

**RESEARCH PAPER**

Linguistic Construction of Forced Optimism: A Transitivity-Based Study of Toxic Positivity in Dr. Quratulain Bakhteari's TED Talk

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the transitivity patterns in the TED Talk by Dr. Quratulain Bakhteari. The study also aimed to explicate how the linguistic choices contribute to the construal of toxic positivity in the feminist discourse. Based on the Systemic Functional Linguistics, especially the transitivity model (Halliday, 1994), the study employed a mixed-method design. The study employed a quantitative frequency analysis of the types of processes. Then, the roles of various processes and participants were explained qualitatively to interpret their discursive meanings. Analysis showed that there was a prevalence of material and relational processes, whereas the mental processes acted as mediators that converted the emotional experiences into cognitive and moral solutions. The participants, like I, and pain were central in creating a self that was seen as active and strong, but one which was not emotional. The results are valuable to discourse and gender researchers since they show how the linguistic constructions could normalize the endurance of emotion and self-control in the name of empowerment and provide an insight into how feminist rhetoric could reproduce the nuances of toxic positivity.

Keywords:

Toxic Positivity, Transitivity Patterns, Feminist Discourse, Systemic Functional Linguistics

Introduction

Over the last few years, researchers have been paying more and more attention to the phenomenon of toxic positivity, a linguistic and psychological construct that brings too much optimism in the world and suppresses the right to express emotions. Toxic positivity refers overgeneralization of a positive state of mind that rejects or disregards the experiences of pain, stress, or grief (Sokal et al., 2020; Bosveld, 2020). This positivity is discursive, as it is practiced by encouraging people to be positive or remain strong in circumstances where emotional response and vulnerability should be embraced. Trifan (2016) believes that the origins of such discourse are the culture of personal development, as it is focused on self-centered resilience and reduces collective or structural consciousness. It means that only a positive mindset can make a person successful and happy, negating such contextual factors as inequality, trauma, or loss. According to Bosveld (2021) and Ehrenreich (2009), this trend is referred to as forced positive discourse, wherein the excessive focus on optimism is ingrained and made a moral or social virtue.

In feminist discourse, the concept of toxic positivity is significant. The feminism that has always been based on hope and change is now threatening to turn self-restrictive as the language of its strength and endurance turns into the language of emotional containment. Colebrook (2010) suggests that hope, which was the focus of feminist struggle, becomes poisonous when it has its eyes on a perfect future and is unable to confront the unpleasantness and unfairness of the present. This paradox is present in modern feminist rhetoric, especially when the producer of the discourse reveals his/her story of survival in a public speech, like in TED talks, where the language is used to construct a narrative of

victory. Although these stories seem empowering, in many cases, however, they tend to hide the emotional work and suffering that frame the experiences of women. Toxic positivity in feminist discourse, therefore, does not merely ignore suffering; it reinvents it as a tool of self-improvement and moral development.

In order to study the way such linguistic reframing takes place, the current research carries out transitivity analysis of the TED Talk of Dr. Quratulain Bakhtari, a Pakistani activist and feminist voice, whose talk is a combination of personal narrative and concerns for social justice, persistence, and empowerment. The study examines her linguistic choices, especially the type of processes and roles of participants as conceptualized in the work of Halliday (1994), to construe toxic positivity.

The rationale behind carrying out this research study was the need to investigate how toxic positivity is linguistically construed in the discourse. The available studies on forced positivity or toxic positivity have mostly covered its presence in the online discourses, health-focused discourse, or inspirational discourses (Ehrenreich, 2010; Bosveld, 2021; Lecompte-Van Poucke, 2022). However, its linguistic construction, the way toxic positivity is construed grammatically, is still not well explored. This gap is particularly important when it comes to the feminist discourse that has both personal and social connotations of emotional representation and empowerment.

Halliday's (1994) model of transitivity within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a powerful tool to examine the linguistic construction of experiences, actions, and feelings. The transitivity analysis offers a prism to see the way processes (doing, thinking, being, saying, etc.) and participants (actors, sensors, carriers, etc.) construct certain world views in discourse. Using this framework for analysis of the TED Talk by Dr. Quratulain Bakhtari, this paper aims to reveal how linguistic patterns popularize certain notions of positivity, agency, and pain.

It is a discourse-analytic approach that makes the present study unique in relation to strategies that preempt an ideological challenge. The study does not analyze the ideological inferences of toxic positivity. Instead, it dwells on its linguistic construction. In other words, it investigates how language works as a device that grammatically represents moralized optimism. In that way, it highlights that toxic positivity does not exist merely in the content, but is achieved and formulated by certain linguistic choices and predetermined ways of how the experience is portrayed. Therefore, the present study aims to identify transitivity patterns (processes and participants) and explicates how toxic positivity is construed through certain linguistic choices. Further, the study interprets and explains the identified linguistic choices in a broader socio-cultural context.

Literature Review

The theoretical underpinning of the current research is transitivity analysis by Halliday (1985, 1994) within the broader area of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) that considers language as a social semiotic tool to create meanings. In this context, Halliday suggested that there are three metafunctions of language, namely ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction is related to the articulation of the experience and forms the basis of transitivity analysis. The interpersonal metafunction examines the way in which speakers bargain in relation to relationships and attitudes, and the textual metafunction is the way discourse is arranged into coherent messages. Transitivity, which is at the heart of the ideational metafunction, permits examining the representation of actions, events, and states in terms of processes, participants, and circumstances. Halliday (1994) distinguished between six processes, namely material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential, and each of them is defined by the role of participants. Physical or bodily actions are represented as material processes and include an Actor and a Goal or Range as participants; mental actions are termed as mental processes and include a

Senser and a Phenomenon as participants; relational processes show identification, attribution, or possession, and contain token, value, carrier, attribute, possessor, or possessed as participants; behavioral actions represent the interface between mental and bodily actions and include a Behavior; verbal actions are represented as the act of saying, and include Sayer, Receiver, and Verbiage; and existence is represented as existential processes and include Existent as its central participant. Transitivity analysis facilitates researchers to investigate the manner in which language represents social realities and forms ways of looking at experience by analyzing the distribution of these processes and configurations of participants in discourse.

Toxic positivity, as the concept related to overgeneralization of positive thinking and denial of negative emotions, has recently become a topic of scholarly research (Sokal et al., 2020; Bosveld, 2020). It encourages an unrealistic demand of optimism and resilience, and discourages genuine emotional outpouring and interprets negativity as moral failure. Trifan (2016) has stated that such positivity develops as a result of individual progressive ideologies, which romanticize self-control and ignore social or structural factors that cause distress. In the same way, Bosveld (2021) and Ehrenreich (2009) define forced positive discourse as an emotional control mechanism that makes people use a positive aspect. Although it is increasingly gaining cultural significance, there is no significant research on the linguistic processes by which toxic positivity is construed. This is especially relevant in the context of feminist discussion since the rhetoric of empowerment and endurance is quite prone to transforming into the rhetoric of agency into the rhetoric of emotional repression and, thus, recreating moralized discourses of strength.

The existing literature on positivity and toxicity has adopted different methodological perspectives. Quantitative research has helped in the computation of toxic positivity. For example, Upadhyay et al. (2022) created a dataset of Twitter posts and inspirational quotes and trained machine learning algorithms on it to classify toxic positivity. Their research was very accurate, and it showed that computational methods are viable. However, the study provided limited information about the linguistic construction of the phenomenon. Similarly, Brassard-Gourdeau and Khoury (2019) tested the correlation between sentiment and toxicity in online messages and concluded that sentiment analysis could be used to identify harmful discourse. Nevertheless, such studies revolved around technological designation instead of linguistic coding of toxic positivity.

Toxicity has been studied by other scholars using a thematic or qualitative approach. In a critical reading of the television show *Ted Lasso*, Beare and Boucaut (2025) note how corporate narratives choose to convey positivity in a selective manner and downplay the presence of social conflicts like homophobia and gender inequality. In a similar vein, Roy et al. (2023) studied the topic of gender-based toxic speech in the context of the #MeToo movement, using both computational and qualitative methods to find misogynistic and hateful speech. The works shed some light on the cultural dynamics of toxicity, but provide no information about the linguistic construction of toxic positivity. Anwary and Istiadah (2024) have selected a multimodal approach and applied Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) to explore the representation of masculinity on Instagram. Their results showed the normalization of specific moral and emotional values by motivational pictures and captions. Though informative, the MCDA method fails to give a detailed explanation of the way grammatical patterns (as transitivity) form meaning.

Conversely, research undertaken in the context of Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) has focused on the way language is used to create emancipatory and affirmative messages. As a counter to Critical Discourse Analysis, PDA studies ways in which linguistic and rhetorical practices achieve social cohesion and change (Martin, 2004; Bartlett, 2012, 2017; Hughes, 2020). An example of this is Nartey and Ernanda (2020), who studied the speech by Sukarno in the Asia-Africa Conference and demonstrated that transitivity and rhetorical decisions established solidarity between postcolonial countries. In the same way, Nartey

(2020) used the resistance rhetoric of Kwame Nkrumah and found processes and evaluative strategies that presented projected anti-imperialist unity. Based on PDA and Appraisal Theory, Qi (2017) examined the speech of political concession and showed that positive evaluative language ensured a state of collective optimism even during defeat. Macgilchrist (2007) reviewed news articles in the media field and found that the five strategies used to challenge dominant narratives include reframing and irony. All these works demonstrate the possibility of linguistic analysis to show how positivity works in discourse, but they do not pay much attention to the point beyond which positivity becomes coercive or toxic.

The most topical study in relation to the current study is that of Lecompte-Van Poucke (2022). Using a discourse-analytical methodology that incorporates SFL, Pragmatics, and critical theory, she used online endometriosis awareness communities to investigate the effects of neoliberal discourses of positive thinking on participation and self-expression. This research discovered that even though such discourse might seem to be supportive, it actually stifled authentic experiences of pain and supported the practices of exclusion. Despite being similarly methodologically based in the context of its linguistic foundation, the study by her is not equal in subject matter and context, as it analyzes Western health communication, whereas the current study involves the linguistic construction of toxic positivity in a South Asian feminist context.

The literature reviewed as a whole shows that the study of positivity and toxicity has grown in diversity of fields, but lacks in its linguistic scope. The quantitative approaches have focused on detection and categorization, the thematic studies have focused on representation and ideology, and PDA has glorified positive discourse as a place of empowerment. Nonetheless, there are not many studies that have explored how toxic positivity, which is the transformation of pain into moral virtue, is achieved in the form of particular grammatical structures. Additionally, feminist discourse, particularly in non-Western regions like Pakistan, has not been explored in this respect. The present study fills this gap by using the transitivity framework created by Halliday to examine the TED Talk given by Dr. Quratulain Bakhtari, and discusses the mechanics and agents that linguistically shape the concept of toxic positivity. In such a way, the research aims at revealing the role of the language of empowerment as being interwoven with the mechanisms of endurance and restraint in a subtle way, which helps to better understand how grammatical structures mediate emotional and social meaning in the context of feminist discourse of the present day.

Material and Methods

The current study employed a mixed-method approach to analyze the TED Talk by Dr. Quratulain Bakhtari. The quantitative stage aimed at determining and classifying the types of processes. The frequencies of identified processes were calculated, whereas the qualitative stage was aimed at interpreting the role of processes and participants in representing toxic positivity. The study required systematic measurement of linguistic properties and an explanation of these properties. Aliaga and Gunderson (2002) argue that quantitative analysis involves the systematic measurement of phenomena, whereas qualitative inquiry, as argued by Neuman (2006) and Strauss and Corbin (1990), is explanatory in its nature and provides deeper meaning and understanding of the phenomena. Such a combination made it possible to have descriptive and explanatory knowledge about the transitivity patterns of the chosen TED Talk, which guaranteed both methodological rigor and analytical consistency. The data for analysis comprised the text of the TED talk by Dr. Quratulain Bakhtari, which was retrieved through the official TEDx Talks YouTube channel. The link for the sample TED Talk is given below:

Name	YouTube Link
Dr. Quratulain Bakhtari	https://youtu.be/RAdQckjI9CQ?si=pNes9TEMnBnEZpoi

The data was chosen by purposive sampling, as it is thematically close to feminist stories on empowerment and perseverance. The video was transcribed using an online transcriber, *YouTube to Transcript*, which freely transcribes limited videos per day, and is available at https://youtubetotranscript.com/transcript?v=RAAdQckjI9CQ#google_vignette. The video was then listened to repeatedly to resolve the issues of spelling and some other errors found in the online-generated transcription.

The data was analyzed with the help of the Transitivity Model (Halliday, 1994), which classifies clauses by types of processes and their accompanying participants and circumstances. All the clauses in the transcript were coded according to the type of processes, i.e., Material, Mental, Relational, Behavioral, Verbal, or Existential, and the participants, i.e., Actor, Goal, Senser, Phenomenon, Carrier, Attribute, Token, Value, Sayer, Receiver, and Verbiage, were also identified.

During the quantitative stage, the frequency of every process was identified in order to ascertain what patterns of language were most dominant. Then, in the qualitative stage, identified choices were examined to understand the contribution of the employed linguistic patterns to the discourse of toxic positivity. The interpretation was based on the way the processes were construing toxic positivity.

Results and Discussion

This section outlines and describes the findings according to the study's objectives: the first objective was to determine the nature and the occurrence of processes and their participants in the TED Talk delivered by Dr. Quratulain Bakhteari; the second goal was to describe how the linguistic choices helped the speaker in the discursive construction of toxic positivity in the context of toxic feminism. Halliday's (1994) transitivity model was used for analysis, which allows investigating the ideational meanings based on the types of processes and roles of participants in the discourse.

The process of analysis entailed the identification and classification of the clauses by their process types, namely material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential, and the mappings of the participants involved in each. The section is organized according to the two objectives of the research. The first part gives the frequencies of the various types of processes and the key participants involved in them, and answers the first research question. The other part explains these findings in a way that identifies how the processes and actors involved in them play a role in the construal of toxic positivity in the feminist discourse of Dr. Quratulain Bakhteari. A summary of identified processes is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Frequencies of Different Types of Processes

Sr. No	Process Type	Frequencies			Total
		Modalized	Modulated	Neutral	
1	Material Process	0	16	219	235
	Mental Process	05	14	72	87
2	Of Cognition	02	03	36	42
	Of Perception	0	0	21	21
	Of Affection	0	02	05	07
	Desideration	0	09	08	17
3	Behavioral Process	0	0	06	06
4	Relational Process	0	01	20	128
	Identifying	0	0	39	39
	Attributive	0	01	81	82
	Possessive	0	0	08	08
5	Verbal Process	0	02	14	16
6	Existential Process	0	0	0	05
					Total: 478

Table 1 presents the frequencies of the various types of processes and subcategories of the processes that were identified in the TED Talk of Dr. Quratulain Bakhteari, and shows that a total of 478 processes were identified. Of them, the material processes were the most common, with 235 instances, meaning that the talk was organized most of the time around actions and the events that happened physically. There are relational processes with 129 occurrences, including 39 identifying, 82 attributive, and 8 possessive, which indicates a significant amount of clauses describing identity, attributes, and possession. Mental processes were found to be of the medium frequency of 87 cases, comprising 42 cognitive, 21 perceptive, 7 affective, and 17 desiderative processes, indicating a balanced presence of mental processes such as thinking, perceiving, feeling, and wanting. The verbal processes were identified 16 times, whereas the behavioral processes were relatively few, with only 6 instances. Existential processes were the least common, with only 3 incidences. In general, the table demonstrates that the dominance of the discourse is made by the material and relational processes, the middle ground is taken by the mental, and the least frequent are the verbal, behavioral, and existential processes. Table 4.2, provided below, indicates the key participants who operate in different roles that have been identified in the different process types.

Table 2
Summary of Frequent Participants in Various Roles

Role	Participants
Actor	I, she, they, my mother, my parents, it, marriage, things, the ruthlessness of the two armies the merciless killings of the opposite groups of each other the sufferers women children and Ordinary People, University of Technology Ifra England, my family, this, 1971, the 4,000 villages, nobody, the discussion, those, learning, the program, a population.
Goal	it, me, that, them, you, my classes, my house, my first son, money, a home, my husband, my masters, Pakistan, breakfast, lunch, tea, the newspapers, the political analysis of then the people, the question forms, food, excellent care
Receiver	us, Ted, to me, my dear children, we, at them, her, them, me
Senser	I, we, they, my son, people, nobody, when I, that I, because I, did I
Phenomenon	it, myself, that, to do this for her, to tell the stories, to cook, to sew, to raise their children, to make it out, what we were, to know why we faced such disgraceful, humiliating situation across the world, these new refugees from East Pakistan were treated so badly in the University, what I need to do
Carrier	I, it, they, this, who, it's, that, and it, that Balochistan, my mother, my father, a professional woman, a population, no other province, my children, my youngest one, he, we, pain.
Attribute	alive, free, 5 years old, very committed, in love, used, back, successful, happy, committed, okay, important, just horrible, so painful, shattered, too long, too time-taking, much more Consolidated person, Fearless
Token	this, it, that, these questions, today's talk of mine, the fundamental, 4,000, that's
Value	almost like giving the tribute to my mother, a settlement, right there where we were living in that one-room quarter of Drake Colony, now Shah Faisal Colony, words, sermons, empty principles, struggle, my obsession, a time, the time, how, the methodologies, what was my thesis, a son, the first province, guiding
Possessor	she, maybe she, I, that I
Possessed	some silver glasses, my little copper bucket, my all the security, all the sense of trust and a big house, enough water, time, nothing, graduated
Behaver	my mother, I
Sayer	my father, he, they, I, and she, and then she, thank you, were told, was never discussed, you
Verbiage	"kia tum mehlun ki baten krti rehti hu bachun k samny", that, something fast, for this opportunity, stay at home you're not supposed to go outside, all right as we were trained to make best out of it in the in the in the camps that we Lived in the colony that we Lived to make best out of it all right I'll make best out of it, I'll continue my studies, is there some someone who wants to take over this quarter from the poor Widow go through me, no.
Existent	stories, no religious pressures, a program on a PhD

Table 2 shows the major participants performing different semantic roles that were identified in the different types of processes in the TED talk by Dr. Quratulain Bakhteari. The results showed that the participant "I" was the most represented one in a number of roles, especially as Actor, Senser, and Carrier, which means that the discourse was described mainly using a personal and experience-based perspective. Other recurrent actors like *she*, *they*, *my mother*, *my parents* denoted incessant allusion to the family members and shared

experiences. Of the Goals, *it*, *me* and *that* were repeated, and the orientation towards the self-involvement and reflection was high. The references to the receivers, such as *us*, *Ted*, and *my dear children*, implied that there was a dialogic interaction with the audience and close individuals on isolated instances. The expressions *I*, *we*, and *they* worked in a repeated manner in the mental processes as Sensors, and Phenomena like *it*, *myself*, and *those* were commonly linked with personal revelation and self-knowledge. The Carriers *I*, *it*, *they*, *pain* were common, Attributes such as *alive*, *free*, *happy* and *not a bad thing*, as in *pain is not a bad thing*, were used to describe the emotional, moral and existential conditions. The identification was frequently made with the help of tokens, such as *this*, *it*, and *that*, whereas Values, such as *a settlement*, *struggle*, and *my obsession*, pointed at replicating themes in the discourse. Possessors like *I* and *she* and the Possessed objects referred to material and emotional possession. Sayers, with the words *my father*, *I* and *she* highlighted the importance of verbal expression, whereas the Verbiages with direct quotations and reported speech demonstrated some instances of interpersonal communication and memory. The Existent elements like *stories*, *no religious pressures* and *a program on PhD* indicated things that were presented as a component of lived or narrated experience.

The transitivity analysis showed that the discourse of Dr. Quratulain Bakhteari's TED Talk was characterized by material and relational processes, the middle position was taken by the mental processes, and least often were verbal, behavioral, and existential processes. The first person pronoun *I* that she uses throughout the talk placed the speaker at the same time as Actor, Sensor and Carrier, placing the foregrounding of the self as the locus of perception, action and moral judgment. The other recurring figures, namely: *my mother*, *my parents*, and *they*, were primarily used as Actors and Carriers when evoking the generational and familial histories of perseverance and honesty. The combination of these participant roles and types of processes formed a discourse in which the agency, determination, and moral reflection served as the key channels through which the experience could be represented.

This trend was an indication of something more than a style. Material Processes were the most visible, which implied that Dr. Quratulain Bakhteari was creating her experience in a major way of doing, by focusing on concrete actions and resolutions. The experiences were stabilized by Relational Processes, which attributed values and attributes to people and situations, and Mental Processes, which converted emotion into cognition or intent. All these grammatical resources formed a story of control and composure, the story that transformed vulnerability into strength. These transitivity patterns, however, instead of being an expression of real empowerment, reflected what scholars refer to as toxic positivity, a discourse that imposes optimism and perseverance over admitting distress (Sokal et al., 2020; Bosveld, 2021).

This tendency had its grounds in the genre and social orientation of the TED talk. The structure of the talk favors inspirational stories based on individual accomplishment. It promotes speakers to frame experience as an experience of self-realization, as opposed to commenting on structural inequalities. Therefore, the linguistic patterns of Dr. Quratulain Bakhteari fit the TED spirit: Material, Relational and Mental clauses are action-oriented, evaluative, and reflective, respectively, and goal-oriented as well. However, it was the combination of these elements of grammar that made this talk distinctive, as it presented suffering as virtue, which is a discursive characteristic of forced positive language. Suffering was not accepted but justified, promoted, and re-packaged as a natural part of development. It was a redefinition of distress as moral triumph that represented what Colebrook (2010) refers to as toxic hope, hope that nourishes endurance and not change.

Although the proportion of process types was predicted to be the same in a motivational genre, the degree of the application of Mental and Relational processes toward the normalization of hardship was surprising. The speaker redefined social constraints as a chance to be enlightened personally instead of critiquing them through introspection. This

was a minor shift, a struggle for self-growth, in the linguistic spirit of toxic positivity, which is the suppression of the negative by excessive appreciation of resilience.

The rhetoric of acceptance was best achieved when a group of clauses depicted the rewording of personal limitation as a choice. For example:

an option (Range) was put (Material Process: Passive) in front of me (Circumstance of Place), either I (Actor) stay (Material Process) at home (Circumstance of Place) as a nice beautiful beautiful wife (Circumstance of Role) or leave (Material Process) this time (Circumstance of Time).

The passivized process *was put* replaced by agency, and the following clauses restored the use of *I* as the Actor, and the response was given as a self-motivated action. This was grammatically presented as a choice of submission. The social compulsion inherent in the choice was linguistically deleted, and endurance was posed as autonomy. This syntactical camouflaging is characteristic of toxic positivity, as with the help of linguistic design, constraint is empowered.

The same idea was represented in the following relational clauses:

It (Carrier) was (Relational Attributive Process) not about my freedom (Attribute) this time (Circumstance of Time), it (Carrier) was (Relational Attributive Process) of a more deeper social justice question (Attribute)

In this case, the Carrier *it* was an abstract substitute of lived experience and the Attribute was *a deeper social justice question*, moralized personal sacrifice. By means of this Relational Attributive construction, the deprivation of freedom was raised to the level of moral purpose in language. This trend of uplifting, to make it a virtue, was the most typical of the discursive reasoning of toxic positivity, in which pain is not addressed but praised.

Another example was how cognition was transformed into volitional certainty:

I (Senser) resolved (Mental Process) [to leave (Material Process), leaving (Material Process) the comfort of the house (Goal)] (Phenomenon)

In this case, the word *resolved* was used as a Mental Cognitive Process, and the infinitival clause *to leave* was the Phenomenon or the mental content of resolution. The construction was a manifestation of an inner decision, being a conscious will. However, its own construction, i.e., the overlaying Mental Process (resolved) with embedded Material Processes (to leave, leaving), displayed a discursive urge to transform thought into action, reflection into productivity. By doing this, the struggle of emotion was restated linguistically as intentional will. The provision described agency, but in a context in which feeling lacked a separate space, only movement did. This is very similar to Bosveld's (2021) concept of forced positive discourse, where emotional truthfulness is replaced by endurance acting.

Linguistic re-definition of pain as virtue was most evidently expressed in the relational clauses:

and pain (Carrier) is (Relational Attributive) not a bad thing (Attribute), it's (Carrier) okay (Relational Attributive Process: Attribute) to be (Relational Attributive Process) in pain (Attribute: State)

With the help of these clauses, *pain* was grammaticalized as the Carrier of positive or neutral Attributes. The Relational Attributive Process, in the nomenclature of Halliday (1994), attributes a quality, and that quality is the moral acceptability. This linguistically changed the state of pain as something unpleasant into a part of self-knowledge and virtue.

Suffering was not denied or opposed, but rather turned grammatically immortal, an absolute fact about life and self. This linguistic stability is an ideological backlash to toxic positivity: the process of making suffering look normal with the help of words.

This normalization was further carried over into the discourse with negated existential and material clauses:

It's (Carrier) okay (Relational Attributive Process) (Existential Process: Implied) no need (Existent) to get rid (Material Process) of it (Goal) fast (Circumstance of Manner), and (Existential Process: Implied) no need (Existent) to get out (Material Process) of it (Goal) quickly quickly (Circumstance of Manner)

The repetition of *no need* as Existent annulled any urgency to change or escape, and the Material Processes *to get rid of* and *to get out* were negated. The Circumstances of Manner ("fast," "quickly quickly") underlined a voluntary slowing down, linguistically supporting the act of remaining in pain. The absence of resolution is not encouraged by the grammatical construction, and the linguistic construction also elevated endurance to the status of a moral duty.

Such discursive logic of endurance was reinforced by the causal construction which followed:

Because if you (Actor) do (Material Process) that (Goal) you (Senser) might compromise (Modalized Mental Cognitive Process: Probability) on your dreams (Phenomenon)

These constructions brought in a moral basis to the restraint of emotions through the integration of Material and Mental Processes. The Material Process *do* introduced the real activity of getting rid of pain as a physical action, whereas the Mental Cognitive Process *compromise* redefined this action as cognitively and ethically unacceptable. Modality was added in the form of *might*: to act contrary to the pain was to run the risk of your dreams. This building linguistically linked success and failure to perseverance and escape, respectively. It, in a sense, made suffering a precondition of fulfillment. This causal logic, in the context of toxic positivity, carries out the main task of moralizing pain; it convinces people that the suffering itself is a guarantee of redemption, thus preventing critical or transformative action.

The positive conclusion of this argument was seen in:

and it (Actor) eventually (Circumstance of Time: Sequence) all (Circumstance of Extent) comes (Material Process) together (Circumstance of Manner)

This clause was a combination of temporal and extent circumstantials to make a promise of eventual harmony and resolution. The Material Process (comes together) was performed by the Actor *it* (an abstract nominalization of experience or life), indicating that all the difficulties are in the right place and they come to sense. The Circumstance of Time indefinitely pushed the resolution to the future. The structure, linguistically, reassured the listener and delayed the prospect of change, which is the self-regulatory discourse of endurance on which forced positive discourse is based.

The last sequence supported perseverance with the imperatives and modalized instructions:

Just (Circumstance of Manner: Degree) live (Material Process) and learn (Mental Cognitive Process) with the pain (Circumstance of Accompaniment), follow (Modulated Material Process: Obligation) your dreams (Goal), do not leave (Modulated Material Process: Prohibition) it (Goal) halfway (Circumstance of Extent)

These clauses combined Material, Mental and Modulated Material Processes in order to represent instruction and moral regulation. The call to live and learn with the pain amalgamated living and thinking, which meant that the right method of living was to incorporate pain as a pedagogue. The moral compulsion that was brought in through the obligation *follow your dreams* and the prohibition that *do not leave it halfway* added a layer of moral compulsion that was modulated. The linguistic positioning of the listener was not to be acted in, but to continue, to last forever. In this way, endurance was made a moral commandment and failure to persist a moral failure. This combination of demands and forbids exemplifies the turn of language into force, as it is the ideological trend of toxic positivity.

In the light of the systemic-functional approach to grammar provided by Halliday (1994), the grammatical realizations present in the discourse of Dr. Quratulain Bakhteari reflect the process of experience construction and revaluation using process-participant configurations. Material processes represented self-directed activity; relational processes represented evaluative judgment; mental processes re-defined emotion as cognition or will. This interaction formed what Halliday terms the grammar of experience; however, in this case, experience was re-edited and re-packaged to generate a feeling of control and mastery. The representation of pain and uncertainty as a dynamic phenomenon was absent, as they were treated as carriers of virtue, the negative nature of which is neutralized by relational qualities, i.e., *okay* and *not a bad thing*.

The results were consistent with the results of Lecompte-Van Poucke (2022), who, in her study of toxic positivity in health discourse, found that excessive positive word use and moral demands shifted emotional pain inward. The same linguistic mechanism was presented in a TED Talk by Dr. Quratulain Bakhteari; however, in feminist discourse, the exhortations to *follow your dreams* and the promises that *pain is not a bad thing* served to perpetuate emotional work in the name of empowerment. Similarly, Bosveld (2021) and Ehrenreich (2009) observed that the rhetoric of toxic positivity tends to blind any structural inequality by redefining distress as a failure to think.

Based on the analysis, it could be concluded that the discursive nature of the talk created an illusion of empowerment, where the agency was socially constrained but grammatically present. The illusion of control in the material processes, the re-evaluation of pain into acceptance in relational processes, and the re-direction of emotion into reflection and resolution into mental processes linguistically construed toxic positivity. The participants, including self *I*, *you* and *pain*, played repeated roles which reinforced this illusion: the self as a continuous Actor, Senser and *pain* as innocent but ethically obliged Carrier. The outcome was an economy of language which promoted perseverance, discouraged criticism and equated survival with power. By doing this, the discourse met the traits of what the current study considers as toxic positivity within feminist rhetoric- a discourse that lets the agency seem real, though the affective facts of suffering are obsolete.

Such conclusions echo the ideas of Colebrook (2010) regarding the problem of toxic hope, in which looking forward to a better future does not allow one to change the situation in the present. This principle is linguistically manifested in the grammatical constructions of Dr. Quratulain Bakhteari, particularly that vows eventual coherence (*it all comes together*). Hope is a form of containment, rather than change, linguistic postponement, and not action. In that regard, the transitivity patterns of the speaker did not merely mirror her own position, but pointed to a bigger cultural discourse where female power had been mythologized in terms of silence, patience and perseverance.

Conclusion

Transitivity analysis of the TED Talk of Dr. Quratulain Bakhteari based on the model of transitivity by Halliday showed that the discourse of the speaker was majorly construed

using material and relational processes, while mental processes occupied somewhat of what middle ground. The combination of these linguistic decisions painted the picture of personal suffering, struggle and endurance as moral power and self-empowerment. The discourse re-constructed the concept of suffering as a personal development through the use of sentences such as, *pain is not a bad thing* and *I resolved to leave*, and thus the vulnerability was converted into virtue. The study has found that these linguistic structures represent the dynamics of toxic positivity in feminist language, in which the forces of resilience and optimism prevail over recognition of emotional suffering or structural inequality. Although the talk is supposedly empowering, the expression of empowerment supports self-control and perseverance as the idealized feminine qualities.

Recommendations

This result is of importance to discourse and gender studies, as it shows how ostensibly liberal discourses can perpetuate emotional containment by means of linguistic form. Future studies ought to further this investigation to a larger sample of TED talks and other oratory given by women to find out whether the same transitivity arrangements, specifically, the interaction of Material, Relational, and Mental Processes, are repeated as a traditional grammar of endurance. Subsequent research can also be done to investigate the extent to which mood and modality support these meanings, as modulated imperatives such as follow your dreams and prohibitions such as do not leave it halfway, seem to be subtle emotional control mechanisms. The multimodal analysis may show the support of this verbal normalization of suffering by gesture, tone, and visual composition. Lastly, the studies that could be proposed based on the audience study would examine the influence of such linguistic strategies on the affective reactions of the listeners and whether the discourse makes them feel empowered or quietly keeps the expectation of responding calmly when faced with pressure.

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