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# Appraisal Analysis of Women Representation in Matrimonial Advertisements

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## Abstract

The language employed in matrimonial advertisements has a considerable impact on how people perceive marriage and gender roles. In addition to reflecting and reinforcing societal norms, values, and gender roles, the language used in matrimonial ads may have an impact on how individuals and families view themselves and one another in the setting of marriage. The current study explored linguistic choices in marriage ads to depict women in traditional gender roles and how they contribute to the representation of women. Matrimonial websites and social media platforms were used to compile a corpus of matrimonial ads. The current study utilized Appraisal Theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics to explore women representation in matrimonial ads. About 43 matrimonial ads were analyzed by using the ATLAS.ti software, for lexico-grammatical choices pertaining to judgment and appreciation. To identify the linguistic features and patterns, the textual content of matrimonial ads was analyzed linguistically. This analysis concentrated on lexical choices, linguistic structures, and presence of evaluative language, all of which align with Appraisal Theory concepts. The study determined that women are mostly categorized in terms of their physical attributes, such as beauty, height, weight, their age, occupation, education, character, and nature.

**Keywords:** appraisal theory, matrimonial advertisements, regressive, representation of women, systemic functional linguistics

## Introduction

Pakistani society, like many other societies, is a complex tapestry of cultural traditions, norms, and evolving dynamics. The portrayal of women in matrimonial advertisements serves as a microcosm of broader societal expectations, values, and beliefs within this intricate social fabric. The current study focused on Pakistani society and sought to critically examine how women are portrayed in matrimonial ads. Moreover, the study also

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particularly emphasized whether these representations reinforce traditional gender roles, perpetuate societal stereotypes, and exert influence over prevailing beauty standards.

The linguistic choices and discursive strategies used in these ads represent the agents—men and women. Gupta (2021) argues that this sort of representation through language becomes an unconscious part of social cognition of society and drives it to create and uphold certain perceptions. Studies show that women are portrayed in matrimonial ads in a way that upholds certain stereotypes, supports traditional gender norms, and restricts women's agency and autonomy (Bordoloi & Srimathi, 2021; Dei, 2016; Khan & Ateeq, 2017;). This gives rise to a regressive depiction of women. Such depictions may serve to promote rigid gender standards that limit women to predetermined roles and expectations.

Appraisal Theory provided an invaluable analytical framework for the current study. Moreover, it also allowed for a more in-depth examination of linguistic and discursive strategies used in matrimonial ads. This theoretical viewpoint, based on Systemic Functional Linguistics, investigates how language choices express attitudes, emotions, and evaluations, all of which are important components of these ads. Moreover, it also investigated the social expectations placed on women in relation to their age, education, cultural and familial values, religion, physical appearance, and other distinguishing traits. This study, based on the writings of Goffman (1979) and Butler (1990), sought to advance the conversation on gender dynamics and social norms by shedding light on these representations and underlying discourses by employing Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) based analysis. The current study focused on the portrayal of women in matrimonial ads and aimed to examine whether such representation reinforces stereotypes, gender roles, and beauty standards. Understanding these representations and any underlying discourses can contribute to a broader discussion on gender dynamics and social norms and the implications these representations have on them. The current study posed the following research questions:

1. What are the prevalent themes and patterns in matrimonial ads regarding women representation?
2. How do linguistic choices in Pakistani matrimonial ads align with the concepts of affect, appreciation, and judgment in appraisal theory

contributing to the construction of gendered identities and societal expectations?

### Literature Review

Matrimonial ads, once perceived as a form of advertisement for seeking marriage partners, have now evolved into a form of social discourse. In Pakistan, where arranged marriages are the general trend, these advertisements are published with the specific aim of finding a socially acceptable and suitable partner. The literature review of the current study delved into key studies and theoretical frameworks that provided valuable insights into portrayal of women in matrimonial ads.

Goffman's (1979) seminal work on gender is a foundational text for understanding how gender roles are portrayed in various forms of media. The analysis of visual and linguistic cues in ads by Goffman reveals how cultural ideals of femininity and masculinity are constructed and reinforced. Goffman's insights into visual and textual cues, that signify gender roles, are highly relevant in the context of matrimonial ads. His investigation into how women are frequently portrayed in the media as passive and decorative, has implications to understand the portrayal of women seeking marriage partners.

Butler's (1990) work on gender performativity and identity formation has reshaped the gender studies' discourse. Butler contends that gender is a social construct that individuals perform and enact rather than an inherent quality. Butler's theory invites investigation into how language choices in matrimonial ads construct and perform gender identities. It highlights the significance of linguistic choices in expressing and reinforcing the societal norms related to femininity and masculinity.

There is a growing body of literature on how the language used in matrimonial ads can reveal positive and negative attitudes towards men and women. Titzmann (2013), for instance, takes the positive stance and talks about female agency in matrimonial ads, focusing on the representation of new Indian women in these ads. However, other studies prove that despite positive depictions, there is a higher volume of rather regressive representations of women in marriage ads. Some studies suggest that language choice in marriage ads offer insight as to how the marriage system is attached to archaic stereotypes for men and women in South Asia (Dei, 2016). A study conducted on matrimonial ads revealed that 71% of Bengali

men did not mention in their ads that they wanted a working woman; in fact, they were uncomfortable with the fact (Dei, [2016](#)). Ads found in 1930s Hindustan Times showed that women are judged in terms of physical beauty, color, height, weight, qualification, and character to be considered fit for marriage (Sen, [2016](#)). Conventional standards of these characteristics, such as fairness, height, and slimness are considered desirable. Women who meet these standards are more likely to be sought after as compared to women who do not. While Khan and Ateeq ([2017](#)) explored the socio-cultural construction of gender bias through matrimonial ads in Pakistani society, revealing that Pakistani women are treated as others and face gender bias.

Bordoloi and Srimathi ([2021](#)) talked about toxic beauty standards for women in India, portrayed through different channels, such as cinema and commercial ads and how they shape perceptions in real world as to what constitutes a good woman. They included matrimonial ads in their exploration of colorism and beauty and presented that it is often demanded that the perfect wife material women should be “tall, fair, and beautiful” (p. 2). These further ingrain gender roles in society and create a very specific image of a woman; one who is shy and does not work outside the house. Therefore, it can be argued that the representation of women adds to the general cognition of the society to the extent where women are viewed fit for marriage if they fulfil certain criteria or set of characteristics (Gupta, [2021](#)).

Research shows that such representations reflect real-life perceptions. They can be damaging to women rights and lives since they are forced to fit into a criterion or be ousted. It limits their potential to be diverse and unique. Such practices perpetuate prejudice, discrimination, and injustice either through deliberate or ignorant means (Shabir & Khan, [2022](#)). The socially dominant male ideology regarding fitness, suitability, and acceptability of women to be considered for marriage has been naturalized by the society of which women are also a part. It is embedded deep down into the cultural unconsciousness. This concept of othering and ousting of women has become a norm, depicted through the advertisers' lexical choices in matrimonial ads, leading to objectification of women by men and society. Women are described in terms of physical beauty such as color, height, body appearance, education, morality, religious piety, attitude, and so on. In societies like India and Pakistan, the social ideology regarding women fit

for marriage has been naturalized by the society and has become an unconscious part of the culture. While previous research emphasized positive and negative representation of women in advertisements, the current study looked at selected English matrimonial ads and how they depict women.

### Methodology

The current study employed a qualitative methodology. For its theoretical framework, it employed the Appraisal model by Martin and White (2005). For analysis, it employed ATLAT.ti as a tool to code and analyze the data.

### Theoretical Framework

To analyze the lexical choices of matrimonial advertisers to represent women and how they are appraised, the Appraisal model developed by Martin and White (2005) was used as a framework for analysis. This model aimed to systematize a varied set of linguistic resources that speakers and writers use to negotiate evaluations with their addressees and to construct solidarity around shared values. Under this framework, three areas of meaning are presented, that is, (1) engagement (2) graduation, and (3) attitude. The current study focused solely on attitude systems, outlined in Appraisal Theory, depicted in matrimonial ads through lexical choices by the advertisers. Attitude system has been studied under three major categories, that is, affect, judgment and appreciation (Martin & White, 2005). According to Martin and White (2005), emotions and feelings are represented through affect, whereas judgment and appreciation are used to express feelings towards other people, entities, and events.

As Appraisal framework is grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics, therefore, Halliday's (1994) description may be considered that language is not only a medium of communication, however, it is also a tool of meaning-making whereby, the social and cultural ideologies, norms, and principles are reflected through language by the speakers. Furthermore, Systemic Functional Linguistics purports that meaning making can usefully be divided into three broad modes called "meta-functions". These modes are described as follows: (1) "ideational functions" reside in how language construes the world of experience; (2) "interpersonal functions" focus on how speakers/writers enact social roles, personas, and relationships; and (3) "textual functions" elaborate how language is organized into coherent texts, appropriate for a given communicative setting.

The Appraisal Theory specifically focuses upon the evaluative properties of language, that is, how speakers/writers express their opinions, judgments, assessments, and appreciation about people and surroundings by the interpersonal meta-function of language. Appraisal Theory deals with how speakers/writers use evaluative language to express attitudinal meanings, adopt stances, and negotiate ideological positioning with their intended audience (Palomino-Manjón, [2022](#)). In simple words, evaluative language refers to the language that is used to express someone's opinion or feelings about entities or propositions they are talking about. More specifically, Appraisal framework narrows this down to three further subtypes that include affect, the basic attitudinal subsystem used to convey the positive or negative feelings and emotions of the author or of a third party (Martin & White, [2005](#)). The evaluation may be favorable, unfavorable, or neutral.

*Affect:* According to Martin and White ([2005](#), p. 42), “affect is concerned with registering positive and negative feelings: do we feel happy or sad, confident or anxious, interested or bored?”. For instance, someone may positively evaluate a stunning sunset because it makes them joyful. Thus, the effects can be positive or negative, as well as explicit or implicit.

*Judgment:* According to Martin and White ([2005](#), p. 42), “judgment deals with attitudes towards behaviors which are admired or criticized, praised or condemned”.

*Appreciation:* Appreciation is used to value aesthetics, people's physical appearance, processes, entities, and states of affairs (Martin & White, [2005](#)). These three subtypes focus on the depiction of a positive or negative assessment of persons and things through lexical choices of speakers. As Thompson ([2014](#)) states, “it is sometimes difficult to decide with some appraisals whether we are dealing with judgment or appreciation” (p. 82). The current study focused to examine the instances of judgment and appreciation in Pakistani matrimonial ads, for instance, how they perpetuate the othering of women in society and create a gender bias.

## Research Methodology

To thoroughly examine the linguistic representations of women in matrimonial ads in Pakistani society, the research methodology for this current study followed a qualitative approach. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the representations and their implications, this approach

involved content analysis of corpus. The research methodology focused on the following elements:

### **Corpus of Matrimonial Advertisements**

The corpus for the current study comprised matrimonial ads from Pakistani media including online newspapers and matrimonial websites. About 60 ads were collected and filtered according to the following criteria: (1) ads in English, (2) containing a matrimonial profile including age, gender, education, occupation, and (3) a list of desired characteristics for the bride being sought. To contextualize the representations, additional demographic information about each advertisement's advertiser, such as the advertiser's gender, age, and location was gathered. Out of 60, 43 matrimonial ads met the criteria set for the research and were selected for analysis. Furthermore, to facilitate analysis, the data was coded. Each ad was marked with a specific code following the format M-N, where M stands for matrimonial and N equals the number of ads in the appendix (for instance, M-01).

### **Ethical Considerations**

To protect people's privacy, any personal data gathered from ads was anonymized and used only for the research.

### **Data Collection, Procedures, and Analysis**

The current study comprised 43 ads. These ads were taken from two websites titled muamat.com and expatriates.com as well as a Facebook group titled Pakistani-American Muslim Matrimonial (n.d.). The ads were then compiled and filtered according to the criteria mentioned above.

### **Procedure of Corpus Analysis**

The linguistic analysis of the selected matrimonial ads was conducted under the framework of appraisal theory by Martin and White (2005). The data was analyzed by using ATLAS.ti, to find the patterns and themes in how women are represented in matrimonial ads. ATLAS.ti is a qualitative data analysis tool which helps in organizing, coding, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative data. The data in the current study was first loaded into the software in the form of plain text. Afterwards, the matrimonial ads were coded according to their word usage. For any reflective or evaluative language, that part of the ad was highlighted and assigned a certain code under an overarching category. For instance, the ad M-01 states, "I am



divorced and live alone in Rawalpindi. Lecturer in university. Interested in proposals if weight is under 60 kg and can relocate to Rawalpindi for me. No demand”. In this ad, the part, “if weight is under 60 kg” is assigned the code “weight”, as it talks about weight requirements. It is further classified under the larger category of “physical attributes”. The analysis of the data through ATLAS.ti uncovered several different codes. These codes are listed below in a tabular form and are grouped under their corresponding larger categories. These categories include physical attributes, education and occupation, affiliations, family status, self-evaluations, and personality traits.

**Table 1**

*Categories of Representation of Women with Corresponding Codes*

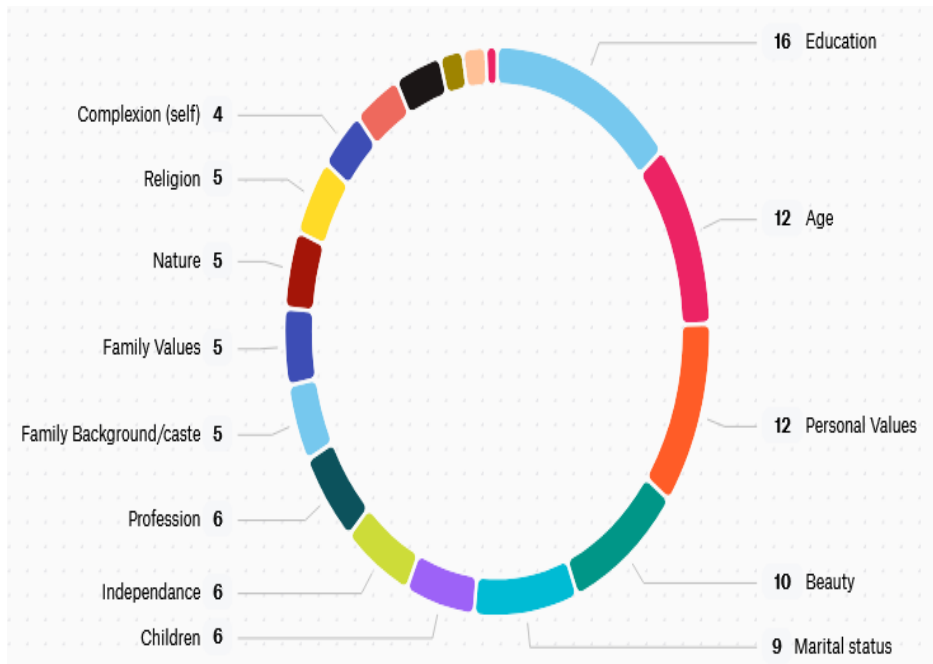
Categories	Code
Physical Attributes	Beauty
	Age
	Weight
Education and Occupation	Profession
	Education
	Religion
Affiliations	Family background/caste
	Preference of residence
Family Status	Marital status
	Children
Self-Evaluations	Weight (self)
	Complexion (self)
	Nature (self)
Personality Traits	Personal values
	Family values
	Independence
	Nature

Through ATLAS.ti, the researchers were also able to determine the number of times a certain code occurred. This helped to reveal patterns of repetition and aided the analysis in evaluating what themes were more prevalent and frequent in the discourse and which were less, thereby uncovering the major focuses of women representation. A chart is generated through the *Quotations Manager* tab in the ATLAS.ti software which

presents the number of times a certain code occurred in the given data. The image below shows the donut chart.

**Figure 1**

*Donut Chart Showing Number of Instances of Codes*



A total number of 104 instances of evaluative language were identified and coded through the ATLAS.ti software. These instances discussed about a variety of things related to women, such as their physical attributes, personal values, nature, and much more. All instances were identified as evaluating women against a certain kind of perception and requirement. For instance, “looking for someone who could take the responsibility of raising children seriously”. (M-13) points toward the cultural expectation of women having the sole responsibility of raising the children. The code occurring most frequently is *education*, which occurs a total of 16 times. However, the largest category in the data is *personality traits*. As it can be seen from Table 1.0, the personality traits’ category comprises 4 codes: *personal values*, *family values*, *independence*, and *nature*. In Figure 1.0, the combined number of occurrences of these codes is 28, making it the largest category. This means that women are evaluated according to their personality the most in these matrimonial ads.

The lexical choices by advertisers are judgmental and the language used by male advertisers is evaluative. According to Halliday (1994), language is not only a medium of communication, however, it is also a tool of meaning-making whereby the social and cultural ideologies, norms, and principles are reflected through languages. Language helps to express our opinions, likes, and dislikes along with feelings about things and entities. In the analysis of ideologies, evaluative language is a foundational linguistic concept since it uncovers the system of values of speaker/writer and the community in which they operate (Martin & White, 2005). Matrimonial evaluative language reveals patterns of regressive depictions since using evaluative language to describe various aspects, such as beauty, character, education, and other personality traits objectifies women. Several instances of evaluative language for the description of a suitable marriage partner by men perpetuate gender bias and describe women negatively. According to Thompson (2014), the line of distinction between judgment and appreciation is hard to identify due to similar lexical choices used by the speakers to describe persons or things. Matrimonial language, while describing women, may vary from judgmental to appreciative and that is reflected through lexical choices of advertisers. Language is a tool through which we express our ideas, opinions, and the overall attitude pertaining to things and people. Evaluative words, such as good, bad, nice, and beautiful are a few of such lexicons which are used to evaluate the environment. Language is also used to appraise ideologies, views, and socio-cultural norms and rules. Women are not only judged but are also appreciated as non-living entities and objects of beauty when the lexical choices of advertisers describe them in terms of things of physical beauty and other qualities. The following analysis has, after coding the data, categorized the language used in matrimonial ads into the above-mentioned categories.

### **Data Analysis**

Several instances of evaluation were identified in the form of affect, appreciation, and judgment after the analysis of provided text. These all components are crucial elements of appraisal theory. The selected data has been categorized and evaluated accordingly below:

#### **Affect**

Affect, in language, refers to the expression of emotions and emotional responses. On the other hand, matrimonial ads may not explicitly mention

emotions. The focus on physical attributes, beauty standards, and personal preferences indirectly conveys emotional aspects. Phrases, such as "Seeking a Bride," "curvy woman," and "do not like slim or skinny women" reflect the emotional or aesthetic preferences of individuals seeking partners. These linguistic choices suggest that people have emotional preferences when it comes to physical appearances. These ideas would be explored in detail in the following sections.

## **Physical Attributes**

### ***Beauty***

The matrimonial ads begin with a detailed profile of the advertiser or the one seeking to marry. The coded data reflects those male candidates often present information regarding their qualifications, occupation, and physical attributes in terms of height, weight, and skin color. After the introductory profile, the ad continues to provide readers with a list of details pertaining to the requirements of people seeking a marriage partner. Men seeking brides focus enormously on physical attributes, especially beauty. Phrases, such as "Seeking Beautiful Bride" (M-05), "pretty girl required for army major" (M-08), "curvy woman" (M-10), "don't like slim or skinny woman" (M-10), and "young girl" (M-19) reflect a huge emphasis on physical beauty and appearances of women. Such lexical choices reflect conventional beauty standards of the society. Furthermore, women advertisers also highlight their skin complexion while creating profiles. In most profiles composed by women or families seeking grooms, the personal profile of seeker includes the description of their skin color, weight, and height, attributing a lot of importance to the physical features of women. Such a portrayal of beauty by women themselves highlights the internalization of social ideology regarding female beauty.

### ***Weight***

Another feature associated with the physical attributes of women is slimness and weight. The data suggests that women who are slim, skinny, and smart are demanded more than those who do not fit the required criteria. For instance, in "if weight is under 60 kg" (M-01), the man, despite being divorced and seeking presumably a second wife, has very clearly mentioned that the proposal would only be considered if weight is below 60 kg. He further mentions that other than that, there are no further demands which

indicates that making certain demands of the bride is a common practice. The same can be seen with another example mentioned below.

My marriage was arranged and I am not happily married. I want to get married again as I am loving, caring, and an affectionate person, seeking same kind of wife. I think compatibility is quite important for both partners to spend the rest of their lives together. I would prefer a widowed or divorced woman with or without kids, independent, and matured curvy woman. I don't like slim or skinny women (M-10).

Such an open expression and demand regarding the weight of potential wives inculcates in the society, in general, and women, in particular, which also reflects those skinny and slim women have better chances of finding a groom as compared to those who are not slim. On the other hand, the mentioning of a “curvy” woman may occur rarely, however, it creates an impression of women being negatively appreciated as an object and not as a human being with feelings and self-esteem.

### *Age*

Another factor that is frequently seen in matrimonial ads is “age”. Men, when advertising to seek a bride, are very particular regarding the age of women for instance, “Age must be between (30-36) ... Young girl required” (M-19).

Another example is as follows:

Age: 32 required; Age: below 35”, “I am searching a marriage partner for my uncle who is an Air Force Officer for 2nd marriage. His first wife is also there but has no kids. This is the reason that he wants to marry again and with a young girl aged above 27, divorced or single (M-19).

Age criteria for women is relatively flexible in some cases. In the above-mentioned example, a 32-year-old divorced man is willing to consider a woman to get married with who is below 35 years of age. However, the data reveals that no ad by male candidates considers women above 35 years of age. Age factor is also related with the childbearing capacity of women and therefore, women below 35 are preferred.

## Appreciation

Appreciation in Appraisal Theory involves assessing the worth or value of something. In this text, appreciation is demonstrated by focusing on physical characteristics, family values, education, and occupation. For instance, qualities, such as "sincerity," "honesty," "loyalty," "family-orientation," and "good education" are highlighted as desirable and valuable while evaluating the potential partners in matrimonial ads. The analysis that follows provides more detailed insight into this concept.

## Personality Traits

### *Personal Values*

The largest category of evaluative language, as revealed by the categorization of the data, belongs to personality traits. While looking for a bride, most ads seek women with particular traits, especially those who are culturally associated with good match. These include honesty, kindness, family-orientation, nature, and more. These personal values are very important for match seekers. The data illustrates a few examples which highlight the need for strong and positive personal values. Examples, such as, "she must be sincere, honest, loyal" (M-06), and "I need a nice, kind, and looking woman". (M-43) shows the importance and emphasis put upon these qualities. Moreover, family values are particularly emphasized according to the data.

### *Family Values*

Family values often revolve around traditional expectations regarding women's roles within the household. Commonly, women are stereotypically perceived as primarily responsible for managing the household and taking care of children. The chosen data underscores this prevailing mindset. Instances such as references to being an "expert in household" (M-36), being "family-oriented" (M-03), and the requirement for someone who takes child-rearing seriously (M-15) vividly illustrate the significant importance placed on women's family values. A comprehensive analysis of the advertisements, particularly those explicitly mentioning family values, reveals a narrative where women are predominantly confined to domestic tasks and child-rearing responsibilities. There's an implied expectation that women who do not align with these traditional family-oriented roles may be viewed as irresponsible or noncommitted, further emphasizing the societal pressure for them to "consider the importance of relations" (M-16).

### ***Independence***

It can be said that historically, women were not always encouraged to be independent. However, in current times, these trends have evolved which is an ongoing process. Today, more and more families seek women who are independent and that too for multiple purposes, such as modern thinking, financial situation, and more. In the current dataset, the words “independent, mature, and self-made” indicate inclinations towards more autonomous and self-reliant women. Examples include, “I want to marry an independent lady” (M-02); “I will prefer widow or divorced woman with or without kids” (M-10) and similar matrimonial ads.

### ***Nature***

The instances of evaluative language that were not targeted but generally talked about the personality of women were grouped under the code ‘nature’. Words, such as decent (M-18), disciplined (M-39), and respectable (M-40) were used in the target matrimonial ads to show the desired nature of women being sought.

## **Education and Occupation**

### ***Education***

Nowadays, education has become an essential factor in the list of demands by men seeking brides. Women living in urban areas are expected to have a university education. This may reflect a social change in the conventional set of criteria where education used to be of secondary importance as compared to physical beauty and several other conventional gender-related qualities, such as efficiency in household chores, for instance cooking, cleaning, and washing. Nowadays, educated girls/women are being sought by male candidates and the requirement section often includes words, such as “well-educated” (M-11, M-13, M-18, M-29, M-31). However, this word may imply different meanings in different contexts and a clear specification of what someone wants to imply by saying “well-educated” is not given. A dominant trend in the selected data is that educated men, such as software engineers, mechanical engineers, and accountants demanded only well-educated brides and did not mention any physical attributes explicitly. For instance, “Requirements: Education: graduate, preferably Computer Science related, Caste: any, Age: below 35, interested ladies/families can contact” (M-07).

32, looking for an educated and noble family girl. My son has done Bachelors in Computer Information System and business foundation Google User Experience (UX) design certification, settled in Houston Texas, USA citizen and is looking for a well-educated woman (M-09).

“My son has done MBA, MA Economics, ACCA, and is completing postgraduate course in International Business Management. We are looking for an educated woman from Pakistan or abroad” (M-12).

The data suggests that educated men and their families emphasize education but not physical beauty since there is no such demand stated by the advertisers in these ads. However, the question regarding whether it is a change in the social mindset or not is an area that needs further exploration because there are certain men who do not desire an educated marriage partner but focus on physical beauty and other conventionally gender-related qualities in a woman. For instance, “looking for a marriage partner, education is not necessary but should consider importance of relations” (M-16).

### ***Profession***

The changing social dynamics and an increase in women education has led to more and more women working and earning their livelihood. Nowadays, women are serving in almost all professions. Medicine, education, banking, law enforcement, sports, media, and aviation are a few fields where women working professionally has become a common practice. This shift in the traditional gender role of women has now become an acceptable part of our social structure and has also affected the choices of men seeking a marriage partner. The analysis of data show that, just like education, some advertisers clearly mention the desired and required occupation; for instance, “MBBS lady doctor for marriage” (M-18), “preferably a working lady” (M-24) and “requirement for a nurse or teacher” (M-25).

### **Minor Categories**

Other than major categories discussed above, the data analyzed through ATLAS.ti also uncovered some minor instances of evaluative language that highlight other aspects of women representation. These are discussed below.



### ***Family Status***

This category includes marital status and children, indicating match-seekers' preferences for whether the women they seek was previously married or not, or whether they have children or not. It was observed that all opinions on this were present in the data. Some match-seekers were okay with widowed or divorced women, with or without children, while some preferred unmarried women or women with no children.

### ***Affiliations***

This general category includes all affiliations that were observed in the dataset including religion, family background, residence, and more. It was seen that most ads called for religious women with either good or rich family backgrounds. Preference of residence varied from Pakistani to those who live abroad.

### ***Self-evaluations***

Lastly, the analysis conducted through ATLAS.ti unearthed a very interesting theme, that is, self-evaluation. It included ads that women had made seeking for their marriage partners and in doing so had made self-evaluations, specifically about their physical attributes. The most prominent among these were evaluations about complexion, weight, and nature. Examples include, "Complexion: Very fair" (M-20), "Color-Fair Wheatish" (M-39); "Physique: Very Slim" (M-20), "Physique: Average" (M-22); "Very loving, very caring nature, cooperative, decent, nice, attractive, and smart" (M-03). In other places, women were more self-confident and their action of actively seeking marriage partners points to the fact that in the current era, women are empowered enough to be able to raise their voices and branch out.

### **Judgment**

Appraisal Theory involves making assessments regarding the quality, desirability, or credibility of something. This notion is consistently present throughout the data collected from those seeking potential partners for marriage. People explicitly consider various criteria while making choices, such as physical characteristics (for instance, weight, skin color, and age), personality traits, family values, education, and occupation. The text provides examples, such as "the man...has very clearly stated that the proposal would only be considered if the weight is less than 60 kg" and

"educated men...have demanded only well-educated marriage partners." These judgments highlight specific requirements and preferences that assist in the evaluation process. Furthermore, the discourse on these themes reveals how advertisers pass judgments on marriageable women by restricting their agency and autonomy while also considering their economic positions.

### ***Restricting Agency and Autonomy***

While seeking a marriage partner, one factor that is prioritized to a great extent by male advertisers is 'the qualities and traits of a woman's character'. These factors are listed in the requirement section and sometimes appear after required physical attributes. Women are required to be "loving", "caring", "honest" "sincere" "practicing Muslim", "family-oriented", "motherly", and so on. For instance, "Male, Age 29, I need someone who takes the responsibility of raising children seriously (if Allah SWT choses to grace us" (M-15).

This highlights the societal emphasis on attributing value to the quality of motherliness in women. Additionally, men express a desire for women to embody traits such as love, care, kindness, good manners, and honesty. These lexical choices in language contribute to the creation of an image of the conventionally perfect woman. However, the use of these judgmental words is both vague and abstract, as the standards for honesty, sincerity, kindness, and decency may vary from person to person. For instance, an advertisement like "a true and sincere female is required for marriage. Inbox with details" (M-38) underscores the societal expectation that a marriage-worthy woman must possess these qualities. Conversely, the absence of such traits places women in a position where they may not be actively sought after.

Notably, women who deviate from the conventional expectation of being family-oriented and reluctant to reside in a joint family are stereotypically categorized as not fitting the mold of a good woman. The demand for a family-oriented, loving, and caring woman implies an expectation of submission and readiness to take responsibility for the groom's parents, siblings, and household. The judgment of a woman's character is evident in the language used, creating a gender bias and drawing distinctions between good and bad women. This perpetuates stereotypes, gender bias, and the othering of women.

An illustrative example is found in ad M-33, where the male candidate seeks a wife who is independent, liberal, and characterized by a heart full of "love and sacrifices." From a cultural standpoint, societal expectations often dictate that women should take care of the groom's household, manage domestic responsibilities, bear and raise children in accordance with religious and social values. These representations in matrimonial ads mirror prevailing societal attitudes, reflecting thinking patterns and perceptions already ingrained in the cultural fabric. It is essential to recognize that these representations are not necessarily constructed intentionally for a specific purpose but rather reflect the existing societal norms and beliefs.

### ***Imposing Marital Criteria***

The rigid marriage requirements that matrimonial ads impose on women, based on their caste, religion, community, or family background have the potential to perpetuate negative societal norms, such as caste discrimination, religious prejudice, or social stratification. These requirements restrict women's options and uphold prevailing societal norms and hierarchy.

### ***Promoting Dowry or Material Expectations***

Matrimonial ads overtly or indirectly include dowry or material expectations from the bride's family which support outdated dowry customs, the commodification of women, and financial dependence. Instead of representing women as equal partners in marriage, these ads depict them as objects of barter or transaction. For instance, "a financially stable family who can support him" (M-24), "graduate, preferably Computer Science related" (M-07).

This analysis reveals the complex relationship between affect, appreciation, and judgment in language usage, specifically in matrimonial ads. It offers valuable insights into linguistic expressions of evaluative language within this genre.

## **Discussion**

The analysis above uncovers various ways in which women are represented regressively in matrimonial ads, adding to the research of women's representation in the wider media. In an era, where society is advancing towards holistic and inclusive representations of marginalized entities, the prevalence of such discourse patterns and use of language, points those

equal opportunities and equal treatment in the society is a violated human right of women. Aligning with Gofman's (1979) investigation into how women are frequently portrayed in the media as passive and decorative, the similar portrayal of women was found in matrimonial ads. Butler's (1990) theory aided the investigation into how language choices in matrimonial ads construct and perform gender identities.

Moreover, the analysis demonstrates that how Appraisal Theory is applied to analyze the language in matrimonial ads. It reveals the presence of affect, appreciation, and judgment in these ads, showcasing how people express their emotional preferences, evaluate specific qualities, and make decisions about their potential partners. However, considering Thompson's (2014) opinion, the line of distinction was found difficult to be identified between judgment and appreciation due to similar lexical choices used to describe women as objects. Additionally, the text highlights the societal and cultural norms that shape these assessments including beauty standards, family values, and gender roles.

However, it is worth mentioning that matrimonial ads also prompt significant inquiries regarding gender bias and perpetuation of stereotypes and societal norms. The excessive focus on physical appearances, familial traits, and other specific characteristics in matrimonial ads can strengthen traditional gender roles and expectations. This issue holds great importance in the overall analysis.

Halliday (1994) posits that language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for meaning making, reflecting social and cultural ideologies. Building on Martin and White's (2005) work, this study identifies evaluative language in matrimonial ads, revealing regressive depictions of women by portraying them as objects. Aligning with Khan and Ateeq's (2017) focus on Pakistani Urdu matrimonial ads, this research extends the analysis to English-language ads, reaffirming the persistence of regressive representations in contemporary society.

In resonance with Bordoloi and Srimathi (2020), who studied patterns of condescending language in general media, this study uncovers traces of colorism, objectification, discrimination, and body shaming in matrimonial ads. However, a departure from available literature is seen in the categorization of matrimonial ads not as 'propaganda,' as termed by Khan and Ateeq (2017), but as a form of media discourse. The term 'propaganda'

implies intentional degradation of women, a view challenged by the current research, which posits that the language used in ads unintentionally mirrors prevailing societal beliefs.

Unlike Titzmann's (2011) focus on positive self-presentation in marriage market discourse, this study suggests that matrimonial ads in newspapers often perpetuate stereotypical roles and gendered identities. While empowered women are navigating progressive changes online, the negative depictions persist, particularly at the grass-root and middle-class levels.

Contrasting with Dei's (2016) holistic approach that explores the pressures on both men and women in matrimonial contexts, this study specifically delves into female depiction. It suggests further research avenues to understand the portrayal of men in matrimonial ads and explores the gendered dynamics.

Unique to this study is its application of Systemic Functional Linguistics, specifically Appraisal Theory, offering a linguistic approach to unveil regressive thought patterns in matrimonial ads published in Pakistan. Language analysis in ads, such as the passive-aggressive tone in M-15, reveals subtle instances where female agency is undermined, and power dynamics are skewed. The linguistic approach provides real-time data, showcasing the impact of language use in constructing gender profiles.

This study emphasizes the need for a more detailed examination of matrimonial ads as a distinct discourse reflecting societal norms and the unrealistic expectations placed on women. By shedding light on the unattainable demands and pervasive regressive patterns in matrimonial ads, it calls for a reformulation of societal perceptions regarding female agency, urging a revitalization of thought in conversations about women.

## Conclusion

Within the domain of matrimonial advertisements, there arises a crucial necessity for a comprehensive linguistic analysis. In recent years, the fields of sociolinguistics, Systemic Functional Linguistics, and discourse analysis have witnessed a noteworthy surge in studies focused on the portrayal of women. The trajectory of the current research aligns with the escalating prevalence of matrimonial ads and their influential role in shaping societal perceptions of gender, achieved through the intricate language constructs employed to depict both men and women.

A synthesis of extensive literature underscores that the portrayal of women in matrimonial ads closely adheres to conventional criteria. Age, beauty, physical attributes, education, family values, and various other facets serve as the foundational elements upon which these representations are constructed. However, these conventions are not benign; they mirror and reinforce established societal norms and expectations. Linguistic inquiry into this domain serves as a critical tool to unveil the nuances of word choices and the underlying discourses they embody and disseminate.

In this pursuit, the current study adopts a Systemic Functional Approach, particularly harnessing the appraisal theory developed by Martin and White (2005). This theory provides a systematic framework for analyzing subjective and evaluative texts, offering insights into how language captures people's evaluations, emotions, and judgments. In the context of the current investigation, the facet of attitude is focused within the appraisal theory, scrutinizing the evaluative language employed to delineate the representation of women in matrimonial ads.

The ensuing discussion lays bare the multifaceted ways in which women are portrayed within these matrimonial ads, emphasizing the role of these representations in perpetuating established societal conventions, which may, at times, appear regressive. Notably, women are predominantly categorized based on their physical attributes and personal and family values. However, it is worth noting that some positive dimensions also emerge, signifying the empowerment of women who actively seek partners and the demand for independence. These discussions closely align with the body of literature reviewed, collectively providing profound insights into the discourse surrounding Pakistani matrimonial advertisements.

Considering the findings, this study advocates for the expansion of linguistic studies in this domain. Currently, a dearth of research exists, specifically dedicated to evaluative language in matrimonial ads, leaving substantial room for future investigations to further enrich the literature in this area.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

## Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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