who emphasized the influence of context in the interpretations of language. Adams addressed the variations between semantics and pragmatics; he mainly focused on the importance of considering the users of a language. While Aznaurova discussed the basic units of language and their relations to the users of language and their context (Fatima et al., 2024).

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Data Collection**

The research data consists of images of the rearview mirrors of various vehicles. This data was collected in the Malakand Division, using mobile devices for photography. The images were taken from different types of vehicles, including rickshaws, autocycles, trucks, and Suzukis. The photographs were captured along the roadside and at various stations.

#### **Public Data Collection**

The researchers conducted interviews with vehicle drivers and locals in the targeted area to understand the reasons behind the inscriptions on vehicle rear-view mirrors and gather the opinions of people regarding these inscriptions. Initially, consent was obtained from all interviewees. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for open-ended responses. Interviewers asked questions such as, "What influence do these inscriptions have on people?" and "What is the purpose of writing quotes or poetry on the back mirrors of vehicles?" The responses

were recorded using a mobile phone and subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis by the researchers.

### **Data Analysis**

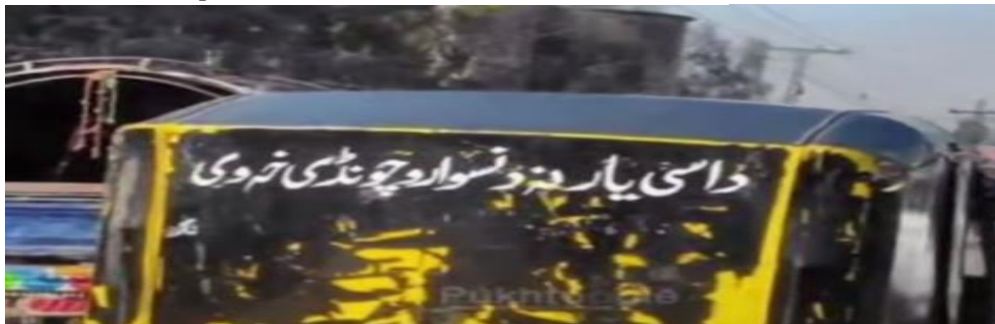
This research employs a mixed-methods approach for data analysis. The images were analyzed using Fairclough and Wodak's (1997) model of critical discourse analysis. Additionally, the data collected from public questionnaires were examined using a data-driven thematic framework inspired by the work of Braun and Clarke (2006).

### **Results and Discussion**

The researchers of the current study have developed a data-driven thematic framework. Each category identified in the following sections is deeply rooted in the local cultural and religious contexts, reflecting the unique beliefs, practices, and values of the community. This thoughtfully designed framework aims to provide future researchers with a valuable resource, enabling them to investigate and explore their own cultural and religious settings more effectively. By using this framework, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the interplay between culture and religion in various contexts.

#### **Cultural Inscriptions**

*Figure 1: Cultural Inscriptions on the Back Mirrors*



This picture shows the unique obsession of Pashtun people. The text means that Naswar (snuff) is better than your beloved. Naswar is some sort of nicotine which is kept in the mouth for some time, and people who keep that Naswar feel well. Naswar is always present in the pocket of people who use it. The text highlights that your beloved is not always with you to give you peace and comfort, but Naswar is always there to mitigate your tension and anxiety. It's not about promoting Naswar, but to show the hidden cultural relevance of Naswar in Pashtun culture. And this cultural text is often inscribed on the back mirrors of vehicles.

The text might trigger some people in society because of the term Naswar, but it is part of their society, and it shows Pashtuns' identity, though it is absurd, but it is reality. These sorts of inscriptions also show the power of language and how sarcastically the beloved is criticized.

## Political Inscriptions

Figure 2: Political Inscriptions on the back Mirrors



The text shown in the figure above reflects the political sentiments of the people in the country. It conveys the message that we are not slaves, so what do you expect us to do? This statement is a famous quote from ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan, which he delivered during a public rally. At that time, he claimed that a cipher from America ordered Pakistan's establishment to remove him from office. In that dialogue, he emphasized that we are not slaves and are not obligated to follow external commands. This narrative resonated widely and garnered significant support from the populace. The text illustrates public sentiment and the prevailing political ideology among the people of Pakistan. They desire a country that is free to make its own decisions without succumbing to the influence of more powerful nations. The populace seeks both personal and national freedom from any form of oppression. In just a few weeks, these three statements drastically altered the political landscape, ideology, and beliefs of the Pakistani people—transformations that had been building for 70 years.

## Inscriptions Reflecting Social Norms

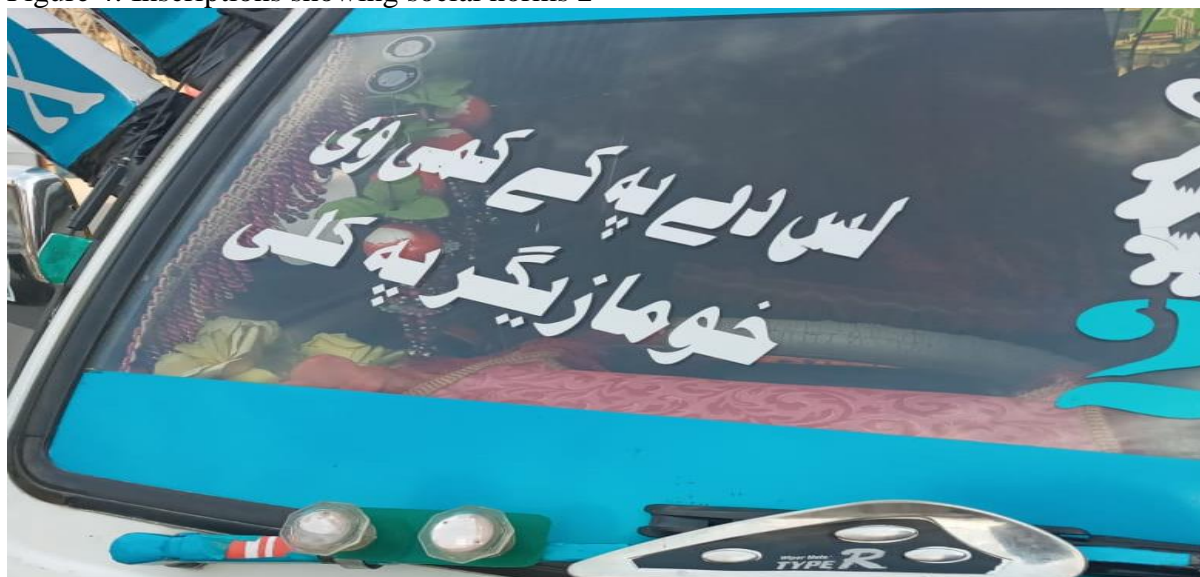
The text in Figure 3 conveys that being black is not a detriment; rather, we are individuals with pure hearts. It illustrates the Gora complex/white complex within our culture and the inferiority complex often felt by black people. Light-skinned individuals tend to enjoy certain privileges in our society, while dark-skinned individuals are frequently overlooked, and their opinions are often disregarded. In the image, the auto owner expresses emotions related to being dark-skinned, emphasizing that it's perfectly fine to be black because we possess beautiful hearts. Society often focuses on outer appearances and fails to recognize the inner beauty present in individuals of color. This situation highlights the reality of racism that exists in our society, where children learn from a young age that being dark-skinned is equated with ugliness and that privileges are reserved for white individuals. The driver wants to clarify that while our outer appearance may be judged, deep down we have hearts of gold.



Figure 3: Inscriptions showing social norms 1



Figure 4: Inscriptions showing social norms 2



The text in Figure 4 emphasizes that while earning money is important, spending the afternoon in the village holds greater significance. It highlights the value of Pashtun village life, particularly during the afternoons when young people gather to play games, socialize, or take leisurely walks with friends. Elders also come together to chat and catch up with one another. This time serves as a refreshing break for people of all ages. Spending the afternoon in one's village brings satisfaction and mental peace after a long day of hard work. The text underscores that being in the village during this time is more valuable than money. It suggests that the pursuit of wealth should not overshadow the importance of relaxation and emotional well-being, which can be found while spending time with friends. It conveys that for the villagers; a simple life prioritizing mental peace and satisfaction is more significant than financial gain.

### Public Perception of the Back Mirror Inscriptions

#### Religious Influence

People have various opinions about the inscriptions on the back mirrors of vehicles. Many drivers choose to write Islamic quotes that reflect their religious beliefs, such as messages about the importance of prayer, honesty, and refraining from sinful activities. These religious quotes are

generally well-received, especially in areas where the population is predominantly religious-minded. Residents appreciate quotes that convey positive and religious messages. While there are many other types of quotes inscribed on vehicle mirrors—ranging from love and obsession to various personal sentiments—the individuals interviewed by researchers predominantly favored quotes related to their faith. They believe that these messages have a lasting impact on the community. Vehicles traveling through local markets are seen by people of all ages, from children to adults. When children encounter these religious quotes, their natural curiosity often prompts them to ask about their meanings. Once they understand these quotes, they are likely to remember them and may even share their meanings with peers. This is the profound impact a single quote can have on children. Overall, individuals in the community have expressed their preference for religious quotes over other sayings found on vehicle mirrors.

### **Attention Seeking**

Some vehicle owners have a fascination with writing poetry, quotes, or using various stickers to personalize their cars. They often engage in this activity for fun and as a form of self-expression. Many drivers decorate their vehicles with flowers, poetic quotes, and other embellishments to stand out from their peers. They write quotes in contrasting colors alongside relevant images to impress and attract passengers, primarily for their satisfaction. Researchers have interviewed people in the area about this phenomenon. Some individuals believe that everyone has the right to do whatever they please with their vehicles since they are their personal property. However, the majority contend that many drivers seek attention through these decorations. Some interviewees suggested that these individuals may have insecurities; thus, they embellish their vehicles as a way to cope. For instance, some drivers inscribe names like Khan, Malak, and Bacha onto their cars. Although they may claim these titles, it is implied that they feel neglected and use these inscriptions to address their insecurities. Additionally, some vehicles feature unethical or vulgar quotes aimed at garnering attention from the public. Residents in the targeted area believe that drivers with quotes on their car mirrors want to impress others and gain appreciation, but sometimes they face humiliation from elders due to the inappropriate nature of these quotes, which are often considered unethical or immoral. The public can easily discern the intention behind the quotes and often respond appropriately. While many people do not always discourage quotes on vehicle mirrors, they tend to appreciate and encourage those that convey positive messages.

### **Personal Thoughts**

The emotional expressions displayed by drivers on vehicles in the Malakand division provide a unique insight into their personalities, values, and sentiments. Through entertaining slogans, heartfelt messages, and personal values, drivers reflect their individuality and creativity. These writings help identify the drivers, showcasing their cheerfulness and emotional releases. Additionally, they often feature symbols, logos, or phrases that reveal their attachments, interests, or obsessions, offering a glimpse into their psyche and presenting a new perspective on life. By expressing themselves on their vehicles, drivers create connections with like-minded individuals, spark conversations, and add a personal touch to the driving experience. This allows us to see them as individuals rather than just vehicle operators. The range of thoughts and expressions varies widely, from playful jokes and witty one-liners to insightful quotes and thought-provoking messages. Each one gives us insight into the driver's personality, values, and life experiences. Some drivers use their vehicles as a canvas to convey their emotions—whether it's frustration, joy, or love—while others display stickers or writings that reflect their deeper beliefs and preferences. This provides a window into their moral compass and worldview. These emotional expressions also serve as a form of self-expression, allowing drivers to take ownership of their space and communicate their messages. Whether it's a humorous bumper sticker or a heartfelt message on a rearview mirror, these expressions add a unique dimension to the driving

experience, making each vehicle a reflection of its driver's personality and style. By exploring these expressions, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex emotions and thoughts that influence human behavior and appreciate the individuality and creativity of each driver.

### **Political Inclinations**

The individuals who write slogans on vehicles have a significant influence on those around them. They select these phrases and display them on the back mirrors of cars. When people write political slogans on their vehicles, they convey a political message and show their support for specific leaders. These slogans reflect love, respect, and loyalty to their chosen leaders. In Pakistan, many people draw from the speeches of leaders like Imran Khan to create their slogans. For example, the phrase “absolutely not” indicates strong support for him and suggests commitment to his vision. “Captain will return” expresses public loyalty and solidarity, signaling to other political parties that they prefer Imran Khan over any alternative leader. The slogan “We want Naya Pakistan” reflects a desire for change and demonstrates faith in Imran Khan as the key figure capable of improving the country's infrastructure and future. Supporters of other political parties in Pakistan also prominently display short phrases, images, and symbols on their vehicles to express their connection with their leaders and parties. For instance, PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz) supporters use slogans like “Sher Hamara leader hai” and “Vote ko izzat do,” which convey their love and respect for the party, emphasizing the importance of honoring the electoral process. Similarly, supporters of the PPP (Pakistan People’s Party) showcase slogans such as “Bato Zinda Hai” and “Roti, Kapra, Makaan,” highlighting their belief that the PPP is the only party dedicated to helping the poor in Pakistan. These phrases communicate a political message that the Pakistan People’s Party is the loyal advocate for the underprivileged.

### **Conclusion**

Languages play a crucial role in expressing and appreciating the richness of cultural diversity. This research was of the aim to discover the cultural and social messages embedded in the scripted inscriptions found on the back mirrors of vehicles in the Malakand division. The political and social ideologies prevalent among the community in the Malakand Division are vividly expressed through the inscriptions on vehicles’ back mirrors, which serve as a canvas for both personal and collective expression. Furthermore, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of back mirror inscriptions as a significant aspect of local culture. These messages often resonate with deep emotions, ranging from declarations of loyalty to beloved political figures, tributes to family members, to expressions of religious and cultural sentiments. This research also shows that these seemingly simple messages encapsulate the identities and beliefs of individuals, transforming back mirrors into more than just reflective surfaces. They become vital communicative artifacts within the community.

### **Contribution of the Study**

This study represents a groundbreaking exploration of the pragmatics of back mirror discourse in the Malakand region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan. As KPK is one of the most culturally rich provinces in Pakistan, the residents are known for expressing their emotions in various ways. This study is significant for two main reasons. First, it introduces the concept of back mirror discourse to the field of discourse studies. Second, it examines how this type of discourse reflects the social and cultural norms of the region. This research also paves the way for future researchers to work and explore such discourses in other cities of the country using the same thematic frame created in the current study.

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