

## Representing Crime in Pakistani English Newspaper Headlines: A Transitivity Analysis

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### Abstract

This purpose of this study is to investigate the crime-reporting headlines in the Pakistani English newspaper *Dawn* using Halliday's Transitivity Model within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. The analysis is based on a corpus of 50 crime-reporting headlines published between April 2024 and April 2026. These headlines are classified into three key categories of crime: rape and sexual assault, murder and killing, and robbery and snatching. The focus of this study is to explore how the language used in headlines shapes crime events and how various social actors, especially victims, offenders and state institutions are framed. The results show a definite prevalence of material process in all categories, i.e., headlines are more concerned with actions, events, and physical consequences than psychological conditions or social situations. This is an indication of a discourse pattern in which crime is shown as progression of actions as opposed to human experiences that are not simple. An important linguistic phenomenon has been noted agent deletion, particularly in the rape and murder headlines where the offenders are often not mentioned using passive tense. This causes the undermining of criminal responsibility and placement of victims as passive participants or goals of actions. In contrast, state institutions are consistently constructed as active actors in material processes, performing decisive actions such as arresting suspects and conducting investigations. This exclusive visibility brings out the strength and success of law enforcement. This study concludes that the *Dawn* headlines serve an ideological purpose in purifying violence by wordplay, downplaying the presence of perpetrators in sensitive issues, and reinforcing a state-focused discourse that focuses on institutionalizing crime.

**Keywords:** Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Transitivity Analysis, Media Representation, Crime Headlines, Dawn News, Agency, Material Processes, Pakistani English Press.

### Introduction

Media reporting crimes is vital in the construction of social reality in the minds of people. Newspapers do not simply report on events as objective facts but rather create meanings using certain linguistic decisions that shape the way in which readers perceive crime, criminals, victims and the state institutions (Richardson, 2017). This makes the media discourse a strong location of ideological representation. Crime headlines are one of the most important types of news discourses since they give summarized information about a given incident (Van Leeuwen, 2008) and in many cases; they influence instant societal opinion even before the readers open the entire

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news report. Headlines can be used to indirectly influence perceptions of responsibility, blame, and victimhood because of their conciseness and influence. English newspapers which include Dawn have a lot of followers, and are trusted by many, and are therefore well represented in the Pakistani market (Anwar, 2012; Shahid, Anwar & Amin, 2025). but even with this perceived reliability, such newspapers are not linguistically neutral. Headline news coverage of crime may signal an ideology such as agency, distribution of responsibility and victimization of victims (Hart, 2014). Certain grammatical constructions, for instance, can help to identify institutional actors (such as the police) and obscure or ignore those responsible. On the same note, victims can be portrayed in the manner that highlights their vulnerability and downplays the role of offenders. This is not a random selection of words; it is a carefully selected means of building the general opinion and bolstering some social discourses.

This paper examines the linguistic embodiment of crime in *Dawn* using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2013) with a framework of the analytical lens of the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) developed by Halliday (1994). To be more precise, the study uses Transitivity Model to study the role of various grammatical constructions in the process of meaning-making in crime headlines. Transitivity analysis considers the types of processes (material, mental and relational processes etc.), the roles of participants (actor and goal) and the circumstantial details, thus allowing a thorough analysis of the ways in which actions and obligations are modeled in language. Three big categories of crimes, namely rape and sexual assault, murder, and robbery, are the subject of the study. The data includes fifty headlines that were gathered from Dawn during April 2024-April 2026. Such headlines are systematically examined to determine the trends in linguistic structures, and special focus is placed on the way agency is built or repressed. It also analyzes the omission of some participants, including perpetrators, by using passive constructions, and the prevalence of institutional actors, including the police, being foregrounded. The findings of the present study reveal that the linguistic decisions in crime headlines are ideologically driven as opposed to being neutral. The research seeks to uncover the ways in which media discourse can influence people to have a specific perception of crime, reinforce current power structures and create certain representations of victims and people who commit crime by analyzing these patterns. This paper has pointed out that media language is not a passive report of reality, but it plays an active role in the construction of reality, and thus the way society perceives crime and justice.

## Research Questions

This research aims to answer the following questions:

1. Which types of processes are used in *Dawn's* headlines reporting incidents of rape, murder, and robbery?
2. How do the participant roles of actor and goal contribute to the representation of perpetrators' agency and victims' passivity in *Dawn's* crime headlines?
3. How do the circumstantial elements contribute to the ideological representation of crime in *Dawn's* headlines?

## **Literature Review**

### **Critical Discourse Analysis and Media Studies**

According to Fairclough (2013, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) views language as a type of social practice which not only mirrors social reality, but also actively constitutes it. Instead of viewing language as neutral or transparent, CDA highlights the importance of discourse being influenced by wider ideological, political, and institutional forces which take place in society. Media texts are value-contaminated, and they are a fundamental source of production and reproduction of power relations (Van Dijk, 2006). Applying to news discourse, CDA has been extensively used to reveal implicit meanings, ideological presuppositions, and unequal power relations inherent in the language decisions. Media institutions shape not only the covered content but also the way the content is covered, hence the perception and social cognition of the people (O'keeffe, 2013). News discourse can either foreground or background some actors by using strategies like selection, omission, lexical choice, and framing, which create specific versions of reality. Therefore, CDA offers a critical perspective on which media texts are analyzed as arenas of ideological conflicts and meaning formation.

### **Systemic functional linguistics (SFL)**

According to Halliday (1994), Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a thorough and theoretically based methodology of the study of the functionalities of language as a means of meaning-making. In SFL, language is cognized in three metafunctions namely, ideational, interpersonal and textual. The ideational metafunction is specifically applicable to depicting experience and reality. One of the important elements of this metafunction is the Transitivity system which is widely used in the studies of CDA to understand the construction of actions, events, and participants. It is concerned with the identification of various types of processes including Material (actions and events), Mental (cognitive and emotional states), and Relational (states of being and identification) etc., as well as the roles of the participants, including Actor, Goal, Senser and Carrier. Material processes dominate in media talk since they focus on tangible acts and discernible events, thus, they are best applied in crime reporting. Transitivity analysis allows researchers to analyze the process of agency assignment, responsibility distribution, and omission or foregrounding of various social actors in a systematic way. As an illustration, active or passive constructions make a significant difference in the expression of an Actor. This makes transitivity a powerful instrument in revealing the latent ideological meanings and news reporting.

SFL considers language as a sense-making tool in social situations. In this context, ideational metafunction allows us to comprehend how language reflects experiences via the transitivity system. This system divides actions and states into six categories: material (actions such as kill or beat), mental (feelings or thoughts such as love or see), relational (states of being such as is or become), behavioural, verbal and existential. There are certain roles of the participants, e.g. actor/goal in material processes or senser/phenomenon in mental processes. These are not neutral linguistic choices, but one with a strong ideological impact, for example, a writer constructs a sentence without the doer in a passive form (e.g., a woman was killed, rather than a man killed a woman), the writer can avoid placing the attention on the person who murdered, as a frequent technique in writing about crime, which has far-reaching consequences in the distribution of

blame and responsibility. Transitivity analysis has been particularly beneficial in news reporting to reveal how events are packaged in news, especially the violent ones. Research in different cultural and linguistic settings shows a consistent pattern that material processes are prevailing in reporting crime and violence, which tend to reinforce pre-existing social hierarchies. A study of Nigerian news headlines on crime by Akinmusuyi (2023) revealed that 96-97 percent of the processes were material, and overwhelmingly men were active doers (Actors) and women passive receivers (Goals) of violence. These linguistic patterns are not merely reporting but contribute to gender stereotypes, with men being agentic by default and ladies being victims. Such a use not only sensationalizes violence but also, in a more subtle way, informs society about gender roles and responsibility, often making women to be perpetually victims of violence, but making the abuser seem less responsible and culpable.

### **Discourse of Crime Reporting in Media**

Studies on crime reporting show that the discourse of the media tends to simplify, event-based and highly selective a crime. It has been demonstrated in linguistic studies that the victims are often described as passive participants, using passive constructions, in which the Actor is either omitted or backgrounded. This linguistic device may obstruct the recognition of the culprits and turn the reader to the victim, thus manipulating emotional appeal and understanding. Institutional agents, on the other hand, are frequently predetermined as active agents, by use of active voice, thus emphasizing their position of authority as well as their role in ensuring law and order. These representational patterns cannot be considered neutral; they contribute greatly to the ways of responsibility, guilt, and victimhood as perceived by audiences. Crime reporting helps in constructing the larger social meanings of justice, power, and social control, by giving precedence to some perspectives and downplaying others. The patterns are also indicative of institutional priorities and ideological positions ingrained in media practices.

Despite the widespread use of CDA and Transitivity analysis in the research on media discourse in the past, a significant part of the literature is either general or not related to Pakistan context. A significant gap in the literature lies in the lack of systematic transitivity-based analyses of Pakistani English (Kayani & Anwar, 2022; Anwar, Kayani & Ramiz, 2024; Ahmed, Anwar & Shahid, 2026). Transitivity Choices and Gender Representation: A Feminist Stylistic Analysis of Ali's "The Book of Saladin". *Journal of Arts & Social Sciences*, 9(1).). Specifically, little focus has been put on comparative analysis in a multi-classification of crime in the same dataset. The bulk of the existing studies are inclined to concentrate on a particular type of crime, e.g. gender-based violence, without comparing it to other types of crimes, e.g. murder or robbery. This limitation restricts an in-depth appreciation of the role linguistic patterns can play in the variation of crime reporting dissimilarity among various crime reporting forms. Moreover, the construction of agency and responsibility is under-explored concerning the differences in the nature of the crime. It is significant that this gap is addressed to come up with a more nuanced interpretation of media discourse in the Pakistani setting.

To fill this gap, this study performs a transitivity analysis of 50 headlines on crime in the *Dawn* newspaper. Based on the Transitivity Model, Halliday (1994) theorizes linguistic strategies as constitutive of agency, victimization and perpetration, and foregrounding of institutional actors in Pakistani crime news discourse using a CDA framework. The study takes a comparative

method by including several types of crime; rape and sexual assault, murder, and robbery that enables them to examine in more detail the variation in linguistic patterns. The study seeks to determine common structures in the types of processes, the roles of the participants involved, and the grammatical structures and explain their ideological meanings. Finally, the research can help understand better the influence that the language of media has on crime representations and how it affects the attitude of the populace, which is why discourse can be viewed as the means of creating a social reality.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study is based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), a theory proposed by Halliday (1994) that considers language as a social semiotic system that is employed to make meanings in context. SFL does not focus on language as a formal rule, as is done in traditional linguistic approaches, but rather on the functional contribution of language to the creation of social reality. Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) describe language as functioning in three metafunctions: the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. The current research is specifically devoted to ideational metafunction which is preoccupied with the representation of language of experience and reality. In this metafunction, the system of Transitivity is taken as the main mode of analysis. Transitivity analysis helps the researcher to investigate the representation of events, actions and participants in a discourse, which is especially appropriate when analyzing news headlines about crime.

Transitivity analysis is very popular in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) since it assists in bringing to the fore the meanings that are encoded in language concerning agency, responsibility, and power (Wodak & Myer, 2015). It discusses the structure of the clauses answering the question: who does what to whom and in what circumstances (Thompson, 2014). The system is composed of three key elements, Processes, Participants, and Circumstances. The realization of processes is usually in the form of verbs and implies various kinds of actions or conditions. The participants are the entities that are in these processes (the person who does something and the person who is impacted by the action), which are the Actor and Goal. Circumstances add more details regarding time, place, manner or cause. According to SFL, there are six key types of processes: Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal, Behavioural, and Existential processes (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). Material processes are the most important in reporting crimes because they include physical acts like killing, arresting or assaulting. They are usually characterized by an Actor and a Goal and thus can be used to analyze the allocation or repression of responsibility in news discourse. There can also be other types of processes like Mental and Verbal processes which are less common in headlines because they involve more matters of internal conditions or communication than actual action.

A key feature of transitivity analysis is its capability of revealing ideological implications in linguistic decisions. Fowler (1991) puts it that grammatical structures are not neutral; it is the part of forming specific versions of reality. As an example, active voice emphasizes the Actor and places responsibility squarely and solely on the Actor, but passive constructions can ignore the Actor, thus obscuring agency and lowering accountability. In crime headlines, these decisions may affect the perception of the readers towards the perpetrator, the victim, and the institutional players. This view is further reinforced by Van Dijk (2006), who points out that the discourse of



news tends to be based on the prevailing institutional views and power relations. By selective linguistic representation, media can foreground some actors, e.g. law enforcement agencies, and back-ground or leave out others, e.g. perpetrators. These trends lead to the formation of social meaning of crime, justice and power. Using the Transitivity Model proposed by Halliday in a CDA model, the proposed study seeks to critically examine how the Pakistani English news headlines on crime construct a crime representation. The framework enables a fine analysis of the distribution of agency, the representation of victims and perpetrators, and the linguistic foregrounding of institutional authority. By doing so, the paper emphasizes language and the role of language in forming social perception of social reality and crime.

## **Methodology**

This study uses a mixed-method research design that incorporates both a quantitative and qualitative research design to give an in-depth analysis of crime reporting in the headlines of Pakistani English newspapers. The reason behind the use of a mixed-method design is that it integrates the advantages of identifying patterns statistically with the detailed interpretive analysis. Although the quantitative part of the analysis is useful in determining the recurring patterns of linguistics within the dataset, the qualitative part of the analysis enables a more comprehensive examination of the ideological implications within the patterns. By doing so, the study guarantees an analytical rigor and interpretative depth that is necessary to publication research.

## **Research Design and Approach**

This is descriptive, analytical and interpretive research. It is also based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which perceives language as a type of social practice that makes and mirrors reality. CDA is especially pertinent to this research project since it allows the researcher to analyze the way in which power relations, ideology, and social meanings are ingrained in media discourse (Bednarek, 2008). In a bid to operate CDA, the analysis uses Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) developed by Halliday to be the theoretical and analytical perspective of the study, with a particular reference to the Transitivity system. Transitivity analysis offers a methodical approach to studying the representation of experiences and events using language, which is particularly applicable to crime headlines, which frequently condense meaning and build it strategically.

## **Data Collection**

The dataset of this research consists of 50 headlines of crime news of the newspaper in English Dawn. These headlines were collected during the online version of the newspaper in the last two-year period i.e. between April 2024 and April 2026. This time frame was selected to ensure that the data reflect current trends in crime reporting within the Pakistani media landscape. Relevant headlines were selected using a purposive sampling technique. It was deemed suitable because it enables the researcher to narrow down to headlines that directly revolve around crime and include clear action processes that are needed to analyze transitivity. Certain selection criteria were used to be consistent and relevant. To begin with, the headlines were required to cover a distinct crime incident including murder, rape, robbery or arrest. Secondly, a clear verb of an action or a process had to be added to every headline. Thirdly, the headlines had to be summarized and have

a normal structure of a news headline. Vague, over-general or unrelated to criminal activities were excluded, e.g., policy debates or statistical reports. The last data set was classified into three broad types of crime: rape and sexual assault (20 headlines), murder/killing (15 headlines) and robbery/theft (15 headlines). This classification provides diversity and allows comparison of various types of crimes.

### **Analytical Framework**

The research uses the Transitivity Model by Halliday as the main analytical tool in the investigation of the construction of meaning in the crime news headlines. The analysis of each headline is done at the level of a clause since the clause is the focal point of meaning in Systemic Functional Linguistics (Martin & Rose, 2003; Eggins, 2004). The method enables a thorough investigation of the linguistic representation of actions, participants and contextual factors. Three main elements of the Transitivity system are analyzed. First, the type of process is checked to identify whether the process is a Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal, Behavioural or Existential process. Second, the roles of participants are analyzed through the identification of individuals who are Actor, Goal, Sensor, Carrier and other positions depending on the kind of process involved. This assists us in knowing the position of various social actors in the discourse. Third, circumstances are analyzed to find more information associated with the place, time, manner or cause, which gives depth to the headlines. A special focus is given to Material processes, since they are most prevalent in crime reporting to depict tangible activities, including killing, arresting, and assaulting. A thorough analysis is also given to whether the Actor is expressly mentioned or not since this directly influences the way agency and responsibility are constructed in the discourse.

### **Procedure of Analysis**

This study adopts a systematic and organized analytical procedure to ensure consistency and accuracy. All headlines are initially handled as clauses and where needed, are restructured into their full grammatical structure to make it easier to analyze. The principal verb in each headline is then determined and categorized into a suitable process type according to Halliday Transitivity framework. After this, the role of participants is then identified and defined, like Actor, Goal or other pertinent roles depending on the type of process. The particular focus is put on whether the Actor is present or absent, because, in this way, it is possible to identify the manner in which the agency and responsibility are created or inhibited in the discourse. Moreover, circumstantial factors, such as place, time and manners are found to give contextual meaning to every incident. Lastly, the data under analysis is categorized into various types of crime, which allows conducting a comparative study of linguistic patterns in different types of crime reporting.

### **Quantitative Analysis**

The quantitative aspect of the current research is aimed at quantifying the frequency of the most significant linguistic characteristics which are discovered during the transitivity analysis. This is done by calculating the occurrence of the various process types in the dataset in a systematic manner with special regard to the prevalence of Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal, Behavioural as well as Existential processes. Moreover, the paper analyzes the occurrence of the roles of participants, including Actor and Goal, to comprehend the distribution of agency and responsibility.

ity in the headlines. The other significant element of the quantitative analysis is the recognition of active and passive constructions, which assists to interpret whether actions are explicitly ascribed to certain actors or agency is repressed. All frequency data is tabularized and formatted in a table format to give a clear and well tabularized account of patterns within the dataset. This statistical description makes it easy to compare across the various types of crimes. Overall, the quantitative analysis provides an empirical basis of the detection of recurrence of language structures and supports the larger interpretive results of the study.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

The qualitative aspect of this study is concerned with the interpretation of ideological meaning of the linguistic patterns detected in the transitivity analysis. Instead of the description of frequencies, this step considers how particular language choices influence the meaning in the crime discourse. The analysis is particularly concerned with the construction of agency, that is, whether it is explicitly given to an Actor or is subordinated by grammatical means, i.e., passive voice. In addition, the paper examines the representation of victims and perpetrators in the headlines, whether victims are presented as passive, and whether the perpetrators are mentioned or backgrounded. It also investigates how institutional actors, particularly the police, are foregrounded to portray authority and control. The second point of interest is the effect of passive constructions on the notions of responsibility in the reader of the text through the obscuring of the Actor. Altogether, such an interpretive methodology allows the study to go beyond the superficiality of observations and discover the ideological undertones of crime reporting discourse.

### **Reliability and Validity**

To be reliable, this paper applies the Transitivity framework by Halliday to all the chosen headlines with consistency, and a similar approach is taken to examine all the headlines. The headlines are analyzed in accordance with well-established categories of the types of processes and the roles of participants, which minimizes the risks of subjectivity in the interpretation process and improves the coding consistency. The study is replicable and verifiable by other researchers because it adhered to a systematic and repeatable process. The study validity is achieved by using genuine data obtained by the authoritative English newspaper in Pakistan Dawn, which enhances the validity of the results. Moreover, the research is conducted in a systematic and transparent way of analysis, with every step in data selection to classification and interpretation described. This methodological clarity enables a more precise depiction of linguistic patterns and makes the conclusions made based on sound and verifiable evidence.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This is a study that simply relies on publicly available news headlines and contains no human participants, interviews, or data collection. Consequently, no direct ethical risks pertain to privacy, consent, or confidentiality. The study, however, acknowledges that reporting of crime, especially those involving violence and sexual assault, is very sensitive and may have severe social consequences. As such, special attention has been given to deal with the data in a responsible and respectable manner. Headlines are all academic in nature and have not been distorted and misrepresented. The discussion is not sensational and is based on the linguistic trends instead of in-



dividuals or events. Furthermore, the research has overall a neutral and objective tone without stigmatizing victims and making the discussion ethically acceptable. This cautious use of delicate materials is a way of keeping academic integrity intact and makes the research acceptable in terms of ethical research analysis.

## Data Analysis

This section presents the findings of the transitivity analysis based on a sample of 50 crime headlines selected from the *Dawn* newspaper. The headlines have been subdivided systematically into three large types of crime which include rape and sexual assault, murder, and robbery. This classification permits the relative study of linguistic patterns in various crime situations. This analysis dwells on three important elements of the Transitivity system by Halliday, namely, types of processes, roles of participants and circumstantial elements. These findings are mainly found on the frequency and distribution of these parts in the data. Types of processes are examined to find out the most common type of actions or states that are reflected in crime reporting. The roles of participants are discussed to realize the ways the agency and responsibility are either allocated or repressed, and circumstantial factors give more context about the time, place, and manner. Through quantitative frequency analysis and qualitative interpretation, this section brings to the fore recurrent patterns in language and shows how the meaning is constructed in crime news headlines.

### Rape and Sexual Assault (20 Headlines)

**Table 1: Transitivity Analysis: Rape & Sexual Assault (Full Text)**

| No. | Date        | Full Headline Text                                                       | Process Type | Participants                                                | Circumstances                                  |
|-----|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | 04 Apr 2024 | Suspect in Muzaffargarh Aitkaf rape case arrested                        | Material     | <b>Goal:</b> Suspect; <b>Actor:</b> Police (Hidden)         | Muzaffargarh (Loc); Aitkaf rape case (Context) |
| 2   | 26 Jul 2024 | Lahore woman 'gang-raped' in front of husband, child                     | Material     | <b>Goal:</b> Lahore woman; <b>Actor:</b> Hidden             | In front of husband, child (Manner/Context)    |
| 3   | 25 Aug 2024 | 12-year-old girl raped, murdered; body found in Karachi's Saddar         | Material     | <b>Goal:</b> 12-year-old girl; <b>Actor:</b> Hidden         | Karachi's Saddar (Loc)                         |
| 4   | 02 Sep 2024 | Another suspect arrested over 12-year-old girl's rape, murder in Karachi | Material     | <b>Goal:</b> Another suspect; <b>Actor:</b> Police (Hidden) | Karachi (Loc); Over rape/murder (Reason)       |
| 5   | 24 Sep 2024 | Teenage girl gang-raped during road robbery in                           | Material     | <b>Goal:</b> Teenage girl; <b>Actor:</b> Hidden             | Pakpattan (Loc); During road robbery (Time)    |

## Pakpattan

|    |             |                                                                             |          |                                                           |                                                            |
|----|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6  | 16 Jan 2025 | Suspect arrested for allegedly raping, murdering 4-years-old girl in Gujrat | Material | <b>Goal:</b> Suspect;<br><b>Actor:</b> Police (Hidden)    | Gujrat (Loc);<br>Allegedly<br>raping/murdering<br>(Reason) |
| 7  | 20 Jan 2025 | Woman raped in Rawalpindi                                                   | Material | <b>Goal:</b> Woman;<br><b>Actor:</b> Hidden               | Rawalpindi (Loc)                                           |
| 8  | 22 Jan 2025 | University student allegedly gang-raped in Lahore                           | Material | <b>Goal:</b> University student; <b>Actor:</b> Hidden     | Lahore (Loc)                                               |
| 9  | 26 Jan 2025 | Suspect arrested in rape case in Azad Jammu and Kashmir                     | Material | <b>Goal:</b> Suspect;<br><b>Actor:</b> Police (Hidden)    | AJK (Loc)                                                  |
| 10 | 02 Feb 2025 | Punjab police arrest 3 suspects in Raiwind gang rape case                   | Material | <b>Actor:</b> Punjab police; <b>Goal:</b> 3 suspects      | Raiwind (Loc)                                              |
| 11 | 24 Mar 2025 | Punjab police arrest 3 suspects in Lahore gang-rape case                    | Material | <b>Actor:</b> Punjab police; <b>Goal:</b> 3 suspects      | Lahore (Loc)                                               |
| 12 | 28 Mar 2025 | 2 suspects arrested over alleged gang rape on Faisalabad motorway: Police   | Material | <b>Goal:</b> 2 suspects;<br><b>Actor:</b> Police (Hidden) | Faisalabad<br>motorway (Loc)                               |
| 13 | 31 Mar 2025 | Maternal uncles among four who raped, killed minor girl in Bahawalpur       | Material | <b>Actor:</b> Maternal uncles; <b>Goal:</b> Minor girl    | Bahawalpur<br>(Loc)                                        |
| 14 | 07 Apr 2025 | Five held in Gujrat for gang rape of salesgirl                              | Material | <b>Goal:</b> Five (men); <b>Actor:</b> Police (Hidden)    | Gujrat (Loc);<br>Gang rape of<br>salesgirl<br>(Context)    |
| 15 | 24 Jul 2025 | Teenage victim of marital rape dies in coma at CHK                          | Material | <b>Actor/Medium:</b> Teenage victim                       | CHK (Loc); In<br>coma (Manner)                             |
| 16 | 04 Aug 2025 | Police arrest 3 for allegedly gang-raping woman in Abbottabad               | Material | <b>Actor:</b> Police;<br><b>Goal:</b> 3 (men)             | Abbottabad (Loc)                                           |
| 17 | 05 Oct 2025 | Three held by NCCIA in Abbotabad for                                        | Material | <b>Goal:</b> Three (men); <b>Actor:</b> NCCIA (Police)    | Abbottabad<br>(Loc); Blackmail<br>of minor                 |

|    |             |                                                                                         |          |                                                                          |                                                       |
|----|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
|    |             | alleged gang-rape,<br>blackmail of minor;<br>police                                     |          |                                                                          | (Context)                                             |
| 18 | 12 Nov 2025 | Teacher booked for<br>allegedly sexually<br>harassing minor<br>student in<br>Rawalpindi | Material | <b>Goal:</b> Teacher;<br><b>Actor:</b> Police<br>(Hidden)                | Rawalpindi<br>(Loc); Sexual<br>harassment<br>(Reason) |
| 19 | 17 Jan 2026 | Suspected serial<br>child rapist arrested<br>in Karachi                                 | Material | <b>Goal:</b> Serial<br>child rapist;<br><b>Actor:</b> Police<br>(Hidden) | Karachi (Loc)                                         |
| 20 | 01 Oct 2025 | Girl gang-raped by<br>five for years                                                    | Material | <b>Goal:</b> Girl;<br><b>Actor:</b> Five<br>(men)                        | For years<br>(Duration)                               |

## Murder and Killing (15 Headlines)

Table 2: Transitivity Analysis: Murder and Killing (Full Text)

| No. | Date        | Full Headline Text                                                                           | Process Type             | Participants                                                                            | Circumstances                                            |
|-----|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | 15 Dec 2024 | Action against three<br>cops over video of<br>murder suspects                                | Material                 | <b>Goal:</b> Three cops;<br><b>Actor:</b> Authorities<br>(Hidden)                       | Over video of<br>suspects (Reason)                       |
| 2   | 05 Jan 2025 | Paramilitary soldier<br>killed in IED blast<br>near border                                   | Material                 | <b>Goal:</b> Paramilitary<br>soldier; <b>Actor:</b><br>Hidden                           | Near border (Loc);<br>In IED blast<br>(Manner)           |
| 3   | 15 Feb 2025 | Target killer of<br>political worker<br>arrested after five<br>years                         | Material                 | <b>Goal:</b> Target<br>killer; <b>Actor:</b><br>Police (Hidden)                         | After five years<br>(Time)                               |
| 4   | 21 Mar 2025 | Woman killed by<br>husband, sons over<br>'honour'                                            | Material                 | <b>Goal:</b> Woman;<br><b>Actor:</b> Husband,<br>sons                                   | Over 'honour'<br>(Reason/Manner)                         |
| 5   | 22 May 2025 | Man guns down<br>sister, cousin over<br>'honour' in Sanghar                                  | Material                 | <b>Actor:</b> Man;<br><b>Goal:</b> Sister,<br>cousin                                    | Sanghar (Loc); Over<br>'honour' (Reason)                 |
| 6   | 03 Jun 2025 | The murder of<br>teenage TikTok star<br>Sana Yousaf is<br>exposing the rot in<br>our society | Relational /<br>Material | <b>Token/Actor:</b> The<br>murder of Sana<br>Yousaf; <b>Goal:</b> The<br>rot in society | In our society (Loc)                                     |
| 7   | 20 Jun 2025 | Two bodies found in<br>abandoned well;<br>murder suspected                                   | Material /<br>Mental     | <b>Goal:</b> Two bodies;<br><b>Actor:</b> Hidden                                        | In abandoned well<br>(Loc); Murder<br>suspected (Manner) |
| 8   | 09 Jul 2025 | Police arrest man for<br>allegedly killing                                                   | Material                 | <b>Actor:</b> Police;<br><b>Goal:</b> Man                                               | Over 'honour'<br>(Reason); After                         |

|    |             |                                                           |            |                                                              |  |                                             |
|----|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------------|
|    |             | daughter over 'honour' after she refused to delete TikTok |            |                                                              |  | TikTok refusal (Time)                       |
| 9  | 23 Jul 2025 | Two POs killed in shootout inside hospital                | Material   | <b>Goal:</b> Two POs; <b>Actor:</b> Hidden                   |  | Inside hospital (Loc); In shootout (Manner) |
| 10 | 24 Jul 2025 | Swat police arrest 11 in seminary student murder case     | Material   | <b>Actor:</b> Swat police; <b>Goal:</b> 11 (suspects)        |  | In seminary student murder case (Context)   |
| 11 | 02 Aug 2025 | Two gang-rape suspects killed in Lahore CCD 'encounters'  | Material   | <b>Goal:</b> Two suspects; <b>Actor:</b> CTD/Police (Hidden) |  | Lahore (Loc); In CCD encounters (Manner)    |
| 12 | 06 Oct 2025 | Wife's friend turns out to be killer of labourer          | Relational | <b>Token:</b> Wife's friend; <b>Value:</b> Killer            |  | Of labourer (Context)                       |
| 13 | 02 Nov 2025 | Murder case registered two months after girl's 'suicide'  | Material   | <b>Goal:</b> Murder case; <b>Actor:</b> Police (Hidden)      |  | Two months after suicide (Time)             |
| 14 | 10 Nov 2025 | Elderly couple found murdered in Karachi home             | Material   | <b>Goal:</b> Elderly couple; <b>Actor:</b> Hidden            |  | In Karachi home (Loc)                       |
| 15 | 07 Jan 2026 | Gang-rape suspects 'killed' by accomplices                | Material   | <b>Goal:</b> Suspects; <b>Actor:</b> Accomplices             |  | By accomplices (Manner/Agent)               |

## Robbery and Snatching (15 Headlines)

**Table 3: Transitivity Analysis: Robbery & Snatching (Full Text)**

| No. | Date        | Full Text                                             | Headline | Process Type | Participants                                        | Circumstances                               |
|-----|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| 1   | 30 Sep 2024 | Armed men snatch car at gunpoint in Islamabad         |          | Material     | <b>Actor:</b> Armed men; <b>Goal:</b> Car           | Islamabad (Loc); At gunpoint (Manner)       |
| 2   | 11 Nov 2024 | Cash, jewelry worth millions looted in daylight heist |          | Material     | <b>Goal:</b> Cash, jewelry; <b>Actor:</b> Hidden    | In daylight heist (Manner/Time)             |
| 3   | 22 Nov 2024 | Armed men snatch mobile phones from 10 people in park |          | Material     | <b>Actor:</b> Armed men; <b>Goal:</b> Mobile phones | In park (Loc); From 10 people (Beneficiary) |
| 4   | 12 Jan 2025 | Robbers loot gold, cash from house in                 |          | Material     | <b>Actor:</b> Robbers;                              | Gulshan-e-Iqbal (Loc); From house (Loc)     |

|    |             |                                                                |                 |                                                                                                  |                                                 |  |
|----|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|--|
|    |             |                                                                | Gulshan-e-Iqbal |                                                                                                  | <b>Goal:</b> Gold, cash                         |  |
| 5  | 18 Jan 2025 | Two Karachi cell phone snatchers jailed for seven years        | Material        | <b>Goal:</b> Two Karachi (Loc); For seven years (Duration)<br><b>Actor:</b> Court (Hidden)       |                                                 |  |
| 6  | 02 Feb 2025 | Burglars decamp with valuables from diplomat's house           | Material        | <b>Actor:</b> Burglars;<br><b>Goal:</b> Valuables                                                | From diplomat's house (Loc)                     |  |
| 7  | 05 Mar 2025 | Citizen deprived of Rs2m outside bank in Lahore                | Material        | <b>Goal:</b> Outside bank in Lahore (Loc); Citizen;<br><b>Actor:</b> Hidden                      | Of Rs2m (Scope)                                 |  |
| 8  | 10 Mar 2025 | Citizens catch robber, hand him over to police after thrashing | Material        | <b>Actor:</b> Citizens;<br><b>Goal:</b> Robber                                                   | After thrashing (Manner); To police (Recipient) |  |
| 9  | 19 May 2025 | Two snatchers arrested after brief shootout in Faisalabad      | Material        | <b>Goal:</b> Two Faisalabad (Loc); After shootout (Time/Manner)<br><b>Actor:</b> Police (Hidden) |                                                 |  |
| 10 | 14 Jul 2025 | Truck carrying electronic goods hijacked on National Highway   | Material        | <b>Goal:</b> Truck; On National Highway (Loc)<br><b>Actor:</b> Hidden                            |                                                 |  |
| 11 | 18 Sep 2025 | Jewellery shop looted in broad daylight in Multan              | Material        | <b>Goal:</b> Multan (Loc); In broad daylight (Time)<br>Jewellery shop; <b>Actor:</b> Hidden      |                                                 |  |
| 12 | 20 Oct 2025 | Cell phone snatchers shoot youth at DHA tea shop               | Material        | <b>Actor:</b> DHA tea shop (Loc)<br>Snatchers;<br><b>Goal:</b> Youth                             |                                                 |  |
| 13 | 12 Jan 2026 | Motorcycle snatching on the rise in urban centers              | Relational      | <b>Token:</b> In urban centers (Loc)<br>Motorcycle snatching;<br><b>Value:</b> On the rise       |                                                 |  |
| 14 | 15 Feb 2026 | Bank heist in Karachi: Dacoits escape with Rs5 million         | Material        | <b>Actor:</b> Karachi (Loc)<br>Dacoits;<br><b>Goal:</b> Rs5 million                              |                                                 |  |
| 15 | 18 Apr 2026 | Girl riding scooty robbed of phone,                            | Material        | <b>Goal:</b> In Lahore (Loc); Dragged on road (Manner)<br>Girl/Phone;                            |                                                 |  |



dragged on road in  
Lahore

**Actor:**  
Hidden

## Overall Distribution of Process Types

The general comparison shows an apparent prevalence of Material processes in all types of crime reporting. Among the 50 headlines analyzed, 47 headlines, which can be about 94 percent, use Material processes, which means that they focus on actions and visible events. This frequency is indicative of the nature of news reporting whereby the focus is on what occurred and not interpretation and evaluation. Verbs that are related to physical acts, like killing, arresting or robbing, are hence the key to the development of crime narratives. Conversely, Relational and Verbal processes are represented in very few percentages of the data, about 6%. These operations are generally employed to give evaluation, classification, or reported speech, but not action. This lack of representation can be seen as an indication that crime headlines are more about immediacy and impact than explanation or commentary. In general, the prevalence of Material processes underlines the action-based character of reporting about the crime in the media discourse.

**Table 4: Frequency & Percentage of Processes**

| Process Type       | Frequency | Percentage  |
|--------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Material Process   | 47        | 94%         |
| Relational Process | 2         | 4%          |
| Verbal Process     | 1         | 2%          |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>50</b> | <b>100%</b> |

## Findings and Discussion

Transitivity analysis of 50 headlines of crimes in Dawn indicates that there are certain common linguistic structures in media coverage of the crime in the Pakistani English language. The results indicate that the Material Processes are predominant in all the three types of crime, which are Rape and Sexual Assault, Murder, and Robbery. This implies that crime is made mostly as a series of physical activities like arresting, killing or committing crimes. Consequently, the headlines continue to concentrate on the crime itself instead of the social, psychological, or human impacts of the crime. The experiences and realities about emotions of victims are largely excluded in the discussion, and it adds to more action-focused and less humanized portrayal of crime. The other significant discovery is associated with agency distribution. In most of the headlines, particularly when it comes to rape and murder, the offenders are either not mentioned at all or they are presented in passive expressions, leading to an evident trend of deleting the agent. This is a linguistic device which makes the victim become a passive participant or rather Goal of the process instead of the criminal. As a result, accountability will be less evident in the early phase of reporting. However, agency is explicitly pointed out in cases of law enforcement agencies. The police are often framed as an agent of action, enforcing crime through various means including arresting suspects, which further solidifies the presence and power of the state in reporting crime. The analysis also demonstrates that the circumstantial factors, especially location details, are quite often used in the headline of robbery. This continual focus on place adds to the building of a spatial sense of crime, in which some urban or public locations are indirectly related to danger. Moreover, the occasional application of Relational Processes to high-profile cases suggests

evaluative connotations, in which events are associated with the generalized social interpretation e.g. moral degradation or social problems. Overall, the results show that crime reporting in Dawn is non-neutral and linguistically shaped in a manner that puts an emphasis on action and institutional response. Such a discourse has the tendency of downplaying the perpetrator presence in delicate cases and preempting state power and influencing social constructs of crime by strategically and selectively using language.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to explore the linguistic representation of crime by Pakistani English media using a Transitivity Analysis of 50 Dawn headlines. The analysis has been done based on the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) proposed by Halliday to analyze the grammatical decisions made in creating meanings associated with crime, victims, offenders and the state institutions. The results obviously show that there is a high prevalence of Material Processes in all the three types of crimes: Rape and Sexual Assault, Murder, and Robbery. This confirms the fact that crime coverage in Dawn is mostly event-based in which the focus is placed on physical activities like arresting, killing or committing crimes. Consequently, the emotional, psychological, and social aspects of crime are still not very evident in the headlines. One of the major implications of the research is that the victims are marginalized due to the consistent use of passive constructions. The victims are often used as the Goal, which linguistically diminishes their agency and makes them passive receivers of action. This grammatical construction adds to a discourse where the victims can be only characterized by the violence that is meted out against them. Selective agency distribution is also emphasized in the analysis. The role of the actor is in most instances filled by law enforcement agencies (especially the police) or totally not present in sensitive crimes like rape and murder. This implies that the media discourse places more prominence on state action and leaves direct criminal responsibility in the background when constructing headlines. Moreover, application of circumstantial factors, especially places in robbery cases and some Relational Processes in high profile cases help in general social meanings. They are such products as the construction of urban insecurity and implicit discourses of social disorder. In general, the analysis shows that the headlines of the crime stories in Dawn are not linguistically neutral. They are rather a discourse that is ideologically constructed, predicting action and institutional power, as well as downplaying the presence of perpetrators and the subjective experience of victims.

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