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GENDERED LANGUAGE AND POWER DYNAMICS IN BANGLADESHI DIGITAL MATRIMONIAL DISCOURSE: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC FACEBOOK GROUP POSTS

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Abstract

The paper analyses the language of marriage posts that are exchanged on the public Bangladeshi Facebook groups using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and pragmatic theory. Grounded on a purposively selected corpus of 20 posts, counting 10 bride-seeking posts and 10 groom-seeking posts gathered in lively Bangladeshi matrimonial Facebook groups, the research discovers the concurrent production and stimulation of gender, power, class, faith, colourism, and migration objectives in digital marital language. Using the three-dimensional CDA model by Fairclough (1992) and Politeness Theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) and Searle (1969) Speech Act Theory and Van Dijk (1998) Ideological Square, one can find out that matrimonial Facebook posts represent a multi-voiced, multi-layered discursive space where patriarchal norms are reproduced They report five major findings: (i) systematic gendering of credentialling language with the most of women being defined by physical and relational traits whilst men are being defined in terms of professional credentials and future potential; (ii) the widespread entrenchment of colourism ideology in complexion vocabulary; (iii) a strong asymmetry in the linguistic management of divorce stigma between men and women; (iv) the strategic use of self-posting The paper has added to the under-researched interplay between South Asian digital discourse and gender linguistics and Islamic matrimonial culture, and (v) the increasing entanglement of matrimonial language and migration aspiration among educated Bangladeshis. The study contributes to the under-researched intersection of South Asian digital discourse, gender linguistics, and Islamic matrimonial culture, offering a replicable analytical model for future research on digital matrimonial discourse in the Global South.

Keywords: Gendered language, Power dynamics, Islamic Marriage, Stigma management.

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1. Introduction

In the overlap of religious practice, family responsibility, and social desire, the institution of marriage in Bangladesh has a special, unique place. The process of searching for a possible mate in life, traditionally aided by the family, local brokers, and newspaper dating pages, has acquired a new twist in the digital world. Facebook, which has already penetrated the demographic groups of Bangladesh to the extent of a high degree, has developed into one of the most renowned matrimonial places, where people, families and professional agencies leave their highly detailed profiles of a potential bride and groom.

They are ideologically bearing full-bodied, orally convoluted texts, and the values, fears, dreams, and power relations of the contemporary Bangladeshi society are debated in the language. Discourse as Fairclough (1992, p. 63) emphasizes, is linked to the social world, yet it is not a reflection of it: it constitutes it, it is a mode of making and creating the world in the sense of meaning. In this light, the matrimonial Facebook post is a copy and an imitation of the social systems in which they are situated: the gender, the class, the religion, the colourism, and the geographical aspiration systems.

This paper examines the linguistic encoding, maintenance, and in some cases, contestation of these structures in a purposefully sampled set of 20 publicly available Bangladeshi matrimonial Facebook posts. Using CDA, pragmatics and ideological approaches, the paper provides a theoretically informed and empirically descriptive explanation of how language in this genre simultaneously serves as social action, constituting, validating and at times challenging the social norms by which the culture of matrimony in Bangladesh operates in the digital era.

This question is important not only in the linguistic field. The linguistic form of matrimonial advertisements has actual social implications: it conveys who is acceptable and who is not, who has value and who has to prove his or her value, what is important in a marriage.

2. Background of the Study

South Asian history of matrimonial advertising is well-documented. Since the late nineteenth century, matrimonial columns in the newspapers across the subcontinent were the place where families placed an advert of their children as eligible and enumerated the qualities they sought in a prospective bride (Ahuvia and Adelman, 1992; Majumdar,2009). These print adverts have drawn the interest of academicians as places of ideological production, especially in terms of gender codes, caste order and class desire (Majumdar, 2009; Jha and Adelman, 2009).

In Bangladesh, marriages have been mediated by several factors which are unique to that country: the country is almost entirely Islamic as a moral and social system; the country is rapidly urbanized and educated since independence in 1971; the Bangladeshi diaspora is currently large in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Germany and the Gulf states; and smartphones and social media have proliferated fast, particularly among urban residents and semi

Facebook as a marriage site is relatively young and still a significant change. Unlike the dedicated matrimonial websites, Facebook matrimonial groups are an unregulated community group in which posts are publicly posted, comments and responses are made, and posted outside the group. This unusual characteristic, uniting the elements of the community and the public, offers Facebook matrimonial posts the characteristics of a sociolinguistic nature, which is not comparable to print advertisements and web profiles. The genre is also linguistically plural: posts are composed

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in formal Bangla, formal English, romanised Bangali (Banglish), and in mixed-code registers, which are also pointers to the social status, educational level, and target audience of the poster.

3. Rationale of the Study

Although the matrimonial discourse of South Asian has gained substantial literature, the language of the matrimonial postings on Bangladeshi electronic platforms is yet to be studied. The existing literature is inclined to concentrate on print advertisements within the Indian contexts (Jha and Adelman, 2009; Majumdar, 2009), matrimonial websites as a sociotechnical platform (Ahuvia and Adelman, 1992), or a question of marriage practices in general in Bangladesh. No particular focus on the linguistic and discursive practices of the Bangladeshi Facebook matrimony groups has been conducted by scholars, to the best of the researcher's knowledge.

This is a serious gap due to several reasons. To begin with, Facebook matrimonial posts represent a new genre in the use of public language, which is modeled on the affordances of social media yet is built on the foundations of centuries-old matrimonial tradition. Second, the clash of Islamic culture, South Asian patriarchal values, digital modernity and the aspirations of classes due to which this genre is defined sets unique and analytically productive conditions of discourse. Third, the fast digitalisation of matrimonial search in Bangladesh makes it an urgent location of critical linguistic interest: the language of these posts has tangible social implications to the individuals mentioned in them, which affects social attitudes towards suitability, desirability, and value.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Gender and Language in Matrimonial Discourse

Studies of matrimonial advertising as a genre of linguistics have confirmed that these texts are not seemingly neutral stores of biographical data. In a study of semiotics of matrimonial advertisements in modern Bengal, Majumdar (2009) revealed that the genre generates the stable ideological construction of femininity and masculinity in which women are always given affective and household characteristics, while men are defined in terms of career and economic and social status. Banerjee et al. (2013) has generalised this to analyse the encoding of caste identity in Indian matrimonial texts, arguing that the seeming transparency of the contemporary matrimonial scenes masks a continuation of hierarchical classification (Banerjee et al., 2013). Jha and Adelman (2009) provided a particularly colourism-centred examination of Indian wedding sites, and recorded an institutionalized favouring of light-skinned brides, which is coded even in the choice of terminology to describe skin colour.

These pioneering studies bring out the most important point that matrimonial language is ideological language: by naturalising social orders, it constitutes them in the conventions of a genre which is practical and apparently neutral. The current research takes a step further in this tradition, but into a new cultural environment (Bangladeshi instead of Indian), a new media (Facebook instead of print or web), and a new level of theoretical richness (CDA instead of content analysis)

4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis: Key Concepts

The main theoretical and methodological framework to be used in this study is Critical Discourse Analysis, which has been developed by Fairclough (1992, 2001), Wodak and Meyer (2009) and Van Dijk (1998). The explicit interest in power and ideology sets CDA apart among other discourse-analytical methods: discourse is not seen as communication but as a type of social

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activity where the power relations are exercised, sustained, and sometimes challenged. The analysis scaffolding of the current study is a three-dimensional model by Fairclough (1992), analyzing discourse as text, discursive practice, and social practice concurrently.

The idea of the ideological square by Van Dijk (1998), i.e., the discursive tendency to focus on positive self-representation and conditional other-representation, is especially fertile in the context of matrimonial analysis, in which the construction of the profiled person and conditions of the desired partner form a systematic contradiction. The emphasis of the study on counter-hegemonic moves: instances in the corpus where traditional ideological standpoints have been challenged in the genre, is informed by the concept of hegemony as implemented in discourse by Fairclough and others, as discussed by Gramsci (1971).

4.3 Pragmatics and Face Management

The second key analytical lens is the Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson (1987), which is based on the ideas of face and stigma suggested by Goffman (1959, 1963). Their model of positive politeness (seeking approval and solidarity), negative politeness (respecting autonomy), and face-threatening acts (FTAs) is also quite fruitful to use in the context of the matrimonial post, a genre that has to both affirm the social value of the poster, put conditions on the reader, and handle the social threat of exposure.

The analysis of how posters manage potentially discrediting characteristics like divorce, disability, infertility and age is informed by the notion of stigma management introduced by Goffman (1963) in his approach to stigmatization, which is his concept of disclosure strategy. The Speech Act Theory offered by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) can be used to classify the performative roles of matrimonial language, i.e., the assertives, directives, commissives, and expressives, with the help of which the genre fulfils its social work.

4.4 Digital Discourse, Identity, and Social Media

The rise of social media as a place of identity formation and a community practice has created a great amount of academic interest (Blommaert, 2010; boyd, 2014; Georgakopoulou, 2007). As Androutsopoulos (2013) has observed, online discourse blends characteristics of written and spoken language in such a way that new registers emerge, whilst Blommaert (2010) has shown how the digital platform exacerbates existing social inequalities, as well as provides new opportunities to marginalised voices. The analysis of the corpus in the study is informed by the notion of linguistic capital, as described by Bourdieu (1991), which is the unequal social value assigned to various types of language use, with the ability to produce rhetorically advanced matrimonial speech proving to be systematic with respect to social class and educational background.

Within the context of Bangladeshi culture, in particular, Islam is a ubiquitous organising logic of discourse. The gendered aspects of the Islamic discourse in Bangladesh have been captured by Sultana (2012), who has shown that the religious language gives women a sense of moral power, and at the same time, perpetuates patriarchal demands. The theoretical vocabulary to explain how matrimonial posts perform and produce gender norms comes in the concept of gender performativity as proposed by Butler (1990), i.e., gender as a construction through repetitions of citational practices as opposed to gender as an essence.

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5. Research Gap

The above literature review indicates a noticeable and significant gap in the existing literature. Although matrimonial advertising in Indian print and digital contexts has been extensively studied, and CDA has been productively used to analyze gender discourse in various other contexts, no prior published research has used CDA to analyze the language of Bangladeshi Facebook matrimonial advertisements. As a unique genre, the fusion of Islamic moral discourse, digital social media practices, South Asian matrimonial practices, and the particularities of classes and migration processes of modern Bangladesh, it deserves a specific analytical focus.

In addition, the current research on matrimonial discourse has been inclined to take a look at never-married, younger, and socially normative profiles. The current research project adds to the analytical frame divorced, widowed, and infertile people; older women and men entering the marriage market again; and diaspora and migration-aspiration subjects; professional agency-mediated profiles; and explicitly counter-hegemonic voices such as feminist and Sunnah-based progressive discourse. By this means, it provides a much more socially holistic view of matrimonial language than ever before.

6. Research Objectives and Research Questions

6.1 General Objective

To critically analyze how language is used to construct gender, power, and ideology in Facebook posts of Bangladeshi digital matrimony using Critical Discourse Analysis.

6.2 Specific Objectives

1. To examine the gendered language as constructing the credentialling of brides and grooms differently, the ranking and prioritisation of physical, relational and professional terms.
2. To establish the discourse strategies by which posters negotiate social stigma of divorce, widowhood, disability, infertility, and class vulnerability.
3. To explore how ideologies of religion, colourism, and migration aspiration are integrated and replicated in the language of matrimonial ads.

6.3 Research Questions

1. How are gender and power expressed in the linguistic creation of matrimonial profiles in the posts of the Bangladeshi public Facebook group?
2. How do postes negotiate social stigma using discourse strategies in Bangladeshi matrimonial posts in Facebook, and are these discourse strategies applied systematically across genders?
3. What is the linguistic functioning of ideologies of religion, colourism and migration aspiration in the Bangladeshi digital matrimonial discourse, and how are these challenged or reproduced?

7. Theoretical Framework

This paper uses a multi-theoretical approach that incorporates Critical Discourse Analysis, pragmatic theory, and ideological analysis. The components deal with different but complementary aspects of the information. Collectively, they facilitate a stratified analysis that transpires from micro-linguistic features to macro-sociological explanation.

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7.1 Fairclough's Three-Dimensional CDA Model

The main analytical model is Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model. It theorises discourse as both: (i) text, the linguistic properties of the written post itself such as vocabulary, modality, and structural ordering; (ii) discursive practice, the processes of text production, distribution and consumption such as the role of the poster and the conventions of a genre such as Islamic moral frameworks, colourism, and the hierarchy of classes; and (iii) social practice, the larger ideological frameworks that The tripartite model allows the analysis to wend methodically between detailed textual analysis and global sociocultural analysis.

7.2 Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory

The pragmatic aspect of the analysis is informed by the face management and politeness framework by Brown and Levinson (1987). Their ideas of positive face (the need to be liked), negative face (the need to be independent), face-threatening acts (FTAs), and strategies of mitigation give the possibilities of the analysis of how posters cope with social risk, preserving their own social face and keeping the respect of the reader. A related concept, stigma management, introduced by Goffman (1963), is used to analyze the particular narrative strategies of the posters in question, i.e., divorced, widowed, disabled, and older.

7.3 Speech Act Theory

The Speech Act Theory by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) offers a theory through which the performative functions of matrimonial language could be categorised. The analysis recognizes assertives (presenting facts and qualities), directives (giving instructions and exclusions), commissives (promising about future actions), and expressives (religious and relational bonding performing). Special focus is on directional speech acts in the context of which posters filter out unwanted applicants, which combine acts of gatekeeping and social hierarchies that the poster operates.

7.4 Van Dijk's Ideological Square

We can analyze its asymmetry in constructing profiled persons and desirable partners in the ideological square proposed by Van Dijk (1998), which can be described by the discursive preference of emphasizing positive self-presentation and negative or conditional other-presentation. This disparity is then rationally applied to the gender situation to the marriage situation, where bride price regularly introduces the profiled woman to untried virtues, and the attractive groom with terms and conditions.

7.5 Bourdieu's Linguistic Capital

The analysis of the study is informed by Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital, which is a term used to describe the unequal social value of various types of language use. The ability to create rhetorically advanced matrimonial speech, through the use of narrative framing, emotional appeals, and credential stacking, in itself is a kind of social capital that is unevenly distributed along the lines of class position and is associated with both the level of education and place of residence.

8. Conceptual Framework

The analytical process used in this study is mapped in Figure 1 below. The major input is that of Facebook posts that are public. They are discussed in five intersecting theoretical perspectives that, together, cover the textual, discursive, and sociocultural aspects of the data. The

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analysis is carried out at three levels (micro, meso, macro) and generates five key analytical themes, which are synthesised into the findings of the study.

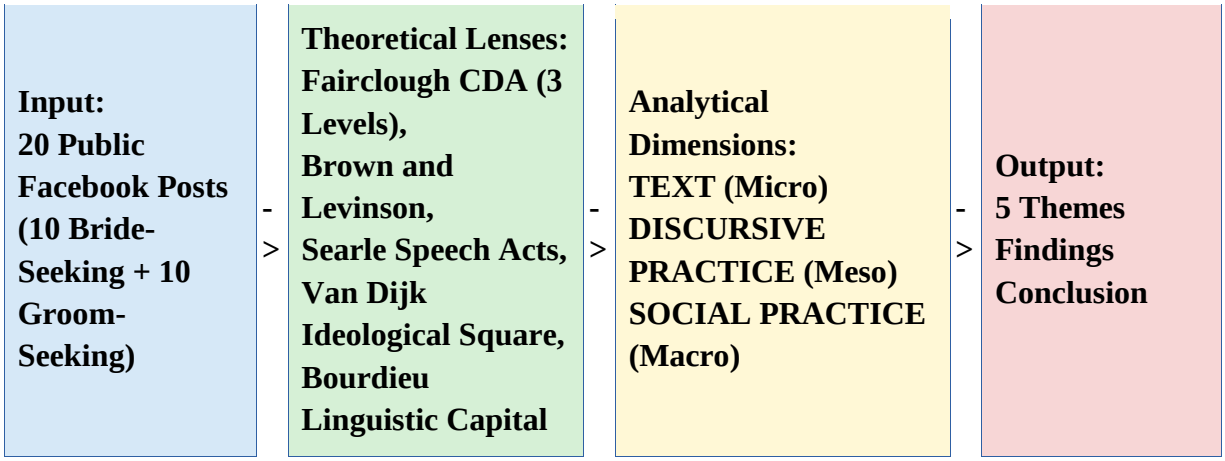


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Analytical Process from Data to Findings

The advantage of this multi-theoretical conceptual framework is that it includes several layers: the single theoretical perspective cannot be used to understand the multi-faceted nature of matrimonial Facebook discourse. The CDA provides the macro-ideological perspective; the politeness theory provides the interpersonal pragmatic perspective; the speech act perspective provides the functional linguistic perspective; the ideological square provides the representational perspective and the socioeconomic perspective is provided by the linguistic capital. They are combined to create an analytical apparatus that is comprehensive and suitable for the multidimensionality of the data.

9. Research Methodology

9.1 Research Design

The qualitative research design of this paper is an interpretive inquiry. It is not a hunt for statistical generalisability but an endeavour to produce a theoretically informed, empirically grounded explanation of the discursive practices in a specific genre of the digital. The approach taken to methodology aligns with the interpretive orientation of CDA, which does not emphasise breadth but depth of analysis and sees texts as socially constructed practices instead of transparent documents of intent (Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

9.2 Data Source and Collection

To collect the data, active Bengali matrimonial Facebook groups of at least 10,000 active members were sampled, who were active Bangladeshi. All the posts were publicly available and not in a group at the time of collection, which met the ethical standards of naturally occurring online data, as defined by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR, 2019). The posts were copied word-for-word and all the original aspects of language, including Bangla script, romanised Bangali, emojis, capitalisation styles, and hashtags, were reproduced. The first stage of collecting posts involved gathering 31 posts, with one of them being filtered out on the basis of authenticity due to its traits of predatory content instead of a real-life discussion of matrimony, thus leaving 30 posts as a usable pool.

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9.3 Sampling Strategy

The final corpus of 20 posts was selected using purposive sampling according to the principle of maximum variation out of the 30 posts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The process of selection favoured analytical distinctiveness: each retained post was required to add a different thematic or linguistic layer, and there was a variety in the following variables: marital status (never-married, divorced, widowed); class background; linguistic register; voice of posting (self, family, friend, professional agency); religious orientation; and the geographical location. To make comparisons of genders systematically, a 1:1 ratio between 10 bride-seeking posts (coded B1 through B10) and 10 groom-seeking posts (coded G1 through G10) was achieved.

Table 1: Corpus Diversity across Key Variables

Variable	Bride Posts (B1 to B10)	Groom Posts (G1 to G10)
Marital status	Never-married (B1, B2, B5, B6, B7); Divorced (B3, B8, B9); Widowed (B10)	Never-married (G2, G3, G4, G5, G6); Divorced (G1, G7, G9); Widowed (G8, G10)
Posting voice	Self: B2, B3, B9 | Family: B1, B5, B7 | Agency: B4, B8 | Sister: B6	Self: G3, G6, G7, G8, G9, G10 | Family: G1, G2, G4, G5
Language register	Formal Bangla, formal English, Banglish mixed	Formal Bangla, formal English, Banglish mixed
Religious orientation	Conservative to progressive Islam; Hindu (B6, B7)	Conservative to progressive Islam
Class background	Lower to upper-middle and diaspora	Lower to upper-middle and diaspora
Geography	Dhaka, district towns, rural areas, diaspora (Germany, Canada, Australia)	Dhaka, district towns, rural areas, diaspora (Canada)

9.4 Analytical Procedure

Three sequential stages were used to analyze it. Stage 1 (Textual Analysis) Stage 1 involved close linguistic analysis on the micro level of each post in terms of lexical choice, modality, structural sequencing of descriptive categories, typographic devices and types of speech acts. Stage 2 (Discursive Practice Analysis) explored the production and consumption of posts in the Facebook group setting and the importance of the poster and the conventions of the genre that govern the matrimonial post. Stage 3 (Sociocultural Interpretation) involved the interpretation of textual and discursive results based on the wider framework of the Bangladeshi society and relating the patterns that were identified to the ideological frameworks that they represent. The passages written in Bangali were translated by the researcher, a native speaker of the language, and he has professional competence in English; he points out decisions made during translation that play an important role in the analysis.

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9.5 Ethical Considerations

The posts that were analysed were all publicly available when they were collected. The ethical standards of internet research, as stated by the AoIR (2019), were also followed in the current study since no personal permission was requested, since the data was openly accessible, and no interaction with the participants took place. In all quoted extracts, any personal names, contact details and other uniquely identifying information have been removed or anonymised. It focuses the analysis of structural patterns in discourse in the corpus instead of the characterisation of particular people.

10. Analysis of the Data

Five broad themes, which have been the result of systematic analysis of the corpus, structure the analysis. The illustration of each theme is provided with the choice of extracts made based on particular corpus posts, including the translation of the posts where needed. The themes are not displayed as separate, mutually exclusive categories but as overlapping aspects of a complex discursive formation.

10.1 Theme 1: The Gendered Credential Hierarchy

A systematic asymmetry in bride and groom descriptions is the most common phenomenon in the whole corpus. In bride-seeking adverts, the physical body is brought to the foreground of description as the main locus of description, which is normally placed ahead of educational or work background. Groom-seeking posts feature professional status and career path, taking a leading role, and physical description plays a minor or unimportant role. Such an imbalance is a symptom of the established system of ideology in which the social value of women is anchored in their bodies and relational qualities, and the value of men on their economic productivity.

The sequence of things is quite vivid in extract B1 as illustrated below:

Extract B1 (Bangla): *উচ্চতা: ৫'৪ (স্লিম) | গায়ের রং: শ্যামলা | ধর্ম: ইসলাম | শিক্ষা: পোস্ট গ্র্যাজুয়েট*

> **Translation:** *Height: 5'4 (Slim) | Complexion: Shemla [wheatish] | Religion: Islam | Education: Post Graduate from National University*

In this posting, the personal information of the bride, like height and build, is the first and second attributes of the list of physical attributes, followed by religion and postgraduate degree. The qualifier within parentheses, (Slim), is a positive credential, which expresses that slimness is desirable in itself and is worth advertising. In comparison, the following extract of the groom post G4:

> **Translation:** *He is solid, easy-going, and stable. He cherishes Islamic values, modesty, faithfulness and marriage is a lifelong affair. No financial expectations. Deen, education, and mutual respect are important to us more than wealth.*

In G4, there is no physical description. The groom is constructed entirely out of character attributes, values and relational characteristics. Where the physical appearance could be considered, it is just the case of being emotionally mature and valuing simplicity. This analogy

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demonstrates the ideology square put into practice as suggested by Van Dijk (1998): the bride is produced through the means of possessing an ideal body; the groom is produced through the means of possessing an ideal character and career. This is the asymmetry that is present in all 20 corpus posts.

Table 2: Description Categories Compared across Bride and Groom Posts

Description Category	Bride Posts	Groom Posts
Physical appearance (height, complexion, build)	Present in all 10 posts	Present in 3 of 10 posts
Character and personality traits	Present in all 10 posts (relational, other-centred)	Present in all 10 posts (individual, self-centred)
Educational credentials	Present in all 10 posts (secondary credential)	Present in all 10 posts (institutional prestige foregrounded)
Career and income	Present in 6 of 10 posts (secondary to character)	Primary descriptor in all 10 posts
Future potential	Absent in all bride posts	Present in 2 posts; unique to groom side
Religious practice	Present in all 10 posts	Present in all 10 posts

10.2 Theme 2: Colourism as Embedded Linguistic Ideology

The second similarity of the corpus is that the descriptions of complexion and the ideology it is involved in are ubiquitous. Not simply a social attitude in this corpus, colourism, as the favouring of the lighter colouration of a racial or ethnic group (Hunter, 2007), is a linguistic phenomenon inherent in the vocabulary of description itself. Each of the complexion descriptors employed throughout the 20 posts has a place in an implicit hierarchy of social value, with light tones having higher prestige.

It is not the description of complexion, but how it is described. In the entire corpus, there is not a single post that has a complexion term which can take a state of darkness ungrounded: all the descriptors are biased towards fairness or give a defensive concession to a non-fair state, or soothe the congruence of a dark complexion with positive modifiers. The hedging policy is as displayed in the extract of B3 below:

Extract B3 (Bangla): *গায়ের রং: উজ্জ্বল শ্যামলা-ফর্সার মাঝামাঝি*

> **Translation:** *Complexion: Between bright dusky and fair [literally: bright dusky-fair in-between]*

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The phrase "উজ্জ্বল শ্যামলা-ফর্সার মাঝামাঝি" is a grammatical construction designed to position the speaker's complexion as close to fairness as honestly possible. The adjective "উজ্জ্বল" (bright or radiant) is inserted before "শ্যামলা" (dusky) to soften the darkness, whilst the compound "শ্যামলা-ফর্সার মাঝামাঝি" positions the skin tone on the fairness side of a perceived spectrum. It is not an impartial description: it is a face-saving linguistic performance, which casts a balance between negotiating colourism and telling the truth. The fact that skin lightening is a process that Glenn (2008) notes works on the premise of a yearning to be light, here can be applied to the linguistic level, not the chemical; the language itself is striving to be fair. Table 3 ranks the entire corpus of complexion vocabulary as the least positively and most positively framed.

Table 3: Complexion Vocabulary Spectrum across the Corpus

Term Used	Post(s)	Linguistic and Ideological Framing
'Brown' (plain English)	B9	Unhedged; no aspiration to fairness; lowest linguistic capital marker
'Shemla' (dusky or wheatish)	B1, G2	Standard cultural term; acknowledged but not linguistically softened
'Bright dusky-fair in-between.'	B3	Hedged towards fairness; 'bright' modifier signals anxious positioning
'Bright Dusky' (English)	B8	'Bright' as positive modifier; colourism reproduced in translation
'Light brown'	G4	English neutralises; implies moderate prestige positioning
'Bright fair'	B7	Highest-value term in Bangla; 'bright' intensifies the fairness claim
'Fair' (ফর্সা, plain)	G3, G5	Stated as outright credential; maximum social value in corpus
No mention (omission)	B2, B4, B6, G1, G6	Absence as strategy or transcendence of colourism norm

10.3 Theme 3: Divorce Stigma and Gendered Asymmetry

The corpus contains six posts that refer to a divorced individual who was profiled: three brides (B3, B8, B9) and three grooms (G1, G7, G9). The relative analysis of the pronouncement and treatment of divorce in these two six posts illustrates an extraordinary and ordered gender imbalance that is one of the most astonishing discoveries of the work.

When they are talking about divorced brides, they always reveal it in a way that is managed in a minimisation strategy, a boundary closing strategy, or a strategy of an emotional narrative. Consider B3:

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Extract B3 (Bangla): *বৈবাহিক অবস্থা: শর্ট ডিভোর্স | অতীত বা ব্যক্তিগত বিষয়ে প্রশ্ন করে বিব্রত করবেন না*

> **Translation:** *Marital status: Short divorce | Please do not embarrass by asking about past or personal matters*

The latter is "শর্ট ডিভোর্স" (short divorce), a modifying word: the brevity of the marriage is applicable to reduce the social stigma of the divorce. The instruction of the attendants, do not ask after personal matters, sets up a wall about the disclosure, and at the same time, declares that intrusive questions are anticipated, and the right not to be subjected to them. It is a typical Goffman (1963) stigma management technique: the disclosure is done on the terms of the discloser, and the terms of additional enquiry are strictly regulated.

In comparison, the same disclosure in G1 (the divorced groom) is presented in a completely different register:

> **Translation:** *Marital status: Short Divorced (marriage less than 1 month. Relevant information can be shared easily when discussing with each other (Freely and without inhibition).*

When closing an inquiry with a protective directive, B3 is used and when opening it with an invitation to transparent discussion, G1 is used. The sentence of being able to share something transparent puts the groom in a position of having nothing to hide divorce is a biographical reality, not an injury that needs to be covered. The widowed bride, after B10, adds another comparative stratum "বৈবাহিক অবস্থাঃ বিবাহিত, স্বামী মারা গেছেন" (Marital status: Married, husband has passed away), which is not referred to at all, but is not in any way protective. Widowhood does not need management of stigma since it is not a social blame on bereavement. All of these three forms of disclosure combined create the impression that the discourse strategies that have been identified in this corpus are not the consequences of the lack of acceptance of non-standard marital status per se, but rather the stigma of divorce, and that this stigma falls much more heavily on women than men. 10.4 Theme 4: Self-Posting as Discursive Agency.

10.4 Theme 4: Self-Posting as Discursive Agency

The correlation between posting voice and social vulnerability has a clear trend through the corpus. Nine of Twenty are self-posted and Eleven are posted by a third party. It is spread according to gender and marital status: all three divorced brides are self-posters, and the least successful grooms as well. By contrast, brides who are not married yet, and have stable families are primarily family-posted.

Stigmatised women are a self-posting, which is a very powerful discursive act. Traditional Darling Bangladeshi marriage conversation involves speaking of women and not to women: their marriage is arranged by their family, and their speech is refracted by their family. A discursive position is assumed by a first-person posting woman in a genre that does not traditionally ascribe this to her. We may find it especially in B2, when the bride begins with a sentence of discursive importance that is extraordinary:

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Extract B2 (Bangla): *আমি আমার জন্য একজন উপযুক্ত পাত্র খুঁজছি*

> **Translation:** *'I am looking for a suitable groom for myself.' The repeated first-person pronoun 'ami' (I) emphatically centres the subject's own voice and agency.*

The bride in B2 then presents a childhood eye defect with an elaborate and well-developed narrative that foresees stigma, justifies why she has waited so long to get married, reassures the potential groom about her sight, and repositions her disability as a moral challenge to the groom. It is also a made of selfhood one, the one which performs a kind of narrative control, the one which recodes the terms in which she can be evaluated.

The most politically violent of the corpus B5 posters, the poster applies slightly more than overtly feminist and human rights terms in a genre that has never been able to bear it:

> **Translation:** *SHE believes in FREEDOM, LIBERTY, and EQALITY. SHE Completely resists gender discrimination, domestic violence, mental and physical torture and racism. The color of her skin is not a big deal to her. SHE IS CHARied with Human Rights. SHE is worthy of respect and love.*

The online conveying of sustained ALL CAPITALS, which is not employed anywhere in the corpus, is, in turn, a raised voice: an intensification of force that means that these values are not preferences, but necessities. Freedom, liberty, and equality, gender discrimination, racism, and human rights are words of political rhetoric, of the feminist and civil rights movements, as opposed to matrimonial custom. It is in its presence here a genre transgression: what Fairclough (1992) sees as a transformative discursive practice, a typical genre as the platform on which to enact the challenge to the very ideology that genre itself generally recreates. Interestingly, the title of the post the Al-Hajj title, comes first before the names of the parents, showing that they both have gone to the Hajj pilgrimage, which forms a fruitful tension between the Islamic religiosity and feminist politics, which is a negotiation of gender equality, and not against a religious system (Moghadam 2002).

10.5 Theme 5: Religious Discourse as Moral Gatekeeping

It is the language of the religion that is in every individual post of the corpus, including the two Hindu (B6, B7) posts. The Islamic linguistic markers in the 18 Muslim posts are moral credentialling of the religious identity of the poster as a qualification to marry, social signalling to find a religiously compatible audience, and gatekeeping to lock out candidates whose religious practice was not up to the standard of the poster. The variety of religious demands in the corpus shows that there was a significant ideological variety in the Islamic discourse as such.

At the right-hand end of the spectrum, on the conservative side, we have G2, a dress code of the proposed bride, not preceded anywhere in the corpus:

Extract G2 (Bangla): *ভদ্র, নামাজী, অন্তত বোরকা নিকাব*

> **Translation:** *Decent, prayer-observing, at minimum burqa and niqab*

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The word "অন্তত" (at least) is analytical: it defines the niqab not as a boundary of religious practice, but a minimum, the lowest extent of bodily covering that is permissible. This puts the naked body of the bride as a site of religious activity upon which the groom has purported to have assessive control. In the middle of the range, G5 indicates exactly the opposite:

> **Translation:** *Wears hijab (not necessarily niqab) and is a normal praying person.*

G2 sets the niqab as a minimum, G5 a maximum. Both posts dictate the dress of the bride, the sole distinction being that they seek the acceptable place at the opposite extremes of the visible-piety axis. It is the opposition, two posts of groom in the same Facebook group with two diametrically opposite ideological positions towards the niqab, which shows a real ideological conflict in Bangladeshi Islam between the conservative and moderate attitudes to the religious observance of women. The marital post has unintentionally made a place for intra-religious dialogue.

Another feature of the religious speech is made in B2 when the strategic application of Islamic sentences, like Alhamdulillah (3 times), Allah, taqdeer (destiny), Rizq, and ameen are applied immediately after the revelation of the eye condition of the bride, which has a specific pragmatic purpose: the transformation of a potentially stigmatising medical declaration into a declaration of spiritual trust.

Table 4: Religious Discourse Functions across the Corpus

Function	Linguistic Evidence	Posts
Moral credentialling	'Follows Islamic guidelines, salat, fasting'; 'prays 5 times daily'	B1, B2, G3, G6
Social gatekeeping	'Non-alcoholic'; 'halal and haram'; 'practising Muslim only'	B1, B3, G2, G5
Stigma mitigation	'Alhamdulillah' after disclosing eye condition; 'taqdeer'	B2, G8
Dress regulation	'At minimum burqa and niqab'; 'hijab, preferably not niqab'	G2, G5
Counter-conventional use	Sunnah of the Prophet cited to justify accepting older women	G6
Identity signalling	'Bismillah' opening; 'Jazakallah Khairun' closing	B3, G2, G6, G10

11. Findings of the Study

The above analysis produces five major findings, each of which are part of a consistent explanation of the ideological and discursive nature of Bangladeshi matrimonial Facebook discourse.

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Finding 1: ***Gendered Credentialling***

The brides and grooms in the Bangladeshi wedding Facebook posts are discursively constructed to be gendered. Women are mostly characterized in physical terms and in terms of relationships; men in terms of professional qualifications and potential. This imbalance recreates and replicates an ideological framework of patriarchy where the social value of women is pegged on the body and the social value of men is pegged on economic productivity. The lopsidedness persists also in the 20 posts with the most progressive posts.

Finding 2: ***Colourism as Vocabulary***

The vocabulary of complexion description in the corpus is impregnated with colourism ideology. Each complexion term addresses either the quest of fairness, defensively admits of the darkness, or moderates the darkness with positive words. Blackness cannot be tolerated in any posting unless linguistically negotiated. It is colourism of the vocabulary, rather than the social attitude, but the system of the language, the predetermined system of rules in the genre.

Finding 3: ***Divorce Stigma Asymmetry***

There is a great degree of gender asymmetry in the linguistic management of divorce. Tactics that are employed by divorced brides include minimisation, boundary closure and protective narrative. Divorced grooms situate or say divorce without protective framing. Widowhood is not liable to social reproach and requires no administration of any kind. This finding upholds the reality of gendered stigma as arousing perceived strategies, and not aberrant marital status.

Finding 4: ***Self-Posting as Narrative Agency***

Women who are negotiating divorce, disability and social vulnerability are stigmatised and portrayed disproportionately, and require first-person discursive agency, which, as a woman, is denied to them. Self-posting is a narrative control mechanism: by writing about themselves, these women control the way they are framed, highlighted, and vulnerable to protection.

Finding 5: ***Ideological Plurality and Counter-Hegemony***

The corpus has a very high ideological diversity, which includes feminist language, Sunnah-oriented progressive language and overt anti-colonialism language. There are never consequences of such anti-hegemonic actions that do not leave the dominant discourse without any consequences: even anti-genre posts follow many of the genre conventions. However, they show that matrimonial Facebook talk is a place of very real ideological struggle, rather than a unitary reproduction of patriarchal values. The digital space enables the marginalised to be involved in a family-mediated discourse space that brings in possibilities of resistance and introduces new forms of surveillance and exclusion.

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Table 5: Summary of Key Findings

Finding	Core Claim	Key Posts	Theoretical Connection
1. Gendered credentialing	Body foregrounded for brides; career for grooms	All 20 posts	Fairclough (1992); Van Dijk (1998)
2. Colourism in vocabulary	Every complexion term negotiates the fairness ideal	B1,B3,B7,B8,G3,G5	Glenn (2008); Hunter (2007)
3. Divorce stigma asymmetry	Women guard; men contextualise; widows need no management	B3,B10,G1,G7	Goffman (1963); Brown and Levinson (1987)
4. Self-posting as agency	Stigmatised women claim discursive voice through self-posting	B2,B3,B5,B9	Fairclough (1992); Butler (1990)
5. Ideological plurality	Counter-hegemonic moves exist but are constrained by genre	B5,G6	Gramsci (1971); Fairclough (1992)

12. Scope for Further Research

This research leaves a number of research directions. To start with, a bigger corpus study that would use corpus-linguistic techniques to study hundreds of posts systematically would allow quantitative validation of the patterns found here in a qualitative analysis and offer statistical support of the frequency and distribution of the key discourse characteristics.

Second, a cross-cultural analysis of matrimonial Facebook talk in other Muslim-dominant countries, such as Pakistan, Egypt or Malaysia, would help clarify the extent to which the features found here are reflective of the Bangladeshi culture or are reflective of Islamic matrimonial talk more broadly. Third, a reception study that would examine the reception, assessment, and response of the readers towards matrimonial posts would complement the production-oriented analysis of the current study, and would thus enable the exploration of the whole communicative cycle. Fourth, a longitudinal study of the change in matrimonial discourse over time would be well-placed to track the trajectory of the feminist and progressive voice discourse within this corpus and whether this is a mainstream or marginal voice that is not internal to the mainstream conventions of the genre.

13. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the language of matrimonial posts posted in open Bangladeshi Facebook groups, and has shown that this seemingly practical genre is a multi-faceted, ideologically discursive space. With the three-dimensional model of CDA, as theorized by

Fairclough (1992) and the addition of complementary pragmatic and ideological models, five general themes of analysis were identified and justified through close readings of 20 corpus posts: the gendered credential hierarchy; the linguistic encoding of colourism; the gendered asymmetry of divorce stigma management; the use of self- posting as narrative agency

The most important aspect of the analysis is that the matrimonial Facebook post is not a tool that is solely utilized to seek marriage. It is a space where the Bangladeshi social ideology is being reproduced, challenged and renegotiated along the lines of gender, class, religion, colourism, and geography. The digital stage is new, the ideological bargaining it contains is old; and it is just the contradiction between the newness of the medium and the permanence of the ideology that makes this form of genre critically productive.

There are non-linguistic implications of these results. They deal with the social life of women and men who negotiate the marriage market in contemporary Bangladesh, and the pressures of colourism, the stigma of divorce, the limited agency of women in their patriarchal families, and with the tentative, yet real, emergence of counter-hegemonic voices that announce new ideals of equality, openness, and emotional generosity. These conditions are linguistically constructed and are the first step to the comprehension of the way that these conditions can be altered.

> *"The matrimonial Facebook post is not just a marriage-seeking device but a place where social ideology of the Bangladeshi is reproduced, challenged, and negotiated at the same time in terms of gender, class, religion, colourism, and geography. (Central argument of this study)*

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Appendices

Appendix A: Final Corpus Overview (20 Posts)

Code	Post Profile	Primary Analytical Value
B1	Family-posted, never-married bride, traditional (Barisal)	Baseline genre; physical description ordering; dowry rejection
B2	Self-posted, never-married bride, eye condition (Narayanganj)	Disability stigma management; first-person agency; no-brother motif

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B3	Self-posted, divorced bride, lower class, driver father (Dhaka)	Class and divorce; guarded disclosure; minimising modifier
B4	Agency (BCCB), never-married bride, Germany-based	Commodified matrimonial discourse; spatial power reversal
B5	Family-posted, never-married bride, Old Dhaka	Islamic feminist discourse; ALL CAPS typographic agency
B6	Sister-posted, never-married bride, Hindu diaspora (Canada)	Non-Muslim; Kayastha caste; credential maximalism
B7	Family-posted, never-married bride, Hindu local (Bangladesh)	Namasudra caste; local vs. diaspora Hindu contrast with B6
B8	Agency-type post, divorced and infertile bride (Chandpur)	Infertility stigma; Mut'ah reference; multi-layer stigma management
B9	Self-posted, divorced bride, rural Banglish (Chuadanga)	Rural register; persistent re-posting; no-brother motif
B10	Self-posted, widowed bride, government employee (Dhaka)	Widowhood without stigma management; contrast with divorced posts
G1	Family-posted, divorced groom, Canada (Narayanganj origin)	Diaspora; open divorce disclosure; minimal conditions on bride
G2	Family-posted, never-married groom (Manikganj)	Conservative Islamic; niqab and joint family requirement
G3	Self-posted, never-married groom (Dhaka)	Class inversion; prefers poor bride; fair complexion as credential
G4	Family-posted, never-married groom, Dhaka (Apparel Merchandiser)	Most progressive framing; no financial expectations; character-centred
G5	Family-posted, never-married groom, software engineer (Dhaka)	Hijab yes, niqab no; religious dress spectrum; military background
G6	Self-posted, never-married groom (Comilla and Chittagong)	Sunnah argument; deen over beauty; career autonomy for bride

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G7	Self-posted, divorced groom (40+, Dhaka)	Emotional motivation; accepts children; most vulnerable male voice
G8	Self-posted, widower (Dhaka, chemical business)	Grief discourse; tribute to deceased wife; widower masculinity
G9	Self-posted, divorced groom, expatriate (Bangladesh and abroad)	Romantic framing; age discourse; targets middle-aged women positively
G10	Family-posted, widower, two sons, modest profession (Rajshahi)	Most marginalised groom; lowest credential requirements; plain register

Appendix B: Translation Note

The author is a native speaker of Bangali and is professionally proficient in English and translated all the extracts into the Bangali language. Romanised Bangali passages (Banglish) were transliterated and put into context in relation to the regular conventions of the colloquial Bangali. When the wording of the original is analytically significant, e.g., complexion vocabulary or modality markers, the original word in Bangla is kept with the translation. The translations have been presented in the form of rough translations so that they can be analyzed and not in the form of some literal equivalents.

The following conventions apply to all corpus quotations that have been used in the analysis:

- The extract block is in italics, written in original Bangla.
- Next comes the English translation (followed by the line text translation):
- Corpus code (e.g., B1, G4) indicates the post where the extract is taken.
- Verbatim reproduction of the English-language text is made, spelled and capitalised as the original poster.