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"Negotiating the Unspeakable: A Discourse Analysis of Euphemisms in Fouzia Saeed's *Taboo*"

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Abstract

Fouzia Saeed's (2011) book *Taboo: The Hidden Culture of a Red-Light Area* examines the strategic use of euphemism, focusing on how unintentional expressions, silences, and substitutes navigate gendered violence, stigma, and power in Pakistan's patriarchal society. The research problem focuses on how euphemistic language in South Asian feminist diaries obfuscates and challenges dominant discourses, primarily exclusive frameworks of socio-religious restrictions and sensual labor standards. By unveiling the philosophical significance of these euphemisms, Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework aims to examine how they parallel and fight against gendered domination disparagingly. The study's methodology evaluates textual aspects, discursive practices, and extensive sociocultural contexts using a qualitative, interpretive approach based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model.By using Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* as a guide, nearby readings of *Taboo* reveal that euphemisms become rhetorical tools of confrontation and revolt, exposing universal inequalities while creating avenues for dissent and intervention. The results demonstrate that euphemism is a strategy of exchanging experience and uniqueness rather than merely evading. In South Asia and Pakistan, the consequences extend to feminist literary studies, helping to clarify how discourse shapes representations of gender, resistance, and postcolonial trauma.

Keywords:euphemism, Critical Discourse Analysis, *Taboo*, Fouzia Saeed, feminist discourse, postcolonial trauma, *Kartography*, Kamila Shamsie, gendered violence, South Asian literature

1. Introduction

Since language reproduces, reinforces, and occasionally opposes the ideas of its time and place, it is never objective. In Pakistan's sociocultural diverse and morally traditional societies, where open discussion of sex, gender roles, and relegation is still frowned upon, euphemistic dialect

proves to be a dangerous tool for navigating the unimaginable. Unintentional, unstiffened, or well-bred terminology used to indicate otherwise sensitive or stigmatized subjects is known as a euphemism. These are not just language artifacts; they are socially constructed devices that serve conversational and sociopolitical functions.An ethnographic portrayal of the survivors of sexual labor in Lahore's red-light district, Fouzia Saeed's *Taboo: The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area (2001),* provides an engaging setting for examining how etymology operates beneath the weight of social silence and moral judgment. To examine how euphemisms are used in *Taboo*, this study uses Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. It also rethinks how these philological stratagems not only adapt to the main socio-political chronicles from place to place, gender, sex, and scruples in postcolonial Pakistan, but also contest each other.

Fouzia Saeed's *Taboo* paves innovative ground by shedding light on the subsistent involvements of womenfolk whose subsistence is frequently cloaked in societal indistinctness. What makes the manuscript particularly ridiculous for an etymological and enlightening investigation is its calculated disposition of euphemisms to relate practices that persist in appalling mainstream Pakistani discourse. Inoffensive language in *Taboo* ensures that non merely disguise crudity; somewhat, the delinquent activates using a means of existence, conciliation, and confrontation indoors a domineering patriarchal (male-controlled) edifice. Footings such as "decent female," "client," or "labor" are contextually infused through coated senses that value hard, broad examination. This learning contends that euphemisms in *Taboo* are distant from or after kind—they are administratively stimulating lexes that divulge how supremacy goes over dialectal, chiefly on behalf of relegated individuals.

This paper contends that *Taboo* hires euphemisms using conversational paraphernalia that equally adapt towards, in addition to resisting, the leading socio-cultural philosophies of postcolonial Pakistan. Utilizing Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, the learning divulges how euphemistic language replicates multifaceted consultations amongst perceptibility and silence, intervention and resistance, propriety and unorthodoxy—eventually exposing the supremacy subtleties entrenched in philological illustrations of taboo topics.

In centering euphemism as both a linguistic veil and a narrative weapon, this paper positions Saeed's *Taboo* as a crucial text for understanding how the unspeakable is not only represented but actively negotiated through discourse. This negotiation is not incidental—it is structural, ideological, and deeply embedded in the narrative fabric of the text.

Research Gap

While *Taboo* by Fouzia Saeed has garnered attention in sociological, feminist, and anthropological circles for its ethnographic depth and bold engagement with the lives of sex workers in Pakistan, it has received limited critical engagement from a linguistic or discourse-analytical perspective. Most existing scholarship focuses on the thematic and socio-political implications of the text, overlooking the specific linguistic mechanisms—particularly euphemisms—that mediate taboo subjects. Euphemisms in *Taboo* have not been systematically examined as discourse strategies that reflect or challenge dominant ideologies surrounding gender, morality, and marginalization. Moreover, while Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is widely used in analyzing media, politics, and institutional texts, its application to ethnographic literature in the Pakistani context remains scarce. This research addresses that gap by applying Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model to *Taboo*, revealing how euphemistic language constructs and negotiates social taboos. By positioning *Taboo* alongside Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*, which similarly explores silences and the politics of naming, the study locates Saeed's text within a broader literary discourse that interrogates the unspeakable. Thus, this research contributes to critical linguistic studies and postcolonial feminist literature by revealing how euphemism functions ideologically in societies shaped by patriarchy, censorship, and cultural repression.

2. Literature Review

Euphemism, as an expansive stratagem, plays a dominant part in circumstances somewhere dialectal obligation is concurrently incomprehensible and divulge, particularly in civilizations formed by ethical bans, patriarchal scrutiny, and overseas deposits. In the interior of the Pakistani edifying and legendary site, this marvel develops unfluctuating extra marked, by way of euphemistic language, is not only an indicator of courtesy or politeness, nonetheless likewise aninstrument of general muzzling. In works like Fouzia Saeed's *Taboo* (2001), euphemisms are

organized to express about, rather than around, the subsistent certainties of sexual practice in Lahore's Heera Mandi. These euphemistic deviations convey conceptual heft, intensifying the wider sociocultural distress through identifying and talking about sex workers, corporeal self-sufficiency, and womanly activity. In Saeed's account, euphemisms act as premeditated linguistic tools that exchange between discernibility and expurgation, permitting the unspeakable to be uttered indoors communally permitted limitations. Despite the substantial role that euphemism plays in determining communal and secluded dissertations, learnt consideration of this topic within Pakistani literature remains comparatively rare, predominantly since the viewpoint of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This breach is conspicuous at what time put side by side with the rising frame of worldwide and local examination on how euphemistic countenance's edifice treatise on gender and supremacy.

How euphemisms embed cultural fears and power asymmetries, particularly in gendered contexts, has been confirmed by numerous thematic revisions. For example, Chaudhri, Tehseem, and Nazir (2022) examine euphemistic statements in Pakistani English print media, demonstrating how phrases on female anatomy and menstruation are purposefully omitted or softened to comply with socioreligious standards. Even while these linguistic changes appear harmless, they devalue and obscure the feminine body.

Accordingly, Mohi-ud-Din et al. (2023) and Zaman et al. (2022) examine how euphemism framing weakens media representations of gender-based violence and rape, resulting in discourses that hide the identities of the victims and the gravity of the crimes. These studies focus on the ideological function of euphemisms in media, but they rarely address how these linguistic techniques work in literary or ethnographic writings. This opportunity to investigate the connection between euphemism, representation, and resistance has not yet been seized by CDA academics, but Saeed's *Taboo* offers a distinctive platform as a hybrid book that blends social investigation with personal experience.

It is particularly startling that there are so few linguistic analyses of *Taboo*, given that it is one of the few first-hand depictions of women's lives in Pakistan's sex trade. Even though scholars like Raza, Rashid, and Malik (2022) use feminist literary approaches to study issues of exclusion and agency in Pakistani English novels, they usually don't go as far as discourse analysis. Existing

studies tend to focus on the sociological contributions of taboo rather than its rhetorical strategies.

The deliberate language Saeed uses, especially her euphemisms for sex, brothels, and gender norms, must be critically examined. These linguistic choices have other ideological functions in addition to being stylistic, such as navigating respectability politics, exhibiting cultural sensitivity, and protecting the narrator and her subjects from societal censure.One can gain a better understanding of how language mediates power relations and affects social identities by examining these patterns through the prism of Fairclough's CDA model.

To ascertain the ideological role of euphemistic expressions, Fairclough (2013) developed a three-dimensional framework that integrates textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice.Euphemisms are commonly employed at the textual level, prioritizing vocabulary, grammar, and coherence, as metaphorical constructs or lexical substitutions. The degree of discursive practice reveals how *Taboo* was shaped by its sociopolitical context and how different readerships interpret it by considering the processes of production and consumption. Lastly, the extent of social practice connects the book to broader ideological frameworks such as postcolonial identity, nationalism, and patriarchy.

Recent uses in Pakistani contexts, including the analysis of political speeches by Shakeel and Arshad (2023) and the study of gendered advertising by Hussain (2023), demonstrate how effective Fairclough's approach is at dismantling intricate discursive structures.The fact that none of this researchengages with literary or ethnographic texts or looks at euphemism as a discursive form represents a significant methodological gap that this study aims to address.

Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2002) provides a similar examination of gendered trauma, memory, and silence in postcolonial Karachi, while *Taboo* emphasizes euphemism as a strategy for living in a stigmatized group.Through thoughtful word choice and narrative pauses, Shamsie's story is also shaped by the unsaid: familial secrets, suppressed love, and sectarian slaughter. Scholars like Parveen (2020) and Nawaz, Jamil, and Rehman (2024) have shown how *Kartography* reflects Pakistan's fractured national consciousness through multivocality and narrative fragmentation.Although *Kartography* does not employ euphemism as explicitly as

Taboo, it participates in a broader literary tradition of negotiating the inconceivable, a notion central to postcolonial Pakistani fiction.As a result, *Kartography's* inclusion in this study's literary framework goes beyond simple comparison; rather, it places *Taboo* in a tradition of works that challenge linguistic conventions in the face of societal and political taboos.

Researchers from all over the world, such as Kapron-King and Xu (2021), have challenged traditional gender-based presumptions, strengthening the theoretical foundations for the study of euphemism.Their diachronic corpus analysis indicates that euphemistic conduct is more influenced by contextual and institutional variables than by binary gender standards. This insight is especially relevant to *Taboo* since Saeed, a female activist and narrator, employs euphemism not out of traditional feminine courtesy but rather as a deliberate response to stigma, surveillance, and the potential for public censure. As such, the employment of euphemisms by taboo persons can be viewed as rhetorical resistance—a means of negotiating societal norms while exhibiting presence, rather than just a means of concealment.

This study also expands on contemporary feminist and post-structural discourse analysis, which has highlighted how ambiguity, silence, and language either uphold or undermine hegemonic norms.In reports of sexual abuse, euphemism often serves an ideological aim by downplaying victim experiences and maintaining institutional reputations (Millar and Wilson, 2020). This tendency is compounded in Saeed's story because, rather than silencing the women she writes about, her use of euphemistic language gives them a voice within socially defined parameters. This discrepancy highlights the fact that euphemism is a dynamic discourse tool that, depending on the situation, can serve a variety of ideological objectives rather than being seen as a fixed or intrinsically repressive form.

When considered collectively, these theoretical and empirical threads demonstrate the significance and novelty of a discourse-analytic investigation of euphemism in *Taboo*.Existing research has provided critical insights into euphemism in media, advertising, and political speech, and has mapped out the broader sociolinguistic terrain of gender and silence in Pakistani discourse. However, none have brought these approaches to bear on a text like *Taboo*, which straddles the boundaries of activism, literature, and ethnography. Nor has any prior study applied Fairclough’s three-dimensional CDA framework to explore how euphemistic language

simultaneously negotiates visibility and invisibility for marginalized communities. By focusing on this understudied convergence of discourse strategy, gendered experience, and postcolonial reality, the present research seeks to fill a significant scholarly gap and contribute meaningfully to the fields of discourse studies, feminist literary criticism, and South Asian cultural studies.

What emerges from this review is a critical need to analyze euphemism not simply as lexical substitution, but as a culturally loaded discourse practice that negotiates visibility, morality, and resistance, especially in texts like *Taboo*, where the unspeakable demands discursive innovation.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which incorporates textual analysis, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice (Fairclough, 2013). The methodological approach is interdisciplinary, drawing on thematic analysis and close reading to complement the macro-level discourse analysis of language, power, and ideology. The focus is on how euphemistic expressions in Fouzia Saeed's *Taboo* function not merely as stylistic devices but as discursive strategies that reflect and resist sociocultural constraints. Although *Taboo* is primarily an ethnographic and sociological work, this study approaches it as a rhetorically constructed text—one that performs narrative labor similar to literary works. This interpretive stance allows for a CDA-driven reading that treats euphemisms as both linguistic artifacts and ideological maneuvers. Saeed's euphemisms are not neutral substitutes but discursive tools that negotiate public respectability, narrative authority, and the representational limits imposed by patriarchal and postcolonial norms.

At the textual level, the study conducts close readings of selected passages from *Taboo*, identifying lexical choices, syntactic structures, and rhetorical patterns that exemplify euphemistic language. At the level of discursive practice, the analysis examines the production and reception contexts of the text, particularly how Saeed's positionality as a female activist and ethnographer mediates her use of euphemism. At the level of sociocultural practice, the study considers how discourses around sexuality, honor, and gender in Pakistani society shape and are shaped by the euphemistic language Saeed employs.

The interpretative framework is informed by feminist and postcolonial theory, which provides critical insight into how power operates through language. According to Millar and Wilson (2020), feminist theory is necessary to examine the gendered components of euphemism, particularly how patriarchal discourse makes women's bodies, sexualities, and labor unacceptable.It also highlights the relationship between language and agency, showing how Saeed's deliberate.By demonstrating how Saeed's purposeful usage of code wordsboth conceals and exposes the realities of sex workers in a socially acceptable way, it also highlights the relationship between language and agency.

The inquiry gains support from postcolonial theory, which places the discursive silence of excluded groups within a larger historical context of colonial repression and the creation of national identity.Euphemism in *Taboo* is a reflection of colonial morality, which enshrined respectability, shame, and silence, as well as individual desire. The study views euphemism as a hybrid tactic that eases the conflicts between subaltern speech and prevailing standards of intelligibility, drawing on theorists such as Spivak and Bhabha.

A comprehensive examination of how euphemism in Taboo both conceals and negotiates power relations is made possible by combining various critical instruments and theoretical viewpoints, making the unthinkable somewhat sayable within linguistic and cultural constraints. In the end, this method allows the study to demonstrate how, in addition to avoiding offense, to use euphemism in *Taboo*, one must skillfully manipulate words to make the unimaginable somewhat palatable while negotiating a hostile discursive environment.

4. Analysis

In Taboo, Fouzia Saeed skillfully uses euphemistic language to simultaneously show the unimaginable within socially acceptable bounds and shield against moral criticism.Euphemisms in the text represent both resistance and conformance to dominant discourses of gender, morality, and respectability, as demonstrated by Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis—textual, discursive, and social practices. At the textual level, euphemistic substitutions such as **“work”** to denote sex work and **“customer”** to denote a client are not mere linguistic softeners; they are ideological markers. The repetition of such phrases throughout the

narrative reveals how normalized euphemism becomes within the world of Heera Mandi, serving to both protect and marginalize. One of the recurring phrases, **"She has been working since she was twelve"** (Saeed, 2001, p. 67), reframes child sexual exploitation within a vocabulary of labor. This neutralizing of exploitative realities through euphemism reflects the normalization of systemic abuse, allowing a community under surveillance to develop a coded lexicon that softens violence into economic activity.

Fairclough's notion of "ideologically invested discourses" is particularly useful in understanding how euphemism becomes a discursive practice that both obscures and reveals power. Saeed's text constantly negotiates the visibility of the women she represents, and euphemism acts as a discursive shield—a way to narrate truths without transgressing moral codes. In one instance, the narrator reflects on the ways society discusses prostitution without naming it: **"They call it entertainment work or dancing, but everyone knows what they mean"** (Saeed, 2001, p. 54). Here, the euphemistic veil is not just a feature of the sex workers' speech but of society's broader discursive discomfort. What emerges is a dual-layered silencing, where the women internalize euphemism as a form of self-preservation, and the larger society uses it to avoid moral confrontation. Euphemism, therefore, becomes a collective denial mechanism that perpetuates silence while signaling complicity.

A comparative lens reveals striking discursive parallels in Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*, where euphemism often takes the form of narrative ellipsis and metaphoric substitution rather than lexical replacement. For example, when the narrator reflects on political violence and ethnic cleansing in Karachi, the language becomes abstracted and symbolic: **"There are things you just don't name, because once you do, they stop being myths and start being memories"** (Shamsie, 2002, p. 142). This evasion is not out of ignorance but out of fear—fear of rupturing the fragile social fabric holding families and identities together. Here too, euphemism—or its cousin, metaphor—functions as a linguistic means of survival, signaling trauma without explicitly naming it. This strategic ambiguity mirrors Saeed's use of softened vocabulary to manage social expectations. Both texts thus reveal that euphemism is not merely linguistic politeness; it is an ideological strategy for negotiating collective trauma.

At the level of discursive practice, Fairclough emphasizes how texts are produced and consumed within specific socio-historical contexts, and both *Taboo* and *Kartography* were written during moments of intensified cultural surveillance in Pakistan. Saeed's positionality as a female ethnographer and activist shapes her careful deployment of euphemisms. The necessity to protect her subjects from public shaming is evident in phrases like **"She is from a respectable family"** or **"She left home for better opportunities"** (Saeed, 2001, p. 93). These statements obscure the coercive circumstances that often drive women into sex work, but they also reflect Saeed's balancing act between narrating the truth and preserving dignity. Fairclough's concept of "interdiscursivity" helps us understand how multiple discourses—of respectability, morality, survival, and activism—intersect in these euphemisms, making them sites of ideological negotiation rather than mere linguistic substitution.

Shamsie, too, operates under similar constraints. Her characters speak in ellipses and symbolic allusions, particularly when discussing ethnic violence. In one poignant moment, Raheen's father says, **"The past has teeth. We pretend it doesn't bite, but it does"** (Shamsie, 2002, p. 188). This metaphor is a euphemism for the brutal violence of 1971, revealing how language is often mobilized to encode, rather than expose, traumatic national histories. The elliptical language of *Kartography*, therefore, shares a discursive DNA with the euphemistic strategies of *Taboo*: both function within systems of surveillance, shame, and cultural constraint that render direct speech dangerous. These euphemisms and silences are thus not failures of articulation but purposeful rhetorical strategies that engage with Fairclough's notion of "hegemonic norms" at the level of everyday language.

From a sociocultural perspective, both texts navigate the legacies of colonial morality and the architecture of patriarchal control, making euphemism a critical tool of social practice. In *Taboo*, euphemisms are often invoked to maintain the facade of "izzat" (honor), a cultural construct deeply rooted in colonial and patriarchal ideologies. The phrase **"She does this work, but she is still a good girl"** (Saeed, 2001, p. 105) exemplifies how euphemistic narratives allow for the coexistence of stigma and moral justification. Here, "this work" becomes a rhetorical site of contestation—unnamed but powerfully charged. Fairclough's CDA urges us to see this not just as

a sentence but as a social action: a linguistic performance that reflects and reproduces the gendered norms of a society in which moral dichotomies are constantly negotiated.

Likewise, in *Kartography*, euphemism emerges as a postcolonial negotiation with inherited discursive norms. Scholars such as Parveen (2020) have argued that the novel's language is shaped by "fractured legibility"—a term that could equally describe the euphemistic narratives in *Taboo*. Both texts employ softened or symbolic speech to navigate institutionalized silencing and protect those made vulnerable by history, gender, or politics. Euphemism, in this light, becomes a postcolonial technology of expression, designed to survive within the contours of surveillance, shame, and trauma. This dual function—of concealment and survival—locates euphemism within what Spivak (1988) might call "the permissible speech" of subalterns. Euphemism, then, is not simply absence or silence, but a presence that speaks in culturally intelligible codes.

The euphemisms in *Taboo* often function as discursive placeholders that allow both speaker and listener to tacitly acknowledge the forbidden without transgressing the codes of public speech. Fairclough's view that discourse constitutes "a form of social practice" is exemplified in Saeed's representation of the transactional realities of Heera Mandi, where everyday language is shaped by survival under moral scrutiny. A telling instance is the repeated use of **"guests"** to describe men who frequent brothels (Saeed, 2001, p. 81). On the surface, "guest" suggests hospitality, civility, even familial warmth—yet in context, it thinly veils the exploitative power dynamic between sex workers and their clients. This substitution reflects a deeply ideological process in which linguistic choices are shaped by power structures, allowing those in vulnerable positions to name without naming, to negotiate safety through language. Such euphemisms are not neutral; they construct and sustain a social world where exploitation must masquerade as civility to remain culturally palatable.

In Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*, euphemistic strategies are less overtly occupational but equally potent in their narrative function. The violence surrounding the 1971 conflict and the ethnic unrest in Karachi is shrouded in metaphor, indicating that euphemism also plays a central role in the articulation of collective memory. A striking example appears when Karim says, **"The streets were full of smoke, but it wasn't just fire—it was forgetting"** (Shamsie, 2002, p. 197). The metaphor conflates literal destruction with emotional and historical erasure, emphasizing

how euphemism becomes a mechanism not only of survival but of selective remembrance. Fairclough's emphasis on the "production and consumption of discourse" helps us see how these linguistic choices are shaped by both historical trauma and audience expectations. The reader, positioned within this obfuscating discourse, must decode the unsaid—a process that mirrors the characters' attempts to make sense of a fragmented, euphemistically narrated past.

Saeed's ethnographic narrative, meanwhile, reveals how euphemistic discourse also operates along lines of respectability politics. In one passage, a madam describes her work as **"managing women's needs"** (Saeed, 2001, p. 112). Here, the phrase obscures the coercive conditions under which sex workers labor and frames the madam's role in terms of caregiving or management rather than control or exploitation. The euphemism transforms a stigmatized activity into something almost administrative. This reflects Fairclough's assertion that discourses are "sites of struggle" where ideologies compete for dominance. The attempt to reframe pimping as management illustrates a discursive reorientation that seeks legitimacy within an illegitimate system. The madam reclaims moral agency by manipulating language, engaging in what Norman Fairclough would term "resignification"—reworking the meaning of stigmatized terms to secure social credibility.

This resignification also appears in *Kartography*, where characters repeatedly use softened language to navigate entrenched ethnic divisions. When Raheen's parents finally confront the truth about the 1971 betrayals, they speak in vague, affectively neutral terms: **"We didn't choose the side we were on; the city chose for us"** (Shamsie, 2002, p. 205). The passive construction displaces agency and reframes betrayal as inevitability. Euphemism here functions to protect relationships from rupture; it becomes a language of forgiveness by omission. Scholars like Shaista Sirajuddin (2017) argue that such linguistic choices reflect the novel's engagement with "strategic amnesia," where personal and political reconciliation depends upon carefully curated silences. Euphemism, then, serves not only to conceal but to enable emotional survival, and in this respect, it mirrors the affective economy of *Taboo*, where language often does the emotional labor of containing stigma.

Furthermore, Fairclough's insight into how discourse simultaneously reflects and shapes social identities is evident in how euphemisms define the boundaries of womanhood in both texts. In

Taboo, the term **"respectable woman"** is invoked repeatedly— **"She's not like the others, she's from a respectable family"** (Saeed, 2001, p. 117)—drawing a clear moral line between sex workers and women deemed socially acceptable. This euphemism does more than obscure; it enforces a patriarchal ideology that ties women's worth to sexual purity and class background. The very act of differentiating a sex worker from a "respectable" woman through euphemism reinscribes the structures that marginalize the former. Fairclough's theory foregrounds how such textual features are not isolated but ideologically interlocked with broader power relations; the euphemism thus functions as a gatekeeper of social inclusion.

Similarly, in *Kartography*, euphemistic constructs around gender and ethnicity police the borders of identity. Raheen, struggling with the revelations about her family's past, says: **"I wish I could call it a mistake. But it wasn't. It was something we don't have the words for"** (Shamsie, 2002, p. 211). This meta-euphemism—an explicit admission of the failure to euphemize—reveals the limits of language in narrating guilt and complicity. The refusal to name becomes itself a discursive move that echoes Fairclough's idea of "textual silence," where the unsaid carries ideological weight. The inability to articulate the betrayal reflects a cultural and emotional impasse, where euphemism becomes a measure of inarticulability rather than evasion.

Both texts thus mobilize euphemism not simply to obscure but to structure affect, memory, and social belonging. Saeed's use of softened language aligns with Fairclough's concept of "discourse as ideology," where seemingly innocuous word choices participate in sustaining systems of oppression and exclusion. Yet, paradoxically, these same euphemisms also serve protective functions, enabling dignity, intimacy, and continuity in lives constantly at risk of rupture. Likewise, Shamsie's symbolic and elliptical language invites the reader into a discursive terrain where euphemism becomes a form of narrative ethics, protecting what cannot or should not be fully said. As Asif Farrukhi (2018) notes, *Kartography* constructs "a language of loss that depends on subtlety, not disclosure"—a view that aligns closely with Fairclough's emphasis on the ideological work performed by linguistic nuance.

Within the context of Fairclough's three-dimensional model—text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice—*Taboo*'s euphemistic constructions reveal not only linguistic patterns but also social processes that govern who gets to speak, and under what terms. The dancers' and sex

workers' linguistic creativity in *Taboo* signals a complex negotiation between visibility and erasure. The frequent use of phrases like **"this line of work"** (Saeed, 2001, p. 134) instead of "prostitution" is not simply a euphemism for comfort but a survivalist discursive maneuver. It allows women to discuss their lives without inviting moral judgment or legal risk. This supports Fairclough's argument that discourse is "constitutive of social identities, social relationships, and systems of knowledge and belief." The euphemistic label does ideological work—it distances the speaker from cultural degradation while subtly maintaining a tacit connection to it. This paradox mirrors the sociocultural struggle in which language must mediate shame and necessity.

In *Kartography*, euphemism similarly reflects the discursive construction of trauma. When Karim reflects on the city's violence, he states, **"There's always a reason not to talk about it. It's always easier when we call it 'disturbance' or 'trouble' instead of murder"** (Shamsie, 2002, p. 233). Here, the euphemisms "disturbance" and "trouble" serve as ideological veils that sanitize ethnic cleansing and political betrayal. This linguistic minimization allows individuals and communities to avoid confronting the full emotional and ethical weight of historical injustice. It aligns with what Fairclough identifies as "power behind discourse"—the institutional and social forces that shape the very conditions under which certain things may or may not be spoken. The refusal to call violence by its name becomes a discursive strategy that maintains social cohesion at the cost of truth, mirroring the euphemistic disavowal that governs sex work in *Taboo*.

Moreover, the contrast in the tone and context of euphemism across the two texts enriches the comparative analysis. In *Taboo*, euphemisms are forged from economic marginality and social policing; in *Kartography*, they emerge from emotional repression and postcolonial disorientation. Yet in both, they reflect a shared human tendency to avoid the discomfort of the real. The line from *Taboo*, **"We all have our masks; some just wear them for survival"** (Saeed, 2001, p. 141), metaphorizes the euphemistic impulse itself. Euphemisms are discursive masks, worn to navigate oppressive systems. This reinforces Fairclough's notion that discourse is a site of ideological struggle, wherein competing narratives seek legitimacy. The very act of euphemizing becomes a form of agency within constraint—a way of speaking within structures designed to silence.

The ideological implications of euphemism are further illuminated when examining how institutions themselves deploy softened language to obscure complicity. Saeed recounts how state agencies refer to sex workers as **"displaced entertainers"** (Saeed, 2001, p. 173), a euphemism that whitewashes systemic neglect and state-sanctioned exploitation. This state discourse creates a layer of bureaucratic detachment, deflecting responsibility while reproducing the marginalization of those it claims to protect. Fairclough would interpret this as a manifestation of "institutional discourse," in which official language obscures rather than reveals social realities. The state's euphemism sanitizes both the subject and its failure, reinforcing a neoliberal logic in which social suffering is repackaged as administrative terminology.

In *Kartography*, similar patterns emerge when civic unrest is framed through depersonalized official language. A radio broadcast refers to ethnic killings as **"isolated events in an otherwise peaceful city"** (Shamsie, 2002, p. 201). This euphemistic distancing diminishes the magnitude of violence and positions the city's instability as an anomaly rather than a structural condition. Shamsie subtly critiques this discursive framing, showing how such language enables cycles of denial and repetition. As noted by critic Fawzia Afzal-Khan (2020), *Kartography* illustrates how "silence and substitution in language contribute to a collective erasure of complicity." Language becomes a tool for erasure as well as storytelling, and euphemisms serve as culpability in and of themselves rather than merely concealment.

Thus, in both texts, euphemism crosses the unthinkable by purposefully blurring the lines between palatability and truth, visibility and invisibility. To reduce stigma, restore injured dignity, and affirm their right to self-definition while being monitored, Saeed's women use euphemize. Their language restraint is a potent form of discursive resistance that is vague and obscure. Shamsie's characters, on the other hand, use euphemism to preserve relationships and endure political turmoil.What Homi Bhabha (1994) calls "the unspeakable unspoken," a situation in which language circumvents pain rather than openly addressing it, is enacted by their elliptical discourse. This supports the claim made by Fairclough that "ideology resides in the unsaid as well as in the said"—that is, that often the omitted is more telling than the stated.

Taboo and *Kartography's* discursive patterns ultimately offer compelling proof that euphemism is a social activity as opposed to merely a rhetorical device. By applying Fairclough's viewpoint,

we can observe how these softer language choices mirror larger power relations, including those between the state and its citizens, sex workers and society, and silence and memory. Here, euphemisms—rather than trivializing the unthinkable—control, protect, and delay it. Whether in the shadowy slums of Karachi or the brothels of Lahore, euphemizing reveals a deeper truth: even when words are limited, silence is never neutral.

5. Discussion

An examination of *Taboo's* euphemistic speech demonstrates the intricate relationship between language, power, and gendered subjectivity in a culture characterized by moral surveillance and historical suppression.Euphemisms are active agents that reproduce or oppose hegemonic ideologies rather than passive or ornamental linguistic devices, according to the results, which are based on Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model, specifically its emphasis on the relationship between text, discourse practice, and sociocultural context. Euphemistic words like "respectable women," "customers," and "work" mediate the contradiction between visibility and marginality in *Taboo* by acting as discursive mediators.The text's recurrent use of them emphasizes how linguistic patterns that allow marginalized women to be readable or unreadable in dominant discourses are infused with discourses about morality and honor.

These results bring to light, within the context of feminist literary studies in South Asia and Pakistan, the ideological labor euphemisms that function in patriarchal and colonial prudery-shaped stories.Fouzia Saeed's use of rhetorical tropes demonstrates a conscious effort to shield her subjects from moral criticism while creating a discursive space for discussion of their experiences.South Asian feminist writing has a legacy of balancing presence and absence, disclosure and concealment.

Scholars like Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin have long argued that feminist speech in South Asia needs to strike a balance between the challenging work of talking about the unspeakable and avoiding reinforcing the stigma or guilt attached to it.Saeed's skillful use of euphemism, which offers a language of resistance that is neither overtly confrontational nor completely obedient, lends credence to this concern. Instead, euphemism here becomes a narrative compromise, an

attempt to allow female sexual laborers to be included in a discursive environment that would otherwise deny them representational credibility.

Thus, by showing how euphemism, which is frequently written off as elusive or decorous, can be a subversive feminist tool when used in culturally sensitive contexts, this study adds to the conversation about feminist literature.It demonstrates how, rather than obscuring the truth, female writers like Saeed employ these linguistic strategies to convey it in ways that may withstand oppressive discursive contexts. In this way, the euphemistic form of *Taboo* could be seen as a feminist rhetorical device that highlights agency within constraints. Instead of directly challenging dominant gender standards, Saeed's writing works within their acceptable linguistic bounds to quietly redefine the stories of sex workers as tales of labor, dignity, and resiliency.

Furthermore, the analysis shows how euphemism functions as a common discursive technique in negotiating trauma, silence, and the politics of memory when juxtaposed with Kamila Shamsie's Kartography.While *Taboo* deals with gendered marginality in the context of sexual labor, *Kartography* addresses silences surrounding ethnic violence and familial repression in postcolonial Karachi. In both texts, euphemism and elliptical narrative become devices for gesturing toward trauma without invoking it explicitly. For instance, Shamsie writes: **“There are things you just don’t say, not because they’re untrue but because saying them would break something”** (Shamsie, 2002, p. 94). This elliptical logic mirrors Saeed’s rhetorical strategy of naming without fully revealing, suggesting a broader postcolonial linguistic economy in which truth must be spoken carefully, sometimes indirectly, to be heard at all.

By foregrounding this parallel, the study reveals how euphemism in South Asian literature is not merely a reflection of prudish cultural mores but a deeply embedded response to national trauma, state censorship, and intergenerational silencing. Euphemisms in *Kartography* and *Taboo* index the unspeakable not only in moral but in political terms, marking the boundaries of permissible discourse in societies shaped by violent histories and fractured identities. In this sense, the euphemistic mode participates in a broader literary strategy of what Sneja Gunew has termed “testimonial obliquity”—the indirect witnessing of trauma through fractured or softened language.

In the postcolonial context of Pakistan, euphemism also intersects with national identity formation and the reproduction of state-sanctioned morality. Both *Taboo* and *Kartography* navigate a discursive landscape in which what is unspoken often defines the parameters of what can be said. As Saeed euphemistically refers to sex work as “work,” or identifies brothels by vague locational markers, she is not simply avoiding offense—she is challenging the normative discourses that deny the existence of such labor or criminalize its acknowledgment. Similarly, Shamsie’s avoidance of naming the ethnic conflict of 1986 or the perpetrators of political violence in explicit terms is not an act of cowardice but of cultural realism: in a society where memory is contested and the state often erases or distorts history, euphemism becomes a mode of preserving truth without inviting retribution.

This positioning of euphemism within broader theoretical debates on postcolonial identity aligns with the work of scholars like Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, who contend that subaltern speech often emerges in hybrid forms—indirect, metaphorical, or fragmented—precisely because dominant discourse does not permit it to speak in full. Therefore, Saeed's euphemistic constructs exemplify what Spivak has dubbed "strategic essentialism": the employment of limited or simplified forms of representation to provide subaltern people with narrative visibility. Though it inhabits and pushes the boundaries of hegemonic morality, the euphemistic discourse of *Taboo* gives readers a peek at alternate realities within the prevailing frames, without completely upending them.

Taboo also challenges Fairclough's idea of discursive practice by using euphemism to highlight the tensions between the work's production and reception.Although Saeed uses euphemism techniques to accommodate her Pakistani audience's cultural sensitivities, they also raise concerns about accessibility and legibility—what is lost or distorted in translation for readers from other countries who are not familiar with local customs. An outsider may find terms like "dancing girls" or "respectable women," for instance, innocuous, but in Pakistan, they carry profound socio-historical connotations. This layering draws attention to euphemism's dual functions as a safeguard for cultural meaning and a tool for protection or cover. The ability of

Taboo to communicate with a variety of audiences in a variety of ways is influenced by the polyvalence of euphemism.

Judith Butler refers to this polyvalence as "resignification" in feminist discourse studies, which is the reworking of language to achieve counter-hegemonic goals.Saeed's euphemisms do precisely this by reinterpreting phrases that are used in patriarchal surveillance to convey female autonomy, labor, and resistance. By calling sex workers "artists" or brothels "houses," Saeed subtly questions the stigma attached to them while still reflecting local idioms. When subversion and authority coexist, euphemism becomes a site of resignification.This is especially relevant in South Asian feminist literary analysis, where patriotic, familial, and religious pressures sometimes restrict words. Saeed's literary style speaks within bounds without taking on a servile role, which supports a feminist politics of narrativization.

In addition, this study challenges the role of euphemism in speech theory.Despite being commonly perceived as a conservative or avoidance tactic, euphemism in *Taboo* and *Kartography* demonstrates a more complex theoretical function—what may be called "strategic opacity." This concept acknowledges that, rather than always acting as a shield against political criticism, obliqueness can be a tactic for preserving voice, dignity, and resistance in trying circumstances. By using strategic opacity, marginalized people can maintain discursive agency without facing the possibility of actual, reputational, or epistemological destruction. This may be seen in *Taboo*, where the experiences of sex workers are politely and gently described, their names are frequently changed, and their profession is only vaguely described, but their existence is recognized.

These findings have consequences that go beyond feminist and postcolonial literary studies to include action and instruction. In nations like Pakistan, where open discussion of sexuality, gendered violence, or labor rights is sometimes met with censorship or social punishment, it is important to be mindful of euphemism as a tool for both disclosure and protection while teaching books such as *Taboo* and *Kartography*. Educators, activists, and scholars should recognize euphemism as a discursive tool and approach quite as a rhetorical form that subtly encodes action, grief, and resistance.

Last but not least, the discourse analysis of *Taboo* emphasizes how euphemistic language has political connotations when negotiating the unimaginable.It illustrates how intentional linguistic choices can transform silence into communication. Euphemisms are exchanges rather than evasions in Saeed's story; they are ways to navigate a difficult discursive space while upholding narrative authority and supporting underrepresented perspectives.*Kartography* and the study's placement together draw attention to a broader literary movement in postwar Pakistan that uses linguistic indirection to deal with identity, trauma, and repression. In both books, euphemism serves as a communication tool for resistance, a survival tactic, and a way to create cultural memories. It does this by altering the lines between what is spoken and what is unspeakable from within, rather than by eradicating them.

6. Conclusion

Particularly when examined through a Faircloughian lens that reveals the social roots of seemingly innocuous linguistic choices, this work primarily contributes to the use of euphemism in Pakistani literature as a discursive tool of feminist negotiation.This study has demonstrated that euphemistic language in postcolonial South Asian literature serves as strategic resistance rather than avoidance through a close examination of *Taboo* and a comparison with Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*. Subaltern voices can be heard within systems that would otherwise silence them thanks to this kind of discursive survival. Euphemism is a feminist technique that Fouzia Saeed skillfully navigates cultural taboos to employ for naming without betraying, telling without disclosing, and rebelling without jeopardizing safety.In line with Fairclough's emphasis on how speech is based on ideology and power, the study confirms that euphemism in *Taboo* is not only linguistic but also political, closely related to gendered silence, national memory, and moral hegemony. Future research could build on these findings by examining diasporic feminist narratives where euphemism interacts with identity, exile, and transnational belonging, or by conducting comparative regional analyses across South Asian contexts to examine how euphemistic discourse differs across linguistic, religious, and cultural divides.Additionally, an intertextual approach involving oral histories or digital feminist narratives could further unpack the evolving politics of unspeakability in contemporary discourse. Ultimately, this study asserts that in Pakistani feminist literature, euphemism is not a retreat from truth but a mode of

negotiating it—a means of speaking the unspeakable while protecting the speaker. By illuminating how such discourse operates across personal, textual, and ideological terrains, the research affirms the original article that euphemism in *Taboo* is a site where power, resistance, and representation converge—where silence itself becomes a mode of articulation in the struggle to name what society insists must remain unnamed.

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