



## Critical Discourse Analysis of Chants during Ouster of Prime Minister of Bangladesh: A Systemic Functional Linguistic Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to critically investigate the role of protest chants during the 2024 ouster of Prime Minister of Bangladesh, using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as an analytical framework within the larger context of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Chants as a powerful tool for mobilization, comprises socio-political tensions, unity and resistance against power. This study delves into the linguistic features that create an influential impact on the public by examining chants and a song of resistance 'Awaz Utha' using ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions of SFL. The study is based on Qualitative methodology and advances the discipline of CDA by uncovering the complex meanings of protest discourse. The results explore how the chants act as a powerful agent to disperse ideas of freedom and describe the sketch of political ideologies. It also shed light on the protest movements in socio-political contexts and the role of language in shaping political and social resistance and collective identities in Bangladesh. This perspective is crucial in highlighting the role of language in amplifying marginalized voices and the interplay of language, power and resistance in the protestants demands.

## Introduction

The power of a movement is based on its organised members, who aid in change and rethink governmental structures. Although distributed structures work well for quick mobilisation, they can also cause conflict and chaos which could slow down the pace. "Freedom, peace, justice, and revolution are the choice of the people!"-*protester chant during the 2019 Sudanese Revolution*. Social media-driven protests have the potential to overthrow established governments and give

political leaders greater authority. They have no agency in creating a new political system, though, and have no control over the people who rise to power (Davies & Oyolu ,2020).

The protests in Bangladesh happened over a quota system that reserved 56% of the government jobs for special interest groups, such as descendants of freedom fighters from the War of Independence 1971 of Bangladesh. By mid-2024, the protests helped in easing frustrations of people about inflation, unemployment, and a dwindling democratic space. What began as peaceful student demonstrations in July 2024, against reservation quotas in government jobs quickly turned into a Movement demanding the Removal of Hasina, leading to the death of 266 people. The government shuttered schools and imposed a curfew, severed internet and telecommunications and jailed student leaders. The protests have changed not only the game across Bangladesh's domestic political landscape but also forced rethinking about its foreign policy priorities (Chughtai & Ali, 2024).

When we turn over the pages of history, it is evident that rap, hip-hop music, have been an influential tool for expressing displeasures, rallying purposes as well as battling authority. Other genres of music also played their parts , but the special aspect of hip-hop music is its challenging status quo; converting the note in terms of not doing something that this genre is meant to do (Aziz, 2024).

It has been suggested that song-like vocalisations, such as chanting, have evolved in non-human primates and other animals as a means of conveying information about touching experiences. Chants, as defined by Holtmann (2020: 278), are "rhythmic sound patterns and chanting play important roles in fostering social, heroic, moral, political, and religious narratives, as well as myths of community, and salvation among human groups in conflict" (Angkasa,2023).

The music industry plays its role through developing songs to describe the crucial state of the country. During the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh the music played a crucial role in the country's history as the artists always introduced the public with aspiring music about their heroes and stories of war.

The framework employed for the linguistic and social elements of widely recognized chants and song 'Awaz Utha' is Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). An in-depth qualitative investigation is conducted by using Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the meanings and goals in the protest speech. Through this the researcher tries to explore the approval and disagreements with political agendas taking protest chanting as a sample. The researcher aims to contribute to the previous research conducted on protest discourse and its impacts on a country's politics by presenting the case of Bangladesh.

### **Objectives**

- To critically examine the linguistic features in protest chants and song 'Awaz Utha' during 2024 ouster of PM of Bangladesh.
- To reveal the role of ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions in the language of resistance and unity.
- To investigate how protest song 'Awaz Utha' parallels the sentiments of the public and emotions expressed in the chants during the protest.

### **Research Questions**

- What essential functions do metafunctions perform in the selection of words used in song 'Awaz Utha' and chants during the 2024 Bangladesh protest?
- How do the chants depict power dynamics and political prejudice?
- What words does the song 'Awaz Utha' have in expressing how the majority of people perceive freedom?

## **Literature Review**

In political debates it is crucial for political actors to convince the public through persuasive competence in language. Akram and Iqbal (2021), with a focus on Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League-Noon (PML-N) proposes an in-depth analysis of political slogans used during Pakistan's 2018 general elections. They demonstrated how political slogans are deliberately written to trigger the emotions of voters through a number of rhetorical devices such as repetition, rhyme, alliteration, synonyms, antonyms, and diversity of sentence structures including commands and inquiry. The framework proposed by Hosu and Pavelea (2009) is demonstrated to present the relationship between language, power and political strategy. The framework of their research complements the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistic theory. It offers a critical lens to the strategy of words used to influence the public perceptions and behaviours.

Protest chants from George Floyd riots in the United States were examined in Meng's 2021 study using Critical Discourse Analysis. CDA helps in uncovering the hidden ideas and widely held perceptions. His study explores how protest slogans reveal historical and social conflicts to offer new perspectives on complex issues. The methodological approach aligns with this research. Meng's focus on employing slogans to challenge traditional thinking aligns with the analysis of how protest language affects public anger and opposition to politicians affecting the perceptions of societal injustice.

The emergence of chants and slogans during 2019 Tishreen protests in Iraq were examined by Mustafa in 2022. The study focussed on how those chants are contributing to the formation of social identity. The research adopts a social and multimodal approach, illustrating how these ideologies of chants challenge political narratives and pass across sectarian boundaries. The study is relevant to this research as it provides insights into how language of chants and the song adapt to address the collective frustrations and develop unity.

Van de Velde's 2022 study of protest signs and slogans illustrate their impotence in comprehending the public unrest. It provides a framework for classifying the political agendas; mobilization, announcing, witnessing, making claims and protest writing; portraying the political performances, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs of the public. He addresses methodological approaches along with the ethical concerns with gathering and analyzing protest material. The data in this research is mainly collected from the incident videos and the publications regarding the incident 2024 quota protest of Bangladesh.

Taher examines how the protest movement that overthrew Iraq's Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi was linguistically and ideologically represented in four local and foreign newspapers in 2024. The presentation of local newspapers such as Al-Sabaah, highlights violence and subsiding voices of protesters, has large gaps with the foreign coverage of protests. By exhibiting concerns with the protesters, international publications such as The New York Times and The Telegraph present an unbiased opinion. These channels use language to shake the public and display

intentional word choices. These illustrations align with this research of chants and the song demonstrating the importance of word choices.

Ali et al. 's 2024 study describes the verbal and visual illustrations used in the Baloch Long March sign boards. These narratives centre the interchange between aggressive language , metaphorical expressions and culturally significant images. The study demonstrates how these elements display the pain of oppressive institutions while strengthening their power. The findings describe the ideational and interpersonal goals language through the nonverbal cues like color symbolism and visual metaphors in illustrating emotional appeal. The paper argues that these elements challenge power and ideology encouraging social mobilization and societal narratives. Ail et al.'s paper is significant to this research study in highlighting how the verbal cues might disclose deeper meanings.

## **Theoretical Framework**

To address the above questions, the framework of Halliday is explained through the deeper context of CDA in public protests.

### **Systemic Functional Linguistics**

Three meta-functions of language are identified by M.A.K. Halliday in Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 2007: 183). These are:

#### **1. Ideational function**

It depicts actual occurrences and circumstances. The real-world experiences are explained in this function of a text (Halliday 1973: 106).

#### **2. Interpersonal function**

It enables the expression of attitudes and judgments of people. It illustrates the mood between the author and reader (Halliday and Matthiessen 1999: 7).

#### **3. Textual function**

The meanings behind the text are actualised by the textual function through coherence and structure of the information (Halliday 2007: 184). The 'context situation' between the social phenomenon and the linguistics phenomenon are demonstrated by Halliday. Texts are written by speaker or author for particular reasons and emerge in certain social contexts. The entanglement of language and society is said to be in the relationship between text and context. The meanings of words in a text are explained with the help of social reality, settings which also include genre and register (Bilal, 2012.)

## **Methodology**

The methodology employed in this research article is Systemic Functional Linguistics with complementary framework of Critical Discourse Analysis to illustrate the uncover ideologies, power relations, centring how chants and song 'Awaz Utha' vocalize the collective identities and marginalized voices.

The data collected for analyzing ideational metafunction (socio-political realities), interpersonal metafunction (relationship between speaker and listeners), and textual metafunction (chants resonance with public) of the discourse from transcribed recordings on newspaper articles and the song that causes stir in public through its contextual information about the socio-political environment.

The approach chosen for descriptive analysis is significant for scholars of linguistics, critical discourse analysis presenting the macro-level (CDA) and micro-level (SFL) functions.

***Chants***

Bangladesh protest Chants	English
<i>Bhua, Bhua.</i> (The Times and The Sunday Times)	Fake, Fake
<i>Tui ke? Ami ke? Razakar, Razakar! Ke boleche, ke boleche, sairachar- sairachar.</i> (Firstpost)	Who are you? Who am I? Razakar, Razakar! Who says that, who says that, dictator, dictator!
	We want justice! (AlJazeera)
	Dictatorship must fall.
<i>Ek dofa ek dabi, Hasina tui kobe jabi</i> (The Wire)	We have one demand; when will you resign, Hasina?
<i>Shoirachar nipat jak, gonontontro mukti pak</i> (TheWire)	Autocrats must go, long live democracy
	Who came? Who came? The police came, the police came. What are they doing? They are here to lick the dictator's feet. (The Diplomat)

**Discussion**

The chosen chants and lyrics of the song are presented in this section. The chants are selected on the basis of the most dominant demands of the public and the reason why the riots started. Song 'Awaz Utha' causes a stir in the public and government as it covers the demands of the public and the context of the protest. According to Samir Islam, the co-singer Snare Byt, the rapper 'Hannan' of the song 'Awaz Utha' was taken into custody that agitated the public more.

This is followed by the qualitative analysis of the interpersonal, ideational and textual metafunctions along with the contextual analysis of power relations, societal injustice and ideologies of the public regarding social issues. Finally, these inferences are studies according to the context of the 2024 quota protest of Bangladesh.

The findings contribute to the importance of discourse in instigating crowds and compelling them to take a stand for themselves. It also illustrates the feelings, attitudes, beliefs of the public that are expressed through colors and signs along with the political performances and agendas. It also discusses how these nonverbal cues result in mobilization and changes the cultural perspectives. It also demonstrates how the purposeful use of particular words can shape public perceptions. The words the protesters use arouse sympathy and instigate the global world to be one.

## **Analysis**

These chants are emblematic because it covers the sentiments of the mass. They illustrate the demands of the public and the reason for the protest. The public was satisfied with the decision of the court in 2018 about quota reform after a small-scale protest arose against the government. But the decision of the court was taken back, which led to frustration and resulted in the overthrow of the government in 2024 of Bangladesh. These chants express dissatisfaction with government, resistance of people, call for action and identity formation. When we analyze chants and song in the reflection of 'transitivity functions' included in critical discourse analysis which tells us about the language and its reflection on processes, participants, circumstances we realize that the main participant is the 'public' and 'government' as the protest revolves around the oppressor and oppressed. The words used discuss the power's transfer from government to public.

Following is the analysis keeping in view the 'Ideational', 'Interpersonal', and 'Textual' functions of language in order to describe my perceptions.

### **1) Ideational Function**

It explains how the language used in chants shapes and expresses the reality of the society. The cognitive understanding of the chants, process and participants are explained in the ideational function. The participants are public and the government. It highlights how the public discourse depicts the mobilization of collective action and rebelling against oppression. The words *we want, must go, must resign, must fall* illustrate the necessity of action against suppression. The public is retaliating against the government's oppression. The mental perception of the public about Razakar led to chaos. This controversial remark by Hasina to protesters in response to dismissing the quota system gave air to the anger of the public. The cognitive reality of Razakar for the public of Bangladesh is insulting. 'Razakar' has a negative connotation and encapsulates a historical point, hints back to the East Pakistani volunteer force that opposed the creation of Bangladesh as a separate nation during its 1971 War of Independence (Mishra, 2024). The dictatorship of the government is highlighted by the protesters in chant; *Autocrats must go, long live democracy*. The assertive language depicts the social reality, and constructs solidarity among the population. Through the chant *We have one demand; when will you resign, Hasina?* The protesters clearly portray their demand and the way to tackle the ongoing crisis. The ideology behind the start of protests was to overthrow the government as the people of Bangladesh do not want to have the dictatorship anymore. They want equal rights. *Fake, Fake* chants demonstrate the government's withdrawal from the already abolished reserved seats quota in 2018. They reincarnate the quota in early July that triggers the massive chaos (Hossain & Ethirajan, 2024). In the chant *Who came? Who came? The police came, the police came. What are they doing? They are here to lick the dictator's feet*, the protesters are outlining the role of police during the protest. The police on the command of the government are killing people. The reality of the police of Bangladesh is described by the chant. Their role in the riot is inarguable. Mass of people lost lives due to repression and outrage law enforcements. For years the Bangladesh public has faced the tyranny of the police rather than being the guard of the public. (Lewis & Liller, 2024)

Similarly the lyrics of the song discuss the tyranny of government, resistance and solidarity of the public. The lyrics chosen by the singer portray the real world incidents of Bangladesh. For example, *When Sylhet drowned under water, you who shot Abu Sayeed, Can't forget '52 so why forget '24, how many more brothers remain have to die? We're fooled again and again, This*

*country is her father's property.* These lyrics are the pictures of the incidents during the protest. It discusses the patriotism of the people who died, sacrifice and the environmental concerns of Sylhet. The critique of so-called democracy by mocking Hasina is illustrated in '*this country is her father's property, this wasn't started by her father!*'. The incidents of 1952 and 2024 coincide with each other. The Sylhet flood and the death of Abu Sayeed are mentioned to describe the role of the government and its failure.

This analysis reveals the incompetence and injustice of government resonated by the public as chanting. It also uncovers how the language used in the protest constructs the reality of oppression, resistance, injustice and identity.

## **2) Interpersonal Function**

The interpersonal function describes the relationship constructed between the speaker and audience. When examining the chants and song lyrics from the perspective of the participants' language use, we come across the variations that connect the text to legitimate and reliable usage of question-answers, objectives, etc. The chants include rhetorical questions to instigate the public. The modality in chants like 'must, want, will', reflects the certainty, emotional intensity in demands of protesters. The use of personal pronouns like 'we, you and they', demonstrate the personal relationship between the protesters and the oppressors. The mood of the protesters is highlighted by the intensive emotional words. These words trigger and shape public perceptions. The protesters are declaring that the government is two faced through the chant *fake, fake*. The interrogative moods are demonstrated in the chants *Who came? Who came? The police came, the police came. What are they doing? They are here to lick the dictator's feet, Who are you? Who am I? Razakar, Razakar! Who says that, who says that, dictator, dictator!*, and the imperative mood in *Dictatorship must fall, Autocrats must go, long live democracy*. Thus these interpersonal relations create solidarity among the participants and invoke emotion to inspire actions and resist against the government.

In the song the mood is interrogative. The singer is questioning the acts of the government on several incidents. The whole mood is inquiry and declarative. The use of personal pronouns are excessive like *I, we, you, my, us, her, our, she. You killed my sister! could you bear it if it happened to you? Then why opened a school-college? This country is her father's property, this wasn't started by her father! By how much are you selling our country, tell us!* These are lyrics demonstrating interpersonal relations. The dynamic interplay between the personal pronouns discusses the emotional struggle and confrontation of public to government. It illustrates how this interplay challenges the authorities like the government and police. The polarization of 'us vs. them' is also portrayed through linguistic choices. The specific words e.g. 'Razakar, autocrats' are legitimized through emotional appeal to the public to raise their voices against the discriminations.

## **3) Textual Function**

The textual functions are responsible for creating cohesion and rhythm in a text. A text involving conjunctive markers constructs the sentence in a cohesive manner to make sense of the statement. The use of repetition and parallel statements '*Razakar, Razakar*' in the chants resonate the message and impact of the chants in public.

In the song the statements are linked in cohesion to demonstrate the incident. The themes are constructed in an understandable manner. The singer writes the lyrics in a compact form to illustrate the incidents from past to present. For example; '*I (we) have come with patriotism in my*

*heart, By how much are you selling our country, tell us?’ picture patriotism and betrayal side by side. You , who shot Abu Sayeed, killed him. Who has ordered you to do this? Now, there are million Abu Sayeed on the royal street. If you're brave enough, then come and face them!* These lyrics are the display of cohesion between the present and the past incidents of massacre in Bangladesh. Lyrics also build intertextuality by illustrating the historical points such as *‘the Golden Bengal will stay leaving behind its golden sons’*. The logical statements are included to build coherence such as *Everyone calls it a free Bengal. But true freedom is not in sight! “This country is her father’s property” That wasn’t started by her father. Even what his father had been doing. Not a trace of it remains within (her)!* These lyrics embody convincing conversation about the government of Bangladesh during the reign of Hasina.

The textual metafunction marks the impactful message resonated by the protesters. The injustice and the dictatorship of the Bangladesh government is highlighted by the oppressors. The complex political demands are fused together in clear words to mobilize the public. The democratic ideology of the public illustrated that opposed to the tyranny of government and suppression. The repetition of words adds to the effectiveness of words in public and a tool for assembling the public.

Examination of the chants and ‘Awaz Utha’ song reflects that the power is transferred from government to public. The marginalized voices take over the dominant voices of government. The mobilization paved the way for people of Bangladesh to demonstrate their demands for the change of government. The emphasis shows they are static on their demands and will not back out until they change the conventions.

## **Conclusion**

This study critically investigates the linguistic and social perspectives of protest chants and song ‘Awaz Utha’ during the 2024 ouster of Prime Minister of Bangladesh through Halliday’s Systemic Functional linguistics (SFL) framework within the broader structure of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The results demonstrated the effectiveness of protest language as a crucial instrument for mobilization and resistance of group struggles. The song and chants shed light on the oppression through ideational metafunction, creating the stories of injustice and resistance. While the textual metafunction demonstrates the coherence, cohesion and the emotional amplification of linguistic forms and interpersonal metafunction disclose strategies for unity formation, rebelling oppressors, and dominating voices of marginalized public.

In addition, the study boosts our cognition of how protest language vigorously constructs and portrays social realities and identities. This study signifies the role of rhetoric in visualizing revolutionary changes by highlighting the ideological components embedded in the protest vocabulary. To conclude, the study clarifies the complicated function of protest discourse in Bangladesh’s political and social setting. It provides a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between language, power, and resistance. It illustrates how marginalized voices may empower the dominant oppressors and emotionally triggers the public to make deliberate linguistic choices.

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