Objectifying Speech Act of Silencing: A Thematic Study of Paradoxical Portrayal of Silenced Women in *Bol*

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ABSTRACT: *Objectification theory by Nusbaum adapted by Papadaki, is further appropriated for the present study. Since objectification in the film Bol is a consistent pattern, the central female protagonist Saleha is seen defying the stereotypical silence expected of an obedient daughter. She is silenced on various occasions in the film, yet she speaks up right before receiving the death penalty. Paradoxically the translation of Bol is to speak up, however, this uneasy task requires undaunting courage from Saleha, who had to sacrifice even her life to be heard by the newspaper reporters. She raises her voice against the unjust behavior of her father, consequently, the backlash from the act of silencing is manifested in utterances aimed to reduce her to a silent object. She gets a chance to tell her unheard story to the media before her voice is paradoxically silenced forever. To find out the silencing patterns in female characters' on-screen portrayals, the systematic thematic analysis helped to formulate codes of objectifying speech acts. The verbal utterances containing speech act of silencing are extracted from the film's transcription. The data are further categorized to formulate sub-themes. The findings reveal some sub-themes in the process of silencing by the male objectifier (s), the target of which is invariably a female object. The study finds twelve utterances that execute, and sustain the silencing power of the oppressors, which are further thematically bifurcated into subthemes.*

 Keywords: Female objectification, silencing, Bol, thematic analysis

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Introduction

Taking linguistic pragmatism as its core concept, this study adopts an epistemological approach to the phenomenon of female objectification (Papadika). To discover and infer knowledge in its new forms, epistemological research allows us to form a worldview about knowledge, its sources, and how it is gathered. The pragmatic view of knowledge construction is the area of philosophy that deals with the useful and practical aspects of any phenomenon, in the present study which is the linguistic expression such as speech acts. The objectification phenomenon is manifested in language. So, objectification is not only reducing women to senseless, senile, or playful objects through actions but also through words. Hence the language forms (utterances of silencing) and their functions (objectifying women) are combined in this pragmatic approach toward Objectification.

Pragmatics focuses on experiences and actions rather than rigid doctrines or rules (Clarke and Vissera). Through the examination of the micro functions of objectifying utterances, the macro functions prevailing in society are confirmed. So, in this study, objectification is approached through verbal expressions taken from films and further classified to determine both their objectifying function and linguistic form. Pragmatism allows the explanation of phenomena not only in terms of their features but the way they can be approached in terms of their specific functions in social settings (Clarke and Vissera).

Treating the other as an object is the most dangerous type of bias (Nussbaum). Although many different types of objectification have been studied, two standout ones are taking someone as a target and

using them as a means to an end and depriving the target of their
basic human and mental capacities (Nussbaum, Papadaki, Wang &
Krumhuber,).

According to Martha Nussbaum, women as objects are treated in
seven objectifying ways which include instrumentality, denial of
subjectivity, denial of autonomy, inertness, violability, ownership,
and fungibility. Langton further adds three features to this list;
reduction to appearance, silencing, and reduction to body, which is
compiled by Papadaki. The study is carried out by taking only one
of the ten features of Objectification theory, which is silencing.
This theme is selected considering the title of the film which means
to speak up, making it a sharp paradoxical combination of silencing
versus hushing up.

Speech Act theory discusses three tenants; the elocutionary force
gives forms their meanings, the illocutionary force carries out the
speakers' meanings, and the perlocutionary force describes the
perceived effects on the listener. An illocutionary act expresses a
character's personal opinions or intentions, while they engage in
illocutionary behavior. They speak with an intended meaning that
the listeners, or audience, are supposed to understand. The
utterances must be understood in the context of their specific use
(Searle). Thus, according to Searle, speech acts cannot be
understood separately. They are intertwined with the network of
assumptions about women's place in society. The context of the
verbal content that is spoken is a component of the illocutionary act
to understand the speaker's intentions.

The fundamental illocutionary speech act is classified according to
Searle's taxonomy of linguistic utterances (Searle). Since
objectifying language is used to perform specific verbal actions that
turn women into objects, data in the form of utterances is

categorized and linked with speech acts to materialize the true intent of the language use. The actual practical application of a statement in a specific cultural context reveals the intended meaning of that statement. The objectifying utterances are further classified into their functions and forms to find their objectifying speech acts.

The way women are portrayed on screen is a debatable concern for feminist film analysts, researchers, and media critics (Rizvi). Film critics, for instance, Wajiha Raza Rizvi, on the one hand, is critical of the *chooi mooi* image of women, whereas others are concerned about the bold female image (Ali Khan and Ahmed Ali Nobil). The problem lies in the fact that there is disagreement on the axiology of women's on-screen depiction. Bol's central female protagonist Saleha is neither a "chooi mooi" nor an item song singer. She is a simple woman who talks sense and is punished by silencing objectifies. She cannot be framed into any of these pole-apart categories.

Discussing the screen image of Muslim women, Rafi argues that the rudimentary dialogues show inhumane treatment of women which in the current study is extended as objectification. Women are shown as silent on screen, as a strategy to foreground their helplessness. However, this portrayal gives a certain message to the female viewers to enact power. Rafi finds Muslim women as helpless victims, ignorant, duped, and caricatures in films, and so are the women portrayed in *Bol*. A certain image of women when it is globally accepted is recycled by other filmmakers (Rafi).

Amidst the clash of voicing and hushing up the film portrays struggle. So, the research aims to find objectification in the form of silencing in *Bol*. Women are being silenced for many reasons such as, to keep them inferior and to condone illogical decisions made against their will. The binding thread in all such situations is

objectification, which is a process of reducing the target to a mere silent object by disregarding her thoughts, feelings, emotions, and free will.

Research Question

1. How verbal objectification manifested in the silencing of women is portrayed in the film *Bol*?

Literature Review

Cinema contributes to the construction of meaning on pervasive social and patriarchal beliefs, rather than just reflecting society. The significance of films and film study cannot be ignored in forming, sustaining, and reshaping stereotyped roles. For instance, both the virtuous mother and the seductive whore were used as models for stereotypical roles of women used to attract the male gaze (Smelik 2). Likely offensive stereotyping hurts the audience. While portraying a false image of women and femininity, classical cinema also perpetuates myths that feminist film theorists find objectionable (Smelik).

An example of unpleasant stereotyping is observed in Pushto films. According to Khan and Ahmad (2010), Pakistani Pushto cinema titillates a patriarchal and conservative society that reflects misogyny. The dance scenes detract from the portrayal of women in Pushto films. Shehnaz, a well-known Pushto actress who appeared in over 150 movies, overcame many obstacles and challenges to become a Pushto film director as well. In a challenging patriarchal society with a male audience, she portrays an independent woman character who can take her vengeance for the suffering and loss inflicted on her by men. (p, 158). In the same way, the female lead in the 1990 Pushto film Haseena Atom Bomb

is depicted as an avenging woman. In the subsequent story, she is objectified as an unsteady masculine mixture for her retaliation for the rape from which she suffered (Ahmad).

However, the film Bol breaks the power of traditional patriarchy by presenting females' voices. Beenish and Jamil used feminist theory to analyze *Bol*. Their theoretical framework is based on Kristeva (1980). They set out to identify different types of discrimination against women. Applying Kristeva's feminism model, they also identified levels of degrading treatment and violence against women. They opine that cruel behaviors are condoned by religion while remaining out of step with both religious doctrine and any humanitarian society. Along with psychological and financial control exercised by the oppressive male, physical and sexual violence is depicted in the movie. Therefore, by speaking out against social injustice against women, "Bol" defends the oppressed women who are silenced because they must understand religion to be used in its name.

Similarly in other films, this pattern of oppression in the name of religion is observed. Men oppress women and practice patriarchy by using the idea of religion (Rehman). He notes that Sikhism is used as a patriarchal practice to kill the women who escaped kidnapping by Muslim men at the time of Pakistan and India's partition in his analysis of the movie Silent Waters (Khamosh Pani). In the name of honor, a Sikh pilgrim murdered 22 of his women (2016, p. 58). Beenish and Jamil examined psychological violence and discovered instances of intimidation when Zainab and her sisters were denied an education, instances of harassment when Zainab and her sisters were routinely observed for their daily activities, and instances of threats that were frequently made by Zainab's controlling father. They discover physical abuse in almost every conversation between the father and Zainab, where the father

would always slap, hit, or push the daughter when he could not
respond to her pointed questions. They also document instances of
sexual assault. Economics was the fourth category of violence. The
father, Molvi Sahib, exercised total control and forbade his wife or
daughter from making suggestions or helping with matters of
money.

In an attempt of deconstructing the screen image of oppressed
Muslim women in Hollywood films, Rafi observes discourses
resisting misogyny. Aligned with Discourse Analysis, voicing the
marginalized through the lens of Critical Theory helped in
formulating the theoretical perspective of the study. Further
elongating this nexus, Rafi used Deconstruction as an analytical
framework for analysis. The portrayal of silent women does not
only serve the purpose of passive presentation, but it also urges the
viewers to enact power. Women are victimized, controlled, and
subdued in many rural areas of Pakistan. However, the resistance
from new women is supported by media and film projections.
Women in Muslim society cannot be free from hegemonic
practices, prevalent and attested through religious discourses (ibid).
Analysis of the film *American Sniper* showed that while women are
portrayed as silent, their resistance is captured through multiple
other semiotic modes, such as gestures, facial expressions, and
gaze. Showing Muslim women is observed as a strategy to highlight
their oppressed plight (ibid). Women are either silent or wailing,
hence the coercion and hegemonic control are exercised through
prevalent religious discourses.

Another study finds a feminist ideological perspective, doing a case
study of the movie "Bol" The study was conducted using qualitative
discourse analysis (Shahid). In her findings from the movie,
Shahzadi (2015) mentions the tradition of "monopolization of
knowledge" by men (p. 18). She used written dialogues in the form

of 57 excerpts from the film texts to support her feminism by identifying five key themes. She argues that strong patriarchal ideologies are developed and propagated through language and they are also contested by media to discuss an alternative point of view. As a result, Pakistani researchers analyze the content and discourse of dialogues of the film *Bol* (Shahzadi).

Three movies with humanitarian themes are examined by Shankhamala Ray, one of which is the Pakistani movie "Bol." She admits that "women are stereotyped by media," but she also notes that Muslim women are portrayed as strong characters in movies, and that "the public discussion of women's lives is unusually coded" in those movies (Ray 2). By recording the dialogue from movies and maintaining a feminist ideological perspective, did a case study of the movie *Bol*. She conducted a qualitative discourse analysis (Shahid). In her qualitative case study of the movie *Bol*, Shahzadi mentions the tradition of "monopolization of knowledge" by men (p. 18). She used written dialogues in the form of five key themes that she had identified. This demonstrates how movies reflect life while also presenting images that are larger than life. Previous studies in the context of Pakistan either relied on theoretical textual, content, or visual analysis. The analyses that applied a feminist lens to various data sets came under fire for depicting women as either aggressive and masculine or shy and oppressed. The researcher's and critics' main concern continues to be how to demonstrate violence and crimes against women. The binary gender differences are the basis for the deep structures used in the construction of a film. To theorize and frame methods for film analyses, semiotics, Marxism, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis are frequently used (Smelik).

Methodology

From the review of the literature, it was found that Bol is a much-acclaimed critics' favorite film. It is purposively selected for its themes of feminist concern. Since the film's screenplay was not available, the dialogues were manually transcribed, for further extraction of verbal data. From the transcribed texts the incidences of silencing were highlighted and categorized using thematic coding (Clarke & Braun). Thematic Analysis (TA) provides an organic approach in conducting coding of qualitative data. TA is not bounded, as it allows researchers to make analytical observations. Instead of summarizing the contents of data, TA helps identify specific, and not necessarily all, key features of the collected dataset. The verbal text of the transcribed film was considered for further extraction of silencing which is a major theme in Objectification Theory. The extracted data were labeled according to the doer of the verbal action. For instance, three objectifiers (all males) were identified, whereas no female was found in the silencing of others. The excerpts from the film's text were organized chronologically concerning each speaker's utterances.

Figure 1 shows the nexus of theoretical perspective and analytical framework.

Text of BOL Function ➡ Objectification/ Silencing ➡ Language ➕

Speech Acts

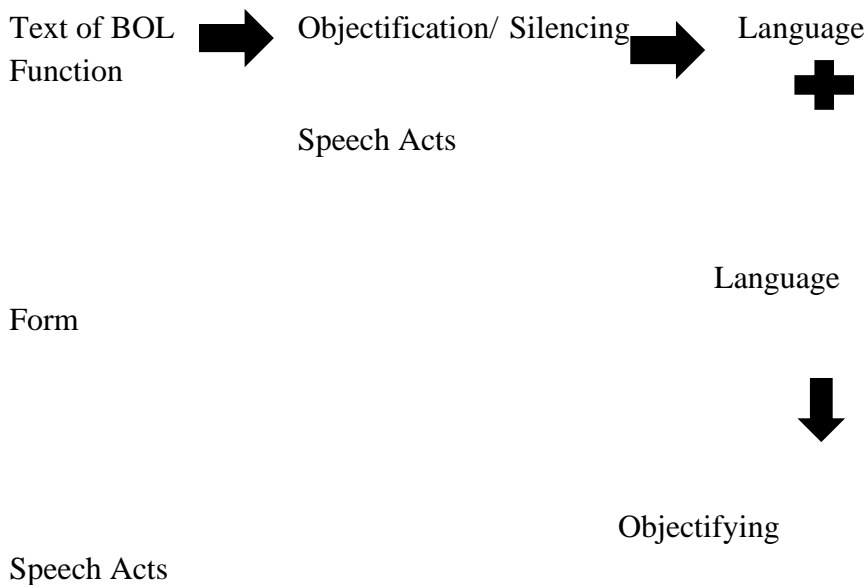Language

Form

⬇

Objectifying

Speech Acts

Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework of objectifying through silencing. It shows the appropriation of the Objectification Theory while deriving one segment from OT which is silencing. Further, the patterns of silencing and the bifurcation of objectified and objectifier are presented.

Results and Discussion:

The following table shows the patterns of silencing as a form of objectification. Further, verbal utterances are classified into speech acts.

Table 1 shows the representation of data and coding

Text	Code: Language function	Language form	Theme: Speech act	Sub-theme: Objectifying Speech act	Theme
1 My name is Suleman Dogar, and I am a jailor…At the cut-off time, I will stop the narration of the story, no matter at the stage it would be **(the jailor)**	Predicting the use of threat and controlling the narration of Saleha's story time.	Commanding and threatening	Commissive	Warning	Silencingby Objectifier 1
2 Why this girl didn't open her mouth in the court? **(The Secretary to the reporter)**	Making an excuse for her silence to suggest her guilt and justify her consequent death.	asking questions to hide his inabilities.	Representative	Arguing	Silencing by Objectifier 2

3 No, stop this talk. How come they have become so shameless under your supervision; they can even create hints of vulgarity in cricket. **(Hakeem).**	Exercising extreme control over speech and recreational activity	Directing, and shouting	Directive	Blaming	Silencing by Objectifier 3
4 Tell her not to be seen here by me, nor I would suffer to listen to her voice. **(Hakeem)**	Snatching the right to speech and freely moving in a tiny house	Indirect command	Directive	Restricting	
5 You are a man; thus you can start beating when you	Presenting an unjust norm of a male's beating up others	Explicitly submitting to unjust norms, while implicitly giving them	Representative	Submission	

lose your logic **(Saleha to father)**	when he loses logic	a verbal expression		
6 In a house where nothing is allowed other than breathing, have you imagined what will be the result of your frivolous talk? **(Saleha to sisters)**	Making other sisters realize their limit, and inherent danger in speaking while commenting on their plight	Forbidding to speak frivolously, highlighting the fear of father	Representative	Forbidding
7 Next time your sound must not be heard anymore. **(Hakeem)**	Exercising extreme control over speech	Directing not to speak in front of him	Directive	Order
8 I am asking them to put her to silence, or else I	Threatening of beating if she does not stop	Asking not to utter a sound	Commissive	Threat

will start beating them. **(Hakeem)**	answering back			
9 Stop crying, talk in a low voice. **(Hakeem)**	Not allowing them to mourn the murder of their sibling, controlling speech	Ordering to remain silent	Directive	Oppressive control
10 you evil-doer! **(Hakeem)**	Using abusive words to silence Saleha	Piece of abuse	Expressive	Using hate words to silence
11 (Slaps) Stop this baseless talk, I will break your face. **(Hakeem)**	Using verbal threats and physical torture to stop speech	Torturing to keep silent	Commissive	Threat
12 Beware, I forbid you to tell the daughters . **(Hakeem)**	Forbidding to reveal his secret marriage and threatening	Threatening and torturing	Directive	Command to shut her mouth

The transcribed data in the above table presents language forms used for objectifying women. Out of twelve silencing utterances, eight are spoken vehemently by Hakeem, whereas the targets are his wife and daughters. Two specific utterances in the form of expressive speech acts are used to attest to the controlling role of the father, Hakeem. The jailor and the secretary also use their power to silence, the group of media persons and the woman reporter, in the form of commissive and representative respectively.

The results show that the objectifier is always a male who has the power to decide when an object needs to be hushed up. Right from the beginning, we find a man identifying himself as the jailor. As he has the power to decide the cut of time for the female narrator's story. He is a studious professional who needed to perform his study to ensure that capital punishment is given to Saleha, before sunrise. Even before she unfolds her story, he gives his verdict that he would stop the story at the cut of time, which indicates his preoccupied ideas about the seemingly guilty Saleha. His inability to think outside the scope of his profession makes him rigid and unable to adapt or empathize. He is robotically devoid of emotions and empathy as much as a stereotypical man can be.

Similarly, the silence of Saleha at various stages of court trials was negatively used against her. It was made as an excuse for not rescuing her from capital punishment. The secretary to the president of the country did not comply with the request of the female reporter, who urged him to stop Saleha's hanging. As an excuse, he replied, that Saleha should have spoken up in the court during the trial. Saleha needed to be heard by a wider audience, to the rest of the country through media, In doing so, her decision of choosing the right time to speak up pathetically shows her helplessness and the failure of society's institution.

A female reporter becomes extremely moved during the narration of Saleha's story. She becomes moved to the extent that she tries to save her life by calling the government officials to save her from hanging. (2) The president's secretary explains by claiming that Saleha should have spoken up in court. Making justifications for not assisting her right away, he does not seem motivated to save her.

Saleha's voice does not have any effect on Hakeem. The utterances (3) and (4) show that at every step in her own house, she was unheard and misunderstood. Her voice was incapable of bringing any change or improvement during her life. She was forcefully hushed and beaten up when her father was unable to stand against her logic. Hakeem forbids his daughters from exercising any freedom of speech in leisure. His daughters mentioned their admiration for certain cricketers during a radio commentary of a game of cricket. He tells them to stop talking, and after hearing this, he calls them despicable. He also chastises his wife for raising their daughters to be blatantly sexual.

In a heated argument, Saleha claims that the benign cricket matches do not have to affect the religious mindset of the people of Pakistan and India. When Hakeem is unable to talk logically, he beats his daughter. As a response in utterance (5) Saleha speaks up in the form of a representative that his father is a male, and thus can use force whenever he thinks he has become flabbergasted. Instead of reasoning or accepting his ignorance he starts beating Saleha, his outspoken daughter, who even dares to raise questions against his obsolete orthodox ideas.

The younger sisters talk about their favorite cricketers. Saleha warns her sisters from drooling over handsome cricket stars. (6) Through a representative utterance, Saleha tells her younger sister that they have no other rights in that house than to breathe. They

must understand that their father's rage would be aroused by their shameless talk about cricket. Hence these girls were not even allowed to think, desire, or speak about their favorite stars.

Hakeem's rage is strangely directed only toward his first wife and daughters. He gets so offended by the nagging of Saleha that he strictly forbids her to say even a word in front of him. In utterances (7) and (8) Saleha is instructed by Hakeem not to speak up in his presence. If Saleha continues to speak, Hakeem says he will hit her. These words are forcefully uttered by Hakeem to reduce Saleha to mere silence. He considered it his right to snatch the freedom of speech from daughters, as he is their father.

Hakeem murders his poor rape victim transgender child. In a fit of fury (9) after killing Saifi, Hakeem forbids the girls from weeping and lamenting the loss of an innocent sibling. He commands them all to keep quiet. This utterance came right after the murder of transgender child Saifi's brutal murder. Hakeem did so to avoid any further verbal or physical harm that would inflict him or his family in the future. Saifi was silenced to death at the hands of his father. He did not want the cries of girls to be heard outside their small house. This silencing is another oppressive exercise of control and the worst dehumanizing form of objectification.

Hakeem keeps on displacing his wrath on Saleha as she is the only one who confronts him. In utterance (10) Hakeem abuses his daughter Saleha and beats up to silence her. Paradoxically, Hakeem is very polite with his prostitute wife, he never uses a piece of abuse for her, but he uses ill-tempered verbal abuse along with physical violence to control his first wife and daughter.

Hakeem's double standards are revealed in the fact that he disapproves of his daughter Ayesha's marriage to Mustafa, yet he marries Meena without letting any family members know about it.

For him, his actions were justified whereas her daughter's marriage was an act of shame, as she was married to a person with a different religious school. in (11) and (12) Hakeem asks his wife to stop talking with these words. Additionally, he is secretive about his second marriage to a prostitute. He slaps his wife and then threatens to beat her even harder. This shows his double standards regarding the marriage of his daughter which he disapproves because of the groom was from a different sect. On the other hand, his nikah with a prostitute, according to her was a formality. He accepted marrying Meena for the sake of money that he received from Saqa, the brothel owner, in return he had to impregnate Meena with a baby girl. This was the only incident when the wife raised her voice against the oppressive silencing control of Hakeem.

Conclusion:

The study finds twelve utterances of Objectifying silencing. All the references to these utterances are invariably female. Saleha being a central and the most outspoken character is usually the victim of silencing by the jailor, the Secretary, and her father. The objectifiers are invariably males. Ten of our twelve utterances are made to attest to the silencing power of Hakeem, out of which two utterances are said by Saleha. These two utterances have multiple functions. They sustain the patriarchal hegemony, yet they serve the purpose of giving his exploitative power a verbal outlet. The purpose is not to attest to his power, but to reveal his exploitation and double standards. The jailor exercised control by announcing that he would stop her story at cut-off time and would use force if he had to do that, by asserting, that the cameras of the reporters were fragile in front of his marching stick. He uses a commissive to threaten the media personnel. The secretary refuses to offer help to stop her punishment while making an argument against her silence in court. Eight overall objectifying utterances by Hakeem were found to

perform a silencing function. Out of these further themes were identified; first, he silenced when he did not have any answers to Saleha's logical questions, second, he silenced his wife to keep his marriage with a prostitute secret, third he silenced his daughters so that their cries could not be heard outside their small house. He threatens, orders, curses, restricts, and blames his power to silence his objects. The life of Saleha is sacrificed, but other lives including the life of their stepsister (the daughter of Hakeem and his prostitute wife Meena) were saved from institutional exploitation. Saleha is exploited at home, and in court, and refused to be given a voice on account of her inability to speak in the court, yet through media she is heard and remembered.

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