Tongues of War: Deconstructing the Lexical Narratology of Children in Conflicted Regions

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Abstract

Children belonging to regions subjected to conflicts, particularly Palestine, Kashmir, and Syria, are every so often rendered via philanthropic, radical, and political lenses consequently over-looking their linguistic expressions for psychological unrest. The purpose of this research is to vocalize such aspects where the linguistic expressions of children under conflict zones are disregarded. This research critically examines the narratives of such children aging 7 to 17 from each region in order to scrutinize traumatic experiences from the wars reflected through their languages. This research analyzes the linguistic patterns exhibited in these children's language in order to re-evaluate such testimonies not only for emotional persuasion but as sociolinguistic texts of prime importance which build upon systemic oppression and subjugation. This research utilizes qualitative comparative methodology projected on discourse analysis and sociolinguistic narrative while drawing the theoretical framework from the Narrative structure theory by William Labov, Trauma theory by Cathy Caruth (1996), and further decolonizing sociolinguistics in order to examine the language under pressured circumstances. The data is collected from public platforms such as testimonies (translated) and humanitarian reports from organizations like UNICEF and Save the Children, as well as interviews and documentaries accessible from social media. The findings of this research imply that children from the above-mentioned regions share certain similar lexicons to express their hope, fear, and loss, and simultaneously exhibit local vocabulary deeply influenced by their political and cultural contexts. Their languages imply struggle, agency, and psychological turmoil these children of war-torn regions go through. The research reveals that the narratives of such children are not just echo of conflicts, but their language acts as a tool to show resistance and survival. The study informs about children narratives not just reflections but trauma embedded linguistic markers are visible, it arises the need of specialized educational and psychological institutions in such conflict regions for assessment of trauma inflicted language.

Keywords: children, language, sociolinguistics, conflict, narratives, discourses, oppression

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Introduction

One of the things shared by all people of different backgrounds across the world is language. Language is a form of social action, and that it is an agent in the construction of reality in a profound way, in the sense of having consequences for the way society is structured, and for the distribution of symbolic and material resources (Lukin 424). The structure of a society is determined primarily through its political and cultural contexts, which eventually shapes its language. Hence, this language is followed by every individual living in that particular social context including children, adults, and the elderly shaped by their social environments. Within the scope of this research, it aims to deconstruct the lexical narratology of children aging from 7 to 17. The narratology and lexicons used by these children is determined via their contexts as well. As said by Van Dijk, the language, debate, and arguments of individuals are indeed shaped by their contexts. Narration as an activity of human consciousness is a medium for understanding human experience since it articulates sequence, thereby placing events in a framing context (Musonye 2010). Humans exercise this liberty to use lexicons in order to narrate their freedom or vulnerability resulted from their circumstances.

In light of this research, the contextual circumstances upon which a language is constructed are considered to be the regions Palestine, Syria, and Kashmir that are marked by decades of displacement and violence. These regions have long histories of conflict and war. Ather Zia mentions in his study that the region of Kashmir has been subjected to outside rule since the 15th century (2019). This implies that the people of Kashmir are under subjugation for centuries. Zia also mentions how Palestinian region is under war-evoking context for centuries as well. On the other hand, Jane Kinninmont, in her research, highlights that the Syrian civil-war displaced 2.7 million Syrians as refugees (2014). This mass displacement of Syrians implies how severe of a conflict region Syria has been. Although, every individual existing in such regions is affected due to the conflicts lingering around them, children are no less immuned to this vulnerability. Colette Daiute, in his research writes that the scholars have started to examine the role of children in war (2017). The role not predominantly means their participation in the war, but portraying its aftermath via their narratology as well. As Daiute says that war continuously tries to describe the lives of millions of children globally (2017), this research shifts this standpoint and defines war through children's perspective, by critically examining their lexical narratology. Lucy Newby, in her study, writes that young people as well as children are both specifically persuasive and symbolically mobile in

communicating the horrors and tragedies of war (2021). Hence, the lexical accounts of children from the conflicted regions of Palestine, Syria, and Kashmir, are scrutinized in this research in order to reevaluate the impact of such circumstances via the sociolinguistic lens.

The children born within the regions that are subjected to wars seem to be impacted by it in many ways. In addition to the psychological and physical unrest they are forced to go through, wars impact their linguistic expressions and lexicon as well. Honwana (2005) writes that the voices of children reach a comprehensive broader platform only in rare and tragic cases. Although, the voices of children are heard in tragic cases, what their voices demand is still a question to reflect upon. With roots of sociolinguistics to determine the impact of wars on children's lexical narratology, the conflicted regions, specifically of Palestine, Kashmir, and Syria, continue to bring forward instances of such children as an illustration of tongues of war. These circumstances seem to have a lasting impression on the young minds which is then released in the form of language and conversation. As spoken by Bert I. Beverly, the children of all ages in the war-torn regions are left home with negligence shown to their general care (1943). Thus, the only form of expression these children have left is their language which they use to depict the struggles, tensions, and turmoil they are subjected to. The linguistic expression of the children of all three regions (Palestine, Kashmir, and Syria) underpins the viewpoint that despite these regions has their own wars to deal with; the outcomes ultimately are the same.

It is essential to determine the impact of conflicts and wars surrounding children in order to examine how it affects their mentality to perceive the world when they are raised under war-torn circumstances and how they express themselves, their experiences, and feelings through lexical narratology. The significance of this study is that unlike other researches, this particular study focuses on the resilience, and strength expressed through the language of such children rather than the pathology, which primarily implies that even if these children have their own contexts and conflicts to deal with, the way to express themselves with language is the same; highly influenced by their political and cultural contexts.

The theoretical framework for this research is constructed upon two major theories. These are narrative structure theory by William Labov, and trauma theory given by Cathy Caruth (1996). The purpose for choosing these theories is to engage the testaments of these children via theoretical understanding to examine how the

narrative accounts of these children align with the narrative structures given by Labov and Caruth. Mishler (1986) says that Labov is one of the firsts to examine narratives linguistically. Labov, in his book Language in the Inner City gives the theory of narrative structure that provides a sociolinguistic model for examining narratives of individuals' personal experiences (1972), which primarily supports the stance presented in this study. On the other hand, Caruth in Unclaimed Experience (1996) introduces trauma theory that implies how narratives speak about/through reflective story of trauma experience.

Review of the Literature

There have been a wide range of researches done on the effects of war on the psyche of children but despite that significant contribution, language of children affected by their circumstances requires in-depth research. The language of adults has been studied extensively in war affected regions, but children's voices are often marginalized or erased. Their experiences are often not given enough limelight when it comes to academic discourses, thus they remain unstudied. Yet children's narratives offer significant contribution, and insights into the study of war affected societies particularly Syria, Kashmir, and Palestine. While a great scholarship of literature examines impact of war on children psychology, (e.g. UNICEF reports), but a few treat their testimonies and narratives as a primary text for sociolinguistics study. This section highlights the recent studies conducted on narratives given by children in different war-torn areas. These marginalized experiences carry significant traces of the interplay between discourses, language, conflicts and identity.

❖ **Existing literature on Palestine**

In case of Palestine several studies focus on oral storytelling and its role in shaping narratives. For instance, a research was conducted by Awad et al. (2025), on oral histories of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, which revealed how shared narratives contribute to sustaining collective memory and their identity. Although it focused on adult refugees, the findings of their study emphasized on role of language used by the child participants in preserving the cultural and identities. Similarly, another study by Ismail on children's media in Palestine revealed how it contributes in shaping people's perception specially children's voices in discussing conflicts. Al Haj (2023), studied language as a resistance against the imposed identities among Palestinian youth. Their study plays a great role in understanding how language

plays a central role in constructing agency among children in conflict zones. Suleiman (2012) studied how the language by Palestinians becomes a form of resistance against the oppressive forces and is shaped by their conflict based experiences. This study aids in understanding the language of children in war torn areas.

❖ Existing literature on Kashmir

Similar researches in Kashmir have been carried out and the results reinforce the idea that children in conflict areas develop linguistics selections to negotiate with power structures. An extensive discourse analysis was carried out by Ahmed (2023) on youth authored opinions and essays which reflect the political consciousness in their lexicon. The results are based on adults but the impact of conflicted situations on language is applicable to children as well. A direct study in children was done by Khan et al. (2022) on the drawings and illustrations by Kashmiri children, the findings reveal that children draw what they feel about the conflicts, i.e. fear, hope, lost, dark etc. as captions evidently demonstrates the sociolinguistic awareness. These visual and verbal expressions in their study contribute to intersectionality of children's narratives and war-torn areas environment.

❖ Existing literature on Syria

Syrian children in their political and historical context of migration, are extensively researched based on their refugee resettlements and psychologies. However, the sociolinguistics features of the children still remain unexplored. A longitudinal study done by Hassan (2024) on Syrian refugees settled in other countries, demonstrate their testimonies, transitioning form instant hesitation or silence to politicized narratives, reveal the structures in the expressions related to war, grief, war, and horrors. The disjointed linguistic elements in their speeches finds its parallel in trauma theory by Caruth (1996), where language mirrors the unspeakable. Al khaib (2023) studied the construction of counter narratives by Syrian refugees particularly youth, to deal with displacement and identity conflicts the findings reveal similar patterns can be observed in children narratives as well.

The linguistic landscapes of these conflicted regions are not merely sites of political violence but they are also the sites for manifestation of colonial ideologies. Scholars like Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook challenge the Eurocentric models of language in Decolonial Sociolinguistics. They highlight how their models of language impose colonial rule and continue to impose their policies and ideologies

even today. Makoni and Pennycook in their work argue that language is not a fixed system rather it is shaped and constructed by the culture society and power structures. In context of conflicted regions, Urdu and Kashmiri language are privileges in media and governance, Ofelia Gracia terms it as linguistic erasure.

Few researches have appeared to be interrogating the linguistic elements of such victims of conflicts. For instance, psychoanalytical study of refugee narratives is done by Huemer J et al. The study is done by using Stress inducing speech task to assess trauma. Findings reveal low word count, fragmented narrative structure and high emotional expressivity in their narrations. Alongside, the code switching of adults in Kashmir was studied by Bhat and Zia (2023), reveals the intersection of language identity place and mourning.

Despite all these researches, the gap remains wide. Very less attention has been paid to the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatics of narratives of war conflict regions children, mostly their psychological impacts have been discussed and very few studies focus on linguistic elements but not as central data. The existing literature examines the impact of wars on children's psychological and physical health, often overlooking the perception of children's linguistic expression in conflicts and wars. This research operates on the erasure of this gap by deconstructing the language and lexicon of such children. Another vital gap this research aims to eradicate is to provide comparative studies across conflict zones of Palestine, Kashmir, and Syria. Such researches that offer a comparative analysis of war-torn regions and its impact on children's language are scarce. Moreover, there is a lack of transnational studies focusing particularly on voices of children and their discursive narratives. This study responds to the urgent need of analyzing children narratives through the lens of sociolinguistics to understand not the trauma response but also how their language shapes it and redefines their experiences.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative interpretive methodology, which adopts a cross regional comparison to strengthen our analysis. This framework enables to perform an in-depth analysis of the children's narratives in conflict regions, particularly Palestine, Syria, and Kashmir. By situating the study in interpretive paradigm, this study takes language not just as a means of communication but also as a complex, socially, politically and ideologically constructed system. It enables researchers to

consider language in a way that constructs meanings, deal with subjectivities and articulate experiences in war conflict regions.

The research design is based on sociolinguistic analysis along with trauma discourse analysis. The study engages with children's testimonies, to interrogate the functionality of language under conflicted circumstances. The narratives of children in this study are acting as primary data and central sociolinguistics text. A comparative methodology is employed which aids in identifying diverse linguistic features in different regions as well as shared linguistic features in conflict situations trans-border. Children under age 17 are selected as primary participants of the study. This age group being most vulnerable of the effects of violence and conflicts, while still being able to narrate their experiences, provides a foundation in studying the children narratives in conflicted situations. This study is based on the narratives collected between 2020-2025 from the focused conflict regions, Palestine, Syria and Kashmir. This time period happens to be the most highlighted in terms of conflicts and unrest, also significant attention has been given to such areas in these years in the form of recorded documentaries, interviews, reports etc.

❖ **Data Sources**

This study draws on reasonably balanced set of testimonies between five to ten narratives from each conflicted region. The sources include reports from different organizations, like UNICEF, Al Jazeera, Save the children, Frontiers, BBC, and other United Nations platforms. The video documentaries by such media outlets were also incorporated in the form of their transcribed versions which are easily available, permitting linguistic verification.

❖ **Sampling Criteria**

The testimonies were selected based on relevance to the study's focus on linguistic analysis of narratives of children aging from 7 to 17. The testimonies used for analysis are confined to first person narratives only to ensure the authenticity of data and findings. The study is refined from any decontextualized data that make the meanings of narratives sloppy or fabricated. The reliance of online accessible testimonies may include the potential bias limiting full representation of diverse voices within each conflict context.

❖ **Ethical Considerations**

All the data is ethically sourced for this study, and it is publicly available, to ensure the standards of research ethics particularly in the case of such vulnerable populations. To ensure the ethical considerations and sensitivity of working with minor narratives and testimonies, not a single data is collected directly, instead the research revolves around already existing material and narratives in the form of documents reports, video story saying that are publicly shared. Also, the identities have been kept anonymous, to protect the integrity of involved participants.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks for this study align perfectly with the aims and research objectives. The first is Labov's narrative structure model, serving as a foundation for our analysis. It aids in analyzing how children narratives are organized and treated, and how children themselves narrate their experiences. Apart from that, Cathy Caruth's Trauma theory (1996) enables to interrogate the linguistic features that hint at deeper psychological narratives. So, different linguistic and discursive features are investigated in relation to children narratives. The analysis is comprised of different steps. First, the data is obtained in the raw form, from written reports, or transcribed from the video documentaries. Relevant available translations are used where required. Each narrative is treated as a distinct case study to ensure the in -depth analysis. Then a cross cultural comparative analysis is drawn, to study the shared linguistic features of children under conflict situations trans borders. The reports are obtained from media platforms and NGO's. The aim is not speaking for the behalf of marginalized voices, instead it is to deal with the testimonies and investigate children narratives as a primary text. To conclude, this study situates children voices in academic discourse rather than marginalizing their experience.

Analysis

Region	Sources		
Palestine	Zionist Colonialism in Palestine (Sayegh 2012)	Palestinian Children: Authors of Collective Memory (Habashi)	Agency operating within structures: A qualitative exploration of agency amongst children living in Palestine. (Cavazzoni, 2021)

Syria	UNICEF Report: Strength beyond Scars; Cidra's story	Save the Children Report: Schools Damaged during Escalation	UNICEF Report: Listen Syrian Children
Kashmir	Childhoods under military occupation: everyday experiences (Oza, 2025)	Insistence on Existence (Oza, 2025)	*Settler Colonial Studies* (2025)

❖ **Testaments of the Palestinian children**

The testimonies collected from various resources showed how the children of Palestine responded to their circumstances with the help of their language. The accounts of Palestinian children, recorded from already done researches, told us that these children had agency, even for the people who put them in conflicted situations. Fayez Sayegh (2012) writes in his research that the Jumbled colonization of the state of Palestine was supported by wealthy Jewish supporters. So, despite being oppressed by the Jews, the Palestinian children still had agency to exhibit in their language for these people. For instance, one such account is given in Janette Habashi's (2013) research where he narrates the words of a 13-year-old boy who says, "The story is the Jews came here because they did not have a homeland and the Palestinians welcomed them in [to] their homes. Palestinians were very hospitable, but they colonized the land". The lexical analysis of this account implies that these children are so innocent and because of this innocence they accommodated the Jews and welcomed them. As this boy says that the people of Palestine were "hospitable" towards these Jews, who settled in this state with the intention to occupy it. Despite the horrors these Jews had been inflicted upon these Palestinians, the people of Palestine, especially children still accepted them with open arms. Moreover, the lexicon "colonized" used by this 13-year-old in a normal conversational sentence suggests the influence of his political context over his vocabulary. This implies that the war circumstances do have an impact on his lexicon as well. Habashi (2013) writes that current political circumstances witnessed by Palestinian children enable them to express issues that form Palestine's history. Labovian narrative analysis, that suggests that personal stories that are told in conversation, have a particular structure, is readily showcased here. This testament, in Labovian terms, uphold agency despite being in a conflicted state. The use of their language reframes their

contexts making one think otherwise. This is how Labov's narrative structure is pertained in the testament.

Another testament by a 10-year-old Palestinian boy in Habashi's research (2013) told that, "When I go and visit I pass my original village (village pre-1948) I start crying. Also, in front of [the] refugee camp where I live there is a gate built by the Israelis. They built this gate and everyone has to pass through it, if you do not, you will be shot and killed". This is a life through the eyes of a Palestinian child. The lexical narratology this boy uses such as "shot", "killed", and "refugee camp" is not supposed to be part of a child's vocabulary who is just 10 years old. This testament implies the impact of political and cultural context, subjected to wars, on the language of children. The diction of these narratives shows intense emotions as well as suppression. The lexicons such as "crying," "destroyed," "killed" are explicit in nature and emotionally charged. However, this non-flamboyant selection of linguistic expressions creates an ambience of flatness that articulates the experiences in depth. Children living in conflicted regions, are affected by their circumstances in both constructive and destructive ways. In the earlier account of 13 years old boy, his language was expressing his agency towards the colonizers. On the other hand, in the latter testament, the language is conveying the traumatic experience this 10-year-old boy goes through. He narrates that when he passes through the gates, he starts "crying." His use of lexicon 'crying' embodies his pain and suffering due to the war circumstances around him. In this testimony of Palestinian child, Labovian narrative structure offers a ground to deconstruct how the trauma, these children are subjected to, is organized. The 'orientation' provides a basis to his life's story disrupted by war. Traumas are often indirectly communicated through metaphors. The repetitive reference to "gate" is not merely linguistic repetition, it is a marker of separation and boundary. It symbolizes controlled access, a physical as well as psychological boundary. The phrases like "if you do not, you will be shot and killed" adds to the depth of this metaphorical layering. Similarly mentioning "original village" refers to the lost space and longing for that space.

The horrors of war shut some children living in those areas but they also wake other children and make them more resilient and stronger. For instance, in a research done by Cavazzoni (2021) on Palestinian children, he recorded narratives of many children subjected to war-torn regions. An account given by 12-year-old Palestinian boy named Fasayel says, "I'm scared of them [the settlers], but sometimes I come here because you can find Internet here. We don't have Internet cable in our village,

but we can come here and use theirs, watch videos on our phones and have fun" (Cavazzoni 2021). Despite surrounded by drones, air strikes, and military army, these children stay resilient and do not surrender to their political contexts. Surrounded by threats from all four directions, this boy used the word 'fun,' a term seemingly incongruous in war contexts, to express his sheer spirit and hope. He said "we come here" referring to the settlers' place, and watches videos after getting hold of the internet connection. The conflicts going around him do not confine him to stop having fun. His language and lexical narratology reveal that the narratives of such children are not just echo of conflicts, but their language acts as a tool to show resistance and survival. The testimonial mentions daily life activities in a casual tone but there is a linguistic contrast. The destructions of war are juxtaposed with casual activities. It highlights how violence, trauma and destruction have been normalized and coexisting with daily life. The language of children testimonials reveals coexisting notions of hope and fear, and survival and suffering. This narrative of Palestinian child includes evaluative clauses from the Labovian narrative structure, that tend to convey deep emotional reverberation. His phrases imply his inner processing of resistance alongside hope.

Cavazzoni and co-authors (2021) further provide another account of 9-year-old Palestinian girl named Nablus in their research. Nablus says, "Sometimes I have to pass through this neighborhood which I am afraid of. So, I ask my friend to come with me. She knows people in that areas, she can help me. In this way, I don't have to wait until Friday to go there with my family". These children use their social resources to resist the oppression they are exposed to. They continue to be strong and seek help in order to continue with their daily life regardless of their threatened surroundings. The 12-year-old Fasayel, on another incident in Cavazzoni's research (2021) says, "We were playing between people and cars. This is annoying and dangerous. So, an idea sprung in our minds, to make a playground. We asked for help and we made the playground. [. . .] It was very hard, but the result is so good. Now we have a playground away from people and cars". This account of Fasayel shows his denial to accept vulnerability. Despite living under severe conditions with war going around, almost no food and water, and despair surrounding him, he is hopefully trying to enjoy every moment. The use of his language implies his consciousness that he is aware and perceives the war happening around him but still chooses to live through it. For instance, he mentions that he found playing between people and cars to be dangerous. So, he used his consciousness to avoid any further danger and with "help," he, along with his fellows was able to make the playground.

To a person living under normal conditions, this narrative appears to be of no worth, but when examined while keeping in mind the suffering and trauma Palestinian children are tied to, the same sentence uttered by a child pervades intense meaning.

❖ **Testaments of Syrian children**

Syrian children's narratives also offer valuable insights in interrogating the interplay between children voices, discourses, and narrative building. Cidra's testimonies offer deep insights into the child psychology and narrative building in conflict situations. Her accounts demonstrate how children in conflict regions navigate with different experiences through language. Her narrative is sourced from UNICEF's report that is publicly available and is published under the title: Strength beyond the Scars: Cidra's Journey of Resilience and Hope, on 20th March 2025. Her being a war victim, physically injured and endured loss of blood relations, narrates her journey. This narrative was selected due to the depth of victims' experiences and rich narrative structures used by Cidra in narrating her experiences. Using Labov's narrative structures (Labov 1972), her testimonies beginning with a quote "keep pushing forward" marks the setting of orientation. She is hinting at her identity as a focal person for youth resilience. When she narrates her story in words "I could feel my hand but not find it" demonstrates the evaluation point according to Labov's lens of Narrative structure. Caruth's trauma theory (1996) also exemplifies in such narrations, her body registers the loss, but her language cannot comprehend it. Thus, we can find traces of trauma in the words as well as her silence between the words. While expressing her journey to recovery we see resolution in terms of Labov's narrative structure (Labov 1972) in her words "It was very helpful and made me a stronger person," which demonstrate her agency through her language.

From the perspective of trauma discourses, experiences are not just narrated through language but also in the silences and metaphors used in discourse (1996). When Cidra recalls her brother death, apparently, she simply mentions "his death was a big shock for me." It is restrained from any extension of elaborated feelings, or verbalizing grief. It aligns with Caruth's trauma theory's narrative that the most painful, and emotional experiences can't be expressed through language, and their silence and hesitations act as meaningful constituents as well (Caruth 1996). This story is foregrounded not in terms of her as victim, but the focus is placed on her agency, resilience and courage which is evident through her discourse. She embodies the features of language suggested by the decolonial sociolinguists. She uses her language to assert her identity, values, strength, resilience and re-situates

herself by countering the marginalized voices, or victimized representation in globally known platforms.

While this account foregrounds resilience, Osama's story brings forward a male centered perspective on child narratives in traumatic and conflict situations. The account is sourced from UNICEF Syria, and it is publicly accessible as well. It documents the story of a young boy aged fourteen named Osama. His story is embedded with visible traces of trauma where his silence and incompressibility of his experience. His reluctance while communicating or narrating his story highlights the emotional muteness imposed on males by societal structures.

Another narrative derived from Save the Children case study, deals with the experiences of six-year-old girl, named Karma, living in a displacement camp of Syria. The case study involves direct quotes from Karma's father. Labov's narrative structures can be examined in karma's story, marking the orientation with narration of Karma's current life situation. And the evaluation has its traces in family reflections on her condition. Karma's language is observed not in terms of words but her silence, behaviors nonverbal expressions, attempts at communication in hesitation. While karma can't produce words due to her physical inability, her silence becomes meaningful, as in the light of Caruth's (1996) trauma response theory, what she can't say, sound the loudest. Her lost voice is symbolizing the voicelessness of displaced and war inflicted children. In decolonial sociolinguistics reading, her silence counters the western ideals of trauma verbalization.

Safi's testimony sourced from UNICEF serves as powerful narrative to analyzed children perspective on war and their narrative and discourse analysis. His response to the violence in his words "I did not feel anything" mirrors the phenomenon of numbness of mind and feelings. This kind of emotional detachment, is a defense mechanism according to Cathy's trauma response (1996). He mentions he is afraid of "Wild animals" rather than airplanes, it reflects how children's minds are conditioned to violence and how war like situations disrupts the childhood fears. His words "I was hurt when they dropped another bomb" reflects the impact of conflicts on innocent minds. Similarly, the longing displaced children experience is way too much for their age. Safi's words "I miss our house the most. I miss everything there." Embody the loneliness, homelessness and complex interplay of language and innocence.

Another testimony recorded by UNICEF in reports of year 2024, exemplifies how children's discourses reflect the extreme traumas and war like situations. Fateh's testimony "I wish everything went smoothly and the houses weren't destroyed I wish children were not touched by wars", functions as cry for help as well as personal account on emotion unrest. It reflects how wars and conflicts disrupt childhood. The testimonies of the children from conflicted regions reveal trauma with elusive yet strong patterns. One of the linguistic items such as syntax, is very crucial in exposing vulnerability of these children. They used indirect speech such as "the houses weren't destroyed" and "children were not touched by wars," that implies no evident violence agent. This passive construction lets the source of harm unexposed. This is a clear example of neglecting direct confrontation and isolation from the very act itself. In the same manner, in "there is a gate built by the Israelis," the narrator emphasized on the entity (the gate) instead of focusing on the one who constructed the gate (the subject), shifting the focus on the signs and symbols of structures rather than those accountable for their existence. This implies the tendency of these children to define surrounding realties instead of actions. Fateh's linguistic choices tells a lot about his mental state. His narrations are not based on typical abstract or generalized concepts about politics or victims, but they are focused on little details, like furniture, toys, bed etc. which signify homely feeling, security and protection. He mentions in the interview that "I'm comfortable here, and I'm not afraid of anything", exemplifies, how children learn to adopt to conflicted environments and their discourses hold a great significance in examining the vocabularies of peace and conflicts.

UNICEF has recorded a number of interviews with children and Wafa is one of them. She narrates her story and mentions "There is nothing worse than this crisis" This discourse functions not just a hyperbole, but as a genuine expression of war and conflict's comprehension by a child's mind. The linguistic choice "nothing worse" reflects the incomprehensibility of conflicts. And illustrates its beyond understanding horrors and terrors. It is a syntactic marker often used in trauma testimonies. Cathy in trauma theory also highlight such unclaimed experiences, where testimonies are not pointing out to any particular details, like Wafa restrained from mentioning or defining war, she just uses the word crisis but the impact is still powerful.

   ❖ **Testaments of Kashmiri children**

Kashmiri children, similar to the state of Palestinian and Syrian children, are posed under conflicted circumstances where they are surrounded by military all the time which primarily impacts the way they think, the way they act, and the way they respond to it. In a research study done by Ezta Oza in 2025, many accounts of Kashmiri children are given that echo their resilience and fearlessness. A 14-15-year-old Kashmiri boy, in Oza's research (2025) said, "we don't feel scared of the army anymore. Now we are used to their presence, they are there in the morning when we wake up, they are there at night when we go to sleep. This is routine here in Kashmir". These children don't fear the military around them because their presence at all times has made them immune to it. The words used by this child are implying his fearlessness and resilience towards the deprecating circumstances. for instance, he says that he does not feel "scared" of the army that lingers around them all the time. He has found a way to live with it unbothered. This language implies their sheer nature regardless of being under conflicted circumstances. Despite the chaos and conflicts happening around them, the act of narration of these children becomes a way of showing resistance and resilience. Thus, the theory brought forward by Caruth (1996) is reinforced here, by suggesting that narrative structure of children is determining their unwavering strength.

Oza, in their research, give account of another Kashmiri child named Sabia who is just 17-year-old. She said,

There is no way we can avoid them, they are everywhere. We walk past them fearlessly. Sometimes you are just indifferent to their presence, and sometimes you know that if you are stopped and something happens, you will have the courage to face them. I still do feel scared at times, but my friend doesn't. I have learnt from her; the way she just walks past the army or the way she talks to them (370).

Sabia talks about how she finds herself juggling between hope and fear. Sometimes she is confident while sometimes she has to look up to other people such as her friend to keep boosted again. The conflicted region that she is subjected to, does not stop her from being brave, instead, it makes her braver. Despite struggling every single day to survive and escape the army, these children are hopeful, resistant, and continue to not give up. Their language echoes their unshaking strength, resilience and hope. Oza (2025) mentions in their research that a research question regarding the army was asked that whether these children fear them while walking through the street. Oza (2025) mentions that almost all the children replied in unison which

was, "no, not at all. Now we are habituated to it. We are not scared anymore. What about fear? When you get used to something, you stop fearing it. If you see it every day, then the fear goes away eventually" (Oza 2025). These are children who are subjected to surveillance, and martial laws every now and then. A child, in his/her normal upbringing is not unscarred, and fearless. He/she is curious and wondrous but these Kashmiri children, raised in unnatural context, are fearless, strong, and unscarred. Their language is the testament, heavily influenced by their political and cultural environments. Another child in Oza's research said, "fearlessness borne out of aadat" (2025). Aadat is a certain habit that you have opted. These children use these terminologies to express their feelings, emotions, and situations, drawn by their contexts. As far as Caruth's (1996) trauma structure analysis is concerned, trauma does not just take one to the past, but it also calls one towards the future. The lexical narratology of these children not only reveals firm resilience, but it also encourages them to look ahead with hope. This structure reinforces Caruth's idea of trauma (1996).

Some children, under the pressure of conflicted situations turn out to be stronger than the others. But some of them become more traumatized because the outside circumstances are extremely horrific for them to cope with. For instance, another testament of Kashmiri child is given in Oza's research (2025). She said,

"You always live in fear here, what if the army comes? You cannot live alone, even within your home. Your home is supposed to be the safest place, right? But you never know who will enter your house. What if the army barges in? At night as well, you sleep with that fear because they patrol at night. The nightmares are the worst. I am scared even in my dreams" ((Oza 2025).

This lexical narratology used by this child reflects her fear and trauma. Not every child comes out strong from the conflicted circumstances, some of them become more confined and reserved. As this child mentioned that even during her sleep, the fear does not leave her. This language, lexicon, and choice of words imply her emotional state and trauma that these children have to go through. Caruth (1996) explores how trauma of people is exposed through their lexical gaps and indirect speech. Kashmiri children describe their horrors through their lexical narratology to express something unspeakable. This resonates with Caruth's trauma theory (1996) that implies that traumatic experiences often tend to be expressed indirectly through language rather than explicitly meaningful sentences.

Discussions

The theoretical frameworks used in this study enables the researchers to analyze children language in conflicts regions as not mere descriptions butt as a tool to construct their identities, resist the oppressing hierarchies, and negotiate with systemic violence. Labov's six-part narrative model offers a lens to analyze the testimonies of children in case of storytelling. When the disruptions occur, or hesitations deviate the storytelling from Labov's model (Labov 359), it reflects the embedded traumatic experiences. Children, who were narrating their stories, kept oscillating between fragmented structures, unlike a sequential model of Labov. A brief comparison of children narratives with adult testimonies reveal noticeable contrast. Adult narrations follow more structured storytelling, explicitly engaging with political framework, reflecting maturity and conscious reflection whereas children narratives are more fragmented and emotionally charged. This structural breakdown is manifestation if the failure of cognition, linguistic depth, and traces of trauma. Thus, through analysis in the lens of Labov's framework, this study examines the silences and hesitations not just as voids, but as meaningful indicators. The disruption in narrative flow that is identified by Labov's linguistic framework aligns with the idea of trauma given by Cathy Caruth (1996). Her trauma theory puts focus on trauma as incomprehensible experience. It was evident in children's narratives from Palestine, Syria and Kashmir as well. Children narrated experiences of loss of loved ones, bomb explosions, and dismembered bodies. So, the traumas are visible in the form of disjointed speech, silence, stammering, usage of strong imagery and metaphors etc. Similarly, the analysis of children's testimonies also demonstrates some patterns of resistance and agency. For instance, children of Kashmir used their local Kashmiri terms to express their emotions, rage and grief. These expressions and emotions are lost when they are recorded and translated by different organizations, which mirrors to decolonial sociolinguists' concept of epistemological erasure and marginalization. Thus, the testimonies of conflict areas children are not just descriptions but they act as a form of resistance, agency, and endurance.

Silence acts as a significant linguistic marker that is embedded with culturally and politically rich meanings and trauma discourses. For instance, in Children narratives of Syria, the silences occur when narrating some losses, wither homeland houses or blood relations, functioning jot just as wordless moments but epistemological resistance to the violence and hierarchical structures. It aligns with Judith Butler's

theory of performity, in which he explores silence as an intentional act. These silences in children narratives are not just absent voices, but they act as meaningful pauses ellipses, abrupt shifts from key details of losses. Butler's theory highlights these notions of strategic refusal to conform to dominant discourses and it aids in analyzing how silence in children's narratives become performative space for resistance rather than mere language gaps.

Similarly, the code switching between Arabic, English by Children of Syria and Palestine reflect the emotionally charged language when they narrate their experiences. This switching happens to be not just coincidence of narration, instead it acts as use of linguistic agency and refers to politically aware children mindsets. This code switching serves multiple functions. In some cases, it is completely subconscious and un intentional. Which underscores the internalized trauma and fragmented memory? In other instances, the code switching serves to be strategic, often occurring when mentioning their legal concepts or solidarity with their nations. This aligns with Jan Blommaert's notion of voice which considers voice as a socially situated and constructed and shaped by societal and cultural resources (2010). However, at some instances it may arise due to translational processes. Recognizing the layers of translational processes is very crucial, as code switching may invite complex linguistic negotiation and its intersectionality with trauma, silence and self-expression.

Comparative Analysis of Linguistic Features of Children Narratives in Conflict Zones:

Analytical Categories	Palestine	Kashmir	Syria
Languages used	Arabic, English,	Urdu, English, Kashmiri	Arabic, English, Kurdish
Narrative strategies (Labov's Theoretical Lens)	Self-reflections and storytelling based on connections with ancestral land	Linear structure with strong political resistance and disruptions by traumas	Fragmented structure, physical displacement and exile's impact on narrations and memory

Trauma markers (Caruth's Lens)	Prominent silence, hesitations, prayers within narrations, illustrate the embedded trauma	Repetitive structure of language, using cultural expressions for victims and martyrs, anger, grief, resistance and pride are prominent	Discourse rich of metaphors on loss, displacement, exile and traumas
Decolonial Sociolinguistics Lens	Resistance towards the globally imposed identities of victimhood through strong portrayal of identity and language	Strong descriptions of resistance through language reclaiming the agency through politically imposed systems, Counter state narrative and discourses are prominent	Children narratives articulate complex identity problems, displacement narratives are rich of metaphors that resist and question the hierarchies
Resilience and agency markers	" We don't have Internet cable in our village, but we can come here and use theirs, watch videos on our phones and have fun "	"we don't feel scared of the army anymore. Now we are used to their presence "	"keep pushing forward"

Linguistic Elements

Theoretical Lens	Palestine	Kashmir	Syria
Labov's Narrative Structure	Coda and Complicating Actions are prominent, includes flashbacks, disrupt temporal flow in narration, e.g. ("Then they came... again.")	Orientation and Abstract fused emotionally; Sentences based on reflection to situations reflect pain ("My father... and then they shot him.")	Complicating actions with traces of rushed codas, narratives include brief orientation. Abrupt endings are hinting at trauma blocking resolution.

Lexical Selection	Frequent use of passive verbs like ("was taken," "we were told"), significant use of abstract nouns ("hope," "loss"), and negation ("no home")	Sensory overload through lexical fields of sound and fear: "gunshots," "screams," "silence"—all within same narrative cluster.	Prominent use of verbs indicating resilience and survival ("run," "hide," "escape"), imperative verbs ("stay still")
Figurative Language (Metaphor and Symbol)	"shot" killed" "scared" "afraid"	"they are everywhere" "we never died in spirit"	"I did not feel anything" "I was hurt when they dropped another bomb"
Syntax and Grammar	Incomplete sentences, over use of ellipses, silence, abrupt clauses	Repetition of words and phrases ("they came, they came"), Sudden shifts in tense form, active to passive voice narration	Short and clipped sentences, little usage of pronouns, indicating loss of identity and self

The results obtained after analyzing these testaments of children from Palestine, Kashmir, and Syria suggest that the language used by them to express hope, fear, and resilience, within their own conflicted contexts is the same. Despite their own individual circumstances, the way they manage to cope with it shows unison. Their language, such as the use of war lexicon (kill, scared, fear) is similar in all these cases. Their language is not just a means to communicate with one another, but it serves as a symbol of their resistance, resilience, and strength.

Conclusion

This study interrogates the marginalized and overlooked narratives of children from conflict zones, particularly from Palestine, Syria and Kashmir, in relation to their linguistic framing and reflection of conflicted situations. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks of Trauma discourse, narrative sociolinguistic and deconstructing sociolinguistics, this study reveals that the linguistics choices children make are not just descriptions but they carry significance. The children narratives are direct responses to the political and systemic violence in the form of symbolically rich discourse. The findings highlight how children use their language to voice their

internal conflicts within the external conflicted situations, and how they resist or comply with the situations. It represents children as active and conscious linguistic agents, who not inky use their discourse to reflect upon the internal and external situations but also resist the typical structures that marginalize their vices. Their silences and hesitations are also embedded with meaning. In all three regions i.e. Palestine, Syria and Kashmir, there are certain mutual metaphors of darkness, violence, and survival. There is a collective narrative of disruption across these conflicted regions. Also, there are certain specificities when it comes to narrations of violence in their respective cultures. These linguistics practices demonstrate that these are not just narrations, rather they are actively articulated linguistic items that signify resistance, call for change and personal narratives as well.

Future Recommendations

Engaging with translated testimonies invites some methodological concerns as well. The language of these children from the conflicted regions, is when translated in English for deep research, causes severe distortions such as the loss of linguistic and emotional expressions. Given these findings, the study opens the door for future studies. Future academic researches may focus on adult centered narratives for nuanced understanding of the conflicts as well as its individualistic perception through language. The future researches should carry out the interdisciplinary approach which attempts to merge subjects such as psychology of trauma, in-depth linguistic analysis as well as studies on the conflicted regions, specifically in sociolinguistic and decolonial frameworks. This study not only advocates for listening children's narratives, but insists on listening to them linguistically, as their narratives are rich in symbolism and have traces of trauma and resistance as well. It highlights the need for training educators in refugee hosting or conflicted areas to recognize the linguistic cues of trauma and respond with relevant appropriate support. Media channels should keep the children narratives refrained from erasure of simplification or erasure of emotional depth. Thus, we recognize that children's narratives are never broken or meaningless even if they are fragmented, code switched, or metaphorical. In fact, they are form of resistance, survival and agency which challenge notions of erasure.

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