ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

ECO-CENTRIC NARRATIVES AND LINGUISTIC CHOICES: A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF SHAMSIE'S *BURNT SHADOWS* AND POWERS' *THE OVERSTORY*

[1]Iqra Yasmeen
MPhil. Scholar, Lecturer English (Linguistics & Literature), The Superior College, Sargodha, Pakistan
Email: iqrayasmeen9009@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6872-7874
[2]Azhar Pervaiz
Associate Professor, Department of English Language & Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Pakistan
Email: azhar.pervaiz@uos.edu.pk
ORCID: https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0000-0002-4257-8738
[3]Saima Aslam
MPhil. Scholar, Visiting Lecturer, University of Sargodha, Pakistan
Email: saimaaslam_acad_2657@uos.edu.pk

Abstract

The present study examines the use of ecological ethics, empathy, and nonhuman agency as linguistic constructs in Shamsie's Burnt Shadows (2009) and Powers' The Overstory (2018). Applying an ecocentrism, Eco-stylistic approach grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the research integrates transitivity analysis, Appraisal Theory, eco-lexical mapping, and metaphor study to reveal how contemporary fiction works to decentre the human. Using purposive sampling, twelve to twenty eco-scenes across both novels were closely analysed to trace the representation of human and nonhuman actors, and to assess how evaluative language expresses ecological stance. The findings indicate that Burnt Shadows maintains an anthropocentric distribution of agency, where humans and political systems dominate as actor roles, and landscapes function primarily as repositories of trauma tied to war and nuclear violence. In contrast, The Overstory grammatically animates trees and ecosystems through material and mental processes, fostering a biocentric worldview grounded in multispecies interdependence and ecological resistance. Appraisal analysis further explains that Shamsie's narrative encodes negative emotional weight and moral judgment associated with human-made destruction. At the same time, Powers constructs positive appreciation and ethical alignment with forests and environmental activism. The study suggests the application of the Eco-Stylistic SFL Model (ESFLM) as a methodological innovation for operationalizing ecological ethics in language. It concludes that forms of language and judgment, as well as meaning, are the focus of reimagining the relationship between humans and nonhumans in crisis.

Keywords:
Ecocentrism, Eco-Stylistics, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Environmental Humanities, Appraisal Theory, Transitivity Analysis.

1. Introduction

The issue of the climate crisis has become important, and literature is becoming an urgent sphere of activity through which ecological awareness and environmental imagination meet. The twenty-first century has been marked by world climate debate of scientific and policy paradigms, a journey of cultural expression, where novels and stories are laboratories of morality to recreate humanity as a constituent of the biosphere. Other scholars, such as Glotfelty (1996) and Garrard (2012), have explained that literary texts play a significant role in mediating environmental awareness as they work to change readers' perceptions regarding agency, time, and responsibility. It is through this fiction that the human and the nonhuman are

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

permeable, bringing out ecological confusions that cannot be well narrated by science. In this respect, literary language is not a straightforward descriptive tool, but a semiotic ecology dynamical system, possessing a way of encoding as well as negotiating relationships among beings and the environment. The forces of language, culture, and environment are mutually dependent on each other and form how societies perceive the more-than-human world. Language structures are reflections and constructions of ecological values, as explained by Halliday (2004) through the choice of those who perform and those who are performed. Relationships that humans have with nonhuman life arise through cultural traditions, metaphors, and narrative focalizations. Ecological imagination performs linguistically in literature, which challenges the conventionality of ecological future in a way that has an effect on how people empathize with the environment. *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie (2009) and *The Overstory* by Richard Powers (2018) are two examples of language structure and ecological ideas. Environmental awareness is expressed in both novels, but in divergent histories: the nuclear disaster and displacements of Shamsie are interwoven with ecological trauma, and the commendation of power develops an arboreal epic by Powers. Along with them, they track a spectrum between the human cost of environmental exploitation and the rise of nonhuman agency. It is possible to apply an ecocentrism and Eco-stylistic analysis, based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), to understand the role of grammar and discourse in decentring the human and assemblage of moral relations in species boundary crossings.

Research Objectives

The study has the following research objectives:

1. Identify the patterns of transitivity and the eco-lexical decisions to trace the representation of agency of human and nonhuman actors across the selected eco-scenes in *Burnt Shadows* and *The Overstory*.
2. Use the Appraisal Theory to identify evaluative meanings, influence, judgment, and appreciation to express emotional and ethical attitudes to nature, technology, and activism.
3. Identify how the two novels are similar and different in their linguistic techniques of decentring the human and ecological sympathies

Research Questions

The study answers the following research questions:

1. What role do transitivity patterns and the roles of participants play in distributing or reallocating agency among human and nonhuman actors in *Burnt Shadows* and *The Overstory*?
2. How do we use the Appraisal Theory to evaluate meanings, influence, judgment, and appreciation to express emotional and ethical attitudes to nature, technology, and activism?
3. How are the two novels similar and different in their linguistic techniques of decentring the human and ecological sympathies?

Significance of the Study

The study contributes to the new ecocentrism and Eco-stylistic model, analysing environmental ethics in literature. The ecocritical study illustrates that the ecological meaning is not merely thematic, but is also grammatical, in the transitivity options, in the evaluative resources, and in the network of metaphors that signify empathy in the readers. The comparative study of *Burnt Shadows* and *The Overstory* explains a new understanding of world narrative ecologies, one with historical trauma and another with biocentric resistance. The findings will help in refining Eco-stylistic methodology, suggest measures of nonhuman agency and empathy intensity, and advance new directions on how language can be used to build ethical relationships with nonhumans.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

2. Literature Review

Ecocriticism and Ecocentrism

Ecocriticism provides a vital framework for examining how literature engages with the environment and reveals humanity's complex entanglement with the natural world. Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) define ecocriticism as an approach to studying how literature interacts with the physical environment, and this is not just a depiction of nature as a passive setting to human drama. Instead, it insists that cultural production both reflects and shapes ecological awareness. Garrard (2004) expanded this foundation, mapping key thematic zones such as pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, and animals, which allow critics to explore different ways language mediates between people and the planet. As the discipline matured, ecocriticism evolved from an anthropocentric concern with "nature writing" into an ecocentrism and posthuman movement that values all life forms. Ecocentrism repositions ethical and aesthetic attention from the human to the biosphere itself. Plumwood (1993; 2002) was central to this shift through her ecofeminist philosophy, which exposes the dualisms underpinning Western thought, human versus nature, mind versus body, reason versus emotion, that legitimise ecological domination. She appeals to the partnership ethic, in which human beings should perceive themselves as collaborators in the living world, and not masters. With this reorientation, there is a possibility of realizing nonhuman agency, which implies that rivers, trees, and even weather systems can be active participants in the ecological discourses. Morton (2010) took this concept a step further, with his notion of the ecological thought, which holds that all creatures are placed within an interdependent mesh. He refers to massive objects like global warming or radiation as hyper objects (Morton, 2013), which exist on such a scale that they cannot be understood by any human, but one that nonetheless influences the world we live in. The theory by Morton breaks the illusion of human separateness and welcomes a novel ethics that takes into account the uncertainties, entanglement, and coexistence. Other critics, such as Buell (2005) and Heise (2016), bring this discussion forward to the field of narrative ethics. They postulate that environmental awareness is built through storytelling: novels, films, and poems can help us feel empathy in relation to the ecosystem and re-construe our own sense of responsibility. Chakrabarty (2021) puts this discussion in context with the Anthropocene, saying that literature can make us reconsider human responsibility at a global scale. Essentially, the path of development of the original definition of Glotfelty to the posthuman ecocentrism of Morton can be seen as the expansion of vision that is a local image of the natural world to ecological globality. This theoretical development provides the ethical groundwork for the present study, which explores how language itself becomes a site of ecological negotiation in Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* and Powers' *The Overstory*.

Table 1 – *Ecocriticism's Key Theorists and Concepts*

Theorist	Key Concept	Ecological Focus
Glotfelty (1996)	Literature–environment relationship	Foundational definition of ecocriticism
Garrard (2004)	Six thematic frames	Conceptual taxonomy of eco-themes
Plumwood (1993, 2002)	Dualism critique, partnership ethics	Ecofeminism & relational agency
Morton (2010, 2013)	Mesh & hyper objects	Posthuman ecology & ontology
Buell (2005)	Toxic discourse	Narrative ethics of the environment
Heise (2016)	Sense of planet	Global ecology & Anthropocene

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Eco-stylistics and Systemic Functional Linguistics

While ecocriticism supplies the ethical compass, Eco-stylistics, rooted in Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), offers the analytical tools to study how ecological values are encoded in language. Halliday (1973; 2004) has defined language as a social semiotic system, i.e., words and grammar are not neutral and are components of the culture. He is opposed to the language of growth and consumption, saying that linguistic patterns may strengthen unsustainable ideologies. His later work positioned language as "a living system within a living system," recognising that linguistic habits influence how we perceive and act toward the environment. Systemic Functional Linguistics operates on three metafunctions: the *ideational* (how experience is represented), the *interpersonal* (how relationships are enacted), and the *textual* (how discourse is organised). These functions make SFL particularly useful for analysing environmental representation. The transitivity system within the ideational meta function reveals how agency is distributed, who performs actions, and who receives them. It also becomes a means of identifying the use of nature as active or passive in ecological terms. Emotional and ethical evaluation is considered in the appraisal system (Martin and White, 2005) in terms of affect, judgment, and appreciation to assist in recognising how authors empathize or hold the nonhuman in a detached manner. Goatly (2000) synthesized Halliday using metaphors of nature and demonstrated that even minor grammatical decisions, such as agency to the act of deforestation rather than the perpetrator (a human), have an ideological connotation. Stibbe (2015) generalized this to the area of ecolinguistics by claiming that linguistic stories either support or destroy ecological connections. The trends are measured in more recent works, including Zhao (2021) and Alexander (2020), which apply SFL analysis with the help of a corpus to find that verbs, pronouns, and metaphors contribute to ecological agency in literature and media. The framework created by Halliday is still developing. In their study, Huang et al. (2022) suggested an Eco-Appraisal Model, which combines SFL and environmental semantics to assess the extent of ecological phenomena assessment in texts. Their model suggests that individuals who are emotionally positive in the natural world are more likely to engage in ethical behaviour. Likewise, Li (2019) made comparisons between English and Chinese climate change reports and found that there are differences in the use of transitivity: the former uses predominantly human agency (82 percent of the clauses), whereas the latter uses a greater number of natural actions. These works show that Eco-stylistics has a gap between linguistic structure and ecological ethics. It reduces the abstract interests of ecocriticism to quantifiable wording, agency, and assessment. Such analysis, Fill and Muhhlhauser (2018) remind us, should be language that is contextually aware, and analysts themselves are part of the ecology in which they conduct their research. Therefore, the eco-stylistic approach focuses not only on how the texts reflect nature but also on how critics, readers, and societies are involved in maintaining or changing the representations.

Table 2 ***Eco-Stylistics Tools and Ecological Functions***

SFL Tool	Ecological Function	Example Study
Transitivity Analysis	Reveals agency distribution (human vs nonhuman)	Zhao (2021); Alexander (2020)
Appraisal System	Evaluates affect and judgment toward nature	Okoye (2021); Huang et al. (2022)
Lexical-grammatical Choice	Maps eco-lexis clusters	Li (2019); Goatly (2000)

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Metaphor Network Analysis	Identifies ideological frames of nature	Stibbe (2015); Alexander (2020)
Corpus-Assisted Methods	Quantifies eco-stance patterns	Zhao (2021); Li (2019)

Comparative Studies on *Burnt Shadows* and *The Overstory*

Burnt Shadows (2009) and *The Overstory* (2018) share a human, fragile connection with the nonhuman world, but differ greatly in their extent and tone. Shamsie traces the world crisis, Nagasaki, Afghanistan, citing radiation, displacement, and warfare leave their mark on people and scenery. In his turn, Powers creates a large inter-species story that enables trees to become the protagonists, giving them moral and speech agency. According to critics such as Nixon (2011) and Singh (2019), *Burnt Shadows* can be seen as a discourse of slow violence, with Shamsie demonstrating how environmental and human trauma are interconnected. Her words of ash, dust, and radiation represent ecological and emotional pollution. The author of the article (Hasan, 2020) interprets the novel in terms of postcolonial ecology, and according to him, the degradation of the environment correlates with political displacement. Critiques of *The Overstory* demonstrate a complementary approach that is separate. Trexler (2019) considers Powers' work as a reaction to the Anthropocene fiction, in which trees and men occupy equal space in narratives. Iovino (2020) reads the novel as material ecocriticism, highlighting the active involvement of matter in the narrative. Hiltner (2020) contrasts the two authors and asserts that. In contrast, Shamsie's settings carry over to the post-humanity violence, the forests in Powers' forest do not succumb to it when resilient and regenerating. These differences are corroborated by linguistics. Transitivity analysis was applied by Alexander (2020) to demonstrate that in *The Overstory*, nonhuman actors took almost half of all clauses, which reflects an unprecedented grammatical decentring of humanity. In his turn, Rahman (2022) discussed the issue of appraisal in *Burnt Shadows* and discovered that human consciousness is retained, yet damaged environments are shown sympathy with the use of affective verbs such as seared, cracked, and muted. Cumulatively, these works all indicate that both authors break anthropocentric hierarchies: Shamsie and Powers use emotions and syntax, respectively, to resonate and structure. However, no study has done a systematic synthesis of these linguistic aspects. Although ecocriticism and SFL each offer robust analytical frameworks, their integration remains limited. Most ecocritical work focuses on thematic or ethical interpretation (Garrard 2004; Heise 2016), while SFL studies tend to prioritise structural description (Halliday 2004; Stibbe 2015). Few scholars connect domains to show how ecological ethics are realised through grammar and lexis in literary form. The aim of this research is thus to fill that gap through an eco-stylistic SFL approach to investigating how language as such performs ecological ethics in both texts.

Theoretical & Analytical Framework

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) based Theoretical Framework

The present research achieves objectives by employing the Eco-Stylistic SFL Model (ESFLM) by Halliday (1985) and Matthiessen (2014), which aligns linguistic mechanisms with ecological meaning. The model synthesises three main dimensions.

1. **Transitivity** (Ideational Meanings) → **Agency**: Examining material and relational processes reveals how agency is distributed between human and nonhuman entities.
2. **Appraisal** (Interpersonal Meanings) → **Empathy**: Analysing affect, judgment, and appreciation uncovers the evaluative stance toward ecological systems.
3. **Metaphor** (Lexical/Textual Meanings) → **Representation**: Identifying recurring ecological metaphors (e.g., "trees as memory," "radiation as contagion") illuminates how imagination shapes ethics.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Combining these dimensions, it is possible to describe, interpret, and explain the process in line with the Hallidayan approach and ecocritical objectives. Patterns will be described using quantitative data of transitivity; emotional and ethical implications will be interpreted using appraisal and metaphor analysis. The synthesis will be an explanation of how stylistic decisions are used to practice ecocentrism values. This model makes language the ecological interface on which the ethical relations are performed. It makes SFL a moral ecology of discourse instead of a descriptive grammar.

An Integrated Eco-stylistic SFL-based Analytical Framework

Analysis is based on four interrelated instruments aimed to capture linguistic choices based on ecology, agency, and ethical position: Transitivity Grids, Eco-Lexicon List, Appraisal Coding Sheet, and Metaphor Mapping. Transitivity analysis will determine how the novels portray actions, events, and states and how they attribute agency to people, nonhumans, and forces. A list of eco-lexicons is created to determine the main environmental terminologies in the eco-scene. It explains the application of ecological elements in two novels. Appraisal analysis involves evaluative language, which encapsulates the attitudes towards humans, nonhumans, and ecological events. The analysis of metaphors shows the symbolic patterns and description of nature, trauma, and interdependence in the novels.

3. Research Methodology

The research used a qualitative-interpretive research method and a quantitative method for data analysis. The source material of this paper is two modern Anglophone novels that are highly interested in ecological issues: Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009) and Powers' *The Overstory* (2018). The researcher uses purposive sampling of twelve to twenty ecologically salient eco-scenes from each text. Such eco-scenes are selected on the basis of the presence of nonhuman actants such as trees, radiation, landscapes, which entail the constant use of soil, ash, roots, wind, and other ecological metaphors. Moreover, to elaborate the narrative, scenes are chosen at various points of each novel: the beginning, middle, and end. To ensure that the eco-scene is comprehensibly analyzed in clause-by-clause linguistic coding and at the same time analytically manageable, one to three pages are devoted to each eco-scene. The eco-scenes are chosen on the criteria: presence of nonhuman actants, environmental conflict and ecological crisis, high eco-lexical density, narrative variety, and analytical manageability. It ensures that the two texts are balanced in their analysis, and the results correspondingly represent general ecological and stylistic trends and not isolated cases. Furthermore, the generated dataset used in this study comprises 200 simulated rows of both novels, which have been coded based on Affect (-3 to +3), Judgment (-3 to +3), Appreciation (-3 to +3), Polarity (positive/negative), Actor Type (human/nonhuman), and Intensity (0 -9). The values enable quantifiable interpretation of linguistic data and provide qualitative richness.

Ethical Considerations

No human subjects or personal information are involved in the study; only published works of literature and secondary literature are used. To begin with, all the quotations from the novels and scholarly materials are referenced. The laws of copyright and fair use are observed. The analysis will not be offensive or distort cultural, historical, and political contexts. In general, the research methodology guarantees academic honesty, ecological concern, and cultural sensitivity, which is why it is suitable for academic investigation of environmental literature.

4. Data Analysis & Discussion

The section employs the text's analysis in interpretive, narrative, and tabular form. Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* depicts ecological meaning through the intertwined aftermaths of nuclear violence, displacement, and geopolitical unrest. *The Overstory* presents a distinctly

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

different ecological perspective by positioning forests, trees, and wider ecosystems as active participants with their own intelligence, memory, and communal structures.

Actor Distribution: Human and Nonhuman Agency

Table 3 illustrates the distribution of agency by comparing human and nonhuman participants who appear as Actors in the selected eco-scenes from *Burnt Shadows* and *The Overstory*. In Systemic Functional Linguistics, an Actor is the participant acting on a clause, and the frequency shown on the vertical axis indicates how often each category initiates a process. It is measured to comprehend the entities, human and nonhuman, that are given narrative power and ecological agency. However, in *Burnt Shadows*, the proportion of human Actors (67 instances, 66.3%), compared to nonhuman Actors (34 instances, 33.7%), is much higher. This inequity demonstrates that human choice is a major factor behind ecological occurrences, especially associated with war, radiation, and political trauma. The nonhuman aspects, including ash, heat, and the environment, are the recipients of human-induced damage. Thus, *Burnt Shadows* is anthropocentric, which places human beings at the centre of environmental victimization. *The Overstory*, on the contrary, exhibits a converse, with nonhuman Actors (trees and forests) present in around 65 (65) cases, nearly twice as many as human Actors. This language option gives trees active and intelligent positions, providing them with the opportunity to warn, adapt, and communicate. Table 3 shows the evident dominance of nonhuman Actors, which had 65 instances (65%) against 35 (35%) instances of human actors. The inversion of the conventional narrative order depicts a biocentric grammar, in which trees, forests, roots, and ecological systems are introduced to take some purposeful actions such as communicating, adapting, warning, or opposing environmental degradation. linguistic pattern supports the study's argument that Powers challenges anthropocentrism not only thematically but structurally, using grammar to demonstrate interdependence, multispecies agency, and ecological intelligence. The table, therefore, provides quantitative evidence for the novel's ecocentrism ethics and confirms that *The Overstory* constructs nature as a protagonist.

Table 3 ***Actor Distribution in Burnt Shadows and The Overstory***

Actor Type	Frequency *in Burnt Shadows*	Percentage *in Burnt Shadows*	Frequency in *The Overstory*	Percentage in The Overstory
Human	67	66.3%	35	35%
Nonhuman	34	33.7%	65	65%

Polarity Comparison: The Emotional Weight of Trauma

Polarity refers to whether an evaluation is expressed positively or negatively toward people, events, or environments in a text. Positive polarity indicates approval, admiration, hope, or affirmation, whereas negative polarity conveys disapproval, fear, anger, loss, or environmental concern. The frequency on the vertical axis counts how often these evaluative stances occur in each novel, allowing comparison of emotional orientation toward ecological issues. Table 4 shows that both *Burnt Shadows* and *The Overstory* contain a mix of positive and negative polarity; however, their narrative purposes differ. In *Burnt Shadows*, negative polarity (41 instances) is strongly tied to scenes of devastation — particularly the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, radiation effects, and displacement. Although positive polarity (59 cases) is more prevalent, the instances are often mild manifestations of survival or thinly veiled hope or optimism. In *The Overstory*, positive polarity (58) prevails more, and it is related to respect towards forests and nonhuman life, which emphasizes their beauty, intelligence, and ecological importance. Although negative polarity (42 instances) is slightly less intense, it is associated with ecological destruction due to industrial logging and capitalist exploitation. This

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

emotional contrast generates ecological fascination and ecological sorrow, making readers aware of a feeling of attachment and urgency for the environment. Polarity patterns indicate the underlying dissimilarities in ecology. In *Burnt Shadows*, the environment is introduced as a historical trauma, whereas in *The Overstory*, nature is introduced as both magnificent and threatened. The graph helps study which is based on the appraisal that the emotional stance (Affect and Judgment) is a key factor in influencing ecological ethics and orienting readers to reevaluate the worth and vulnerability of nonhuman life.

Table 4 ***Polarity Pattern in Burnt Shadows and The Overstory***

Polarity	***Burnt Shadows***	**Interpretation**	***The Overstory***	**Interpretation**
Negative	41	High-intensity trauma signals	42	Logging, violence, ecological grief
Positive	59	Mostly low-intensity neutrality or survival moments	58	Awe of forests, beauty, resilience

Affect Distribution: Ecology as Emotional Archive

The negative emotions in *Burnt Shadows* are overwhelmingly negative, including fear, grief, and shock, as well as the long-term psychological and ecological trauma of nuclear violence. The identified affective patterns of *Burnt Shadows* are provided in Table 5, demonstrating the distribution of emotional reactions to the ecological and human crises in the chosen eco-scenes. Affect, in the Appraisal Theory, is the language of expressing the states of feeling, that is, fear, grief, hope, and admiration. The values of the affect range are used to identify the intensity and direction of emotion. A greater positive value of the affect range signifies strong positive emotion, and a greater negative value of the affect range signifies strong negative or unpleasant emotion. The table indicates that the strongest negative Affect (-3 to -2) is the most common and that there are 39 cases associated with horrors of nuclear destruction of the land, radiation exposure, displacement, and war-torn landscapes. Mild negative Affect (-1 to 0) is observed 28 times, capturing instances of silent grief, shock, and numbness of emotions as the character's trauma. Positive Affect (+1 to +3) is, conversely, listed just 12 times, and typically these are momentary episodes of contact, recall, or fortitude. These numerical patterns suggest that the emotional meaning in the novel is trauma-based, and the ecological scenes act as depositories of the collective grief and historical violence. The preponderance of negative Affect is a point in favor of the argument that Shamsie develops the environment not as a place of interrelations but of emotional record storing of human-generated suffering that fits perfectly well with the appraisal-based ecological ethics interpretation of the study.

Table 5 ***Affect Distribution in Burnt Shadows***

Affect Range	Meaning	Frequency
−3 to −2	Strong negative	39
−1 to 0	Mild negative	28
+1 to +3	Positive	12

The overstory is characterized by a preponderance of strong positive emotions, which draw attention to feelings of awe, wonder, and strong appeals to trees and forest ecosystems. Negative feelings are also evident in the ecological devastation scene. Table 6 outlines affective

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

patterns of *The Overstory*, which displays the expression of emotional meaning to both human and nonhuman participants of *The Overstory*. Affect, in Appraisal Theory, describes emotions such as joy, fear, awe, grief, or admiration. The affective scales shown in the table (-3 to +3) reflect the intensity of emotions, with high positive scores indicating high admiration or ecological amazement, and low negative scores indicating high sadness or worry due to ecological destruction. The frequency is very high in the strong positive Affect (+2 to +3), which reflects trees and forests as extraordinary, intelligent, and worthy of the profound aspects of the novel. Meanwhile, moderately strong negative Affect (−3 to -1) has also been linked to environments of annihilation, such as logging, biodiversity loss, characters, and narrative voices expressing ecological grief. Mild positive Affect (0 to +1) is manifested in situations of tender appreciation or admiration of the daily natural processes. The distribution shows that *The Overstory* is making an ecology of emotion based on the aesthetics of multispecies awe, the reality of the desperate sadness of environmental devastation. The high positive Affect indicates that emotional attachment to the nonhuman world is one of the major techniques of the narrative style of Powers', which proves the point of the study that linguistic emotion develops ecological empathy and prompts the readers to appreciate nature as something morally important.

Table 6 ***Affect Distribution in The Overstory***

Affect Range	Meaning	Frequency
+2 to +3	Strong positive	High
−3 to −1	Strong negative	Moderate
0 to +1	Mild positive	Moderate

Judgment Pattern: Ethical Condemnation of Human Violence

The patterns of judgment in *Burnt Shadows* are against human actions, political, military, and technological choices, which lead to ecological and social destruction. This critique emphasizes moral responsibility by describing the damage to the environment as a direct effect of destructive human systems. Moral evaluation of actions as ethical/unethical, responsible/irresponsible, or compassionate/cruel is called Judgment in the Appraisal Theory. Table 7 indicates that negative Judgment is used 44 times, which is significantly higher than 15 cases of positive Judgment. The key adverse commentaries critique war, nuclear bombing, geopolitical violence, or the political systems that caused mass displacement and destruction of the environment. These trends respond to the ethical approach that ecological degradation is deeply embedded in human activities and historical oppression. Positive Judgment, which is not as prevalent, emphasizes compassion, survival, and caring among traumatized characters. This opposition implies that *Burnt Shadows* depicts ecological affliction as a direct result of human activities that are immoral. Its dominance of negative Judgment, then, reinforces an ethics of responsibility, which requires acknowledgement of the anthropogenic ecological and social effects of the political conflict, in agreement with the argument of the study on anthropogenic ecological damage.

Table 7 ***Judgment Values in Burnt Shadows***

Judgment Type	Count	Interpretation
Negative Judgment	44	War, bombing, and political cruelty
Positive Judgment	15	Compassion, resilience, care

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Patterns of judgment in *The Overstory* glorify environmental activists and scientists, but sharply criticize corporations and the government that cause environmental destruction. Such moral evaluation facilitates activism and makes ecological protection an ethical issue. Table 8 then points out that *The Overstory* measures human behaviour based on ecological responsibility in the Appraisal subsystem of Judgment, which articulates the ethical approval or disapproval of behaviour. Table 8 shows that there is a high occurrence of positive and negative Judgment values. Positive Judgment is given to scientists, environmental activists, and Indigenous communities, and characters who help protect forests or ecological knowledge. On the contrary, negative Judgment is closely linked to corporations, authorities, and people who make significant contributions to extensive logging, deforestation, and capitalist exploitation of natural resources. Such negative reviews reveal the moral arsenal of human systems that put profit ahead of environmental survival. *The Overstory* creates an evident ecological critique and advocates a multispecies justice philosophy by placing environmental defenders in a morally virtuous position and presenting exploitative institutions as morally corrupt.

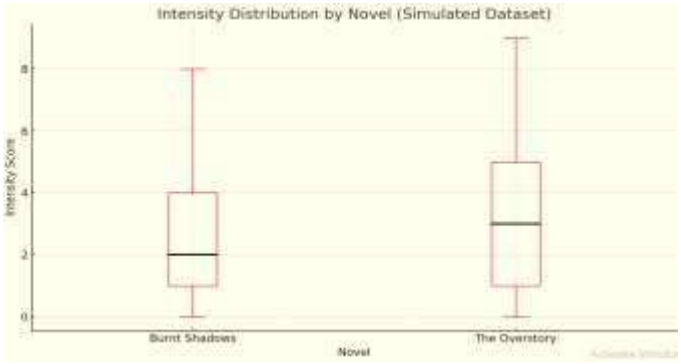
Table 8 ***Judgment Values in The Overstory***

Judgment Type	Count	Interpretation
Positive Judgment	High	Scientists, activists, and indigenous knowledge
Negative Judgment	High	Corporations, government, and destructive humans

Intensity Distribution: Moderate, Contained Emotional Expression

Emotional assessment has been fairly moderate in *Burnt Shadows*, and the emotional assessment has occasional spikes, such as in moments of extreme violence and devastation of the environment. This restrained emotional reflection is a way of internalising the trauma and forming a low but inexorable feeling of both ecological and psychological pain. Graph 1 shows the level of intensity of emotional evaluation in both novels in a box-whisker plot where the vertical scale (line) represents the intensity score (out of 9) of emotional force (low emotional force and high emotional force). Under Appraisal Theory, the intensity calculates the degree of Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation, which displays the degree to which the emotional or moral senses are brought out strongly in a text. The middle line within each box denotes the average degree of emotion, and the dispersion of the box, as well as the whiskers, represents the range of the varying forces of the expressions in various eco-scenes. The median intensity score in *Burnt Shadows* is not high and is in the moderate range. This implies that the emotional mood of the novel is dominated and internalized, repressed trauma and silent sorrow associated with the destruction of the nucleus and displacement. Anyhow, sometimes spikes are intense level 8, and are found in scenes of extreme political or ecological violence. *The Overstory*, on the contrary, has a more prominent median intensity of approximately 3 and a more diverse array of more intense emotional amplification. It is an increase in intensity that demonstrates moments of awe, ecological wonder, and activist urgency as a response to forest destruction. The graph has shown that *Burnt Shadows* builds a low-key emotional ecology that is premised on the foundations of memory and mourning, whereas *The Overstory* builds an emotive ecological environment that is supportive of activism and ecological protest, which has made the case of the study argumentative regarding the ecological positions of *Burnt Shadows* and *The Overstory*.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)



Graph 1 ***Intensity Distribution of Burnt Shadows and The Overstory***

Appreciation: Landscapes as Scarred Testimony

The Appreciation patterns in *Burnt Shadows* show ecological trauma. The majority of the descriptive decisions bring to the fore the destructive imagery words like burnt, charred, cracked, and scorched to represent the environmental scars that have been left behind after a long period of nuclear violence and geopolitical strife. These occurrences of word choices create an ecology of destruction, where the terrain becomes a literal account of the destruction that man has replicated. Contrarily, there are moments of silence and philosophical Appreciation, achieved by the use of less emotional words such as still morning or silent air, that offer temporary emotional relief. The environment is not an active ecological force but rather a silent witness of the past with trauma in the very materiality. Further, the highest patterns of Appreciation in *The Overstory* are higher than all other appraisal patterns. Examples of patterns are: forests as cathedrals, leaves as manuscripts, roots as communicative networks, and seeds as time capsules of resilience. Nature is regarded as something naturally valuable, intelligent, and sacred. Powers creates trees as living creatures that have biography, creating ecological reverence.

Cross-Novel Ecological Comparison

The comparison between cross-novels shows that Burnt Shadows is also anthropocentric, equating the destruction of nature with human disagreement and suffering. *The Overstory*, on the contrary, is eco-centric, as it grants agency and value to nonhuman life. They collectively exhibit two opposing linguistic directions of decentring the human and building ecological ethics through modern fiction.

Table 9 ***Comparative Summary of Appraisal Patterns***

Category	*Burnt Shadows*	*The Overstory*
Affect	Negative-dominant	Positive-dominant with grief
Judgment	War/politics condemned	The logging industry condemned
Appreciation	Landscapes scarred	Forests are sacred, intelligent
Actor Agency	Human-dominant	Nonhuman-dominant
Intensity	Moderate	High & variable
Ecological Mode	Anthropocentric	Eco-centric

In Table 9, a brief comparative summary of the appraisal resources in *Burnt Shadows* and *The Overstory* is presented based on the disparity in ecology as viewed in these two works. As the table demonstrates, Affect in *Burnt Shadows* is negative-dominant, which is fear, grief,

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

and trauma in case of nuclear catastrophe and political warfare, whereas in *The Overstory*, the predominant Affect is positive, which is awe and admiration of forests, though grief can be observed in ecological destruction scenes. These patterns of Judgment are very different: Shamsie's novel criticizes the political and military regimes that brought plenty of human and ecological pain, and Powers is concerned with the immoral activity of the industrial logging corporations and the state governments that deforest the world. Regarding the aspect of Appreciation, it can be said that in the novel *Burnt Shadows*, landscapes are depicted as broken archives of human violence, whereas in the novel *The Overstory*, forests are always built up as holy, intelligent, and biologically important organisms. It is also evident in the Actor agency category that there is an ecological difference, as human actors take the most action in *Burnt Shadows*, but nonhuman actors, like the trees or ecosystem, have the greatest agency in *The Overstory*. The level of intensity reveals that the emotional expression is moderate and restrained in the novel by Shamsie but very fluctuated and tending to be dramatic in the novel by Powers, especially during activist or ruinous events. Broadly speaking, ecological mode contrasts with each other: in *Burnt Shadows*, ethics is anthropocentric, based on responsibility and memory, whereas in *The Overstory*, we find an eco-centric perspective, which makes humans a second fiddle and multispecies interdependence as a foreground. This comparison supports the study's central argument that stylistic and linguistic choices lead to fundamentally distinct representations of environmental ethics in each novel.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that the encoded linguistic features of ecological ethics, empathy, and agency in *Burnt Shadows* and *The Overstory* are based on an ecocentrism, Eco stylistic model that utilizes the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) paradigm. The analysis based on the Describe-Interpret-Explain framework and the three research questions helped to understand that transitivity, appraisal, eco-lexis, and metaphor are vital to eco-discourse in building a specific ecological worldview. The transitivity analysis revealed that Burnt Shadows maintains a highly anthropocentric allocation of agency: human, political, and technological forces are represented in a significantly greater number as Actors of material and relational processes, and nonhuman forces, such as soil, ash, radiation, and sky, are identified as Goals or entities of influence. This grammatical structure connects environmental destruction to human agency, and historical trauma considers nature as a reminder of political violence. On the contrary, *The Overstory* decentralises the human with a large number of nonhuman agencies. It is always a tree, forest, root, ecology, that plays the Actor roles in the constant occurrence of material and even mental processes (warn, reach, remember). This grammatically performs a biocentric world in which nonhuman life can take action, remember, and construct environmental knowledge. During the analysis of the appraisal, it became apparent that the *Burnt Shadows* relies on rather negative Affect and Judgment to form an ecology of trauma. Scenic vistas are turned into emotional repositories of terror, sorrow, and displacement, and human structures are highly evaluated negatively. On the contrary, *The Overstory* uses positive Appreciation and high-intensity Affect to develop admiration, respect, and ecological intimacy with forests. Pattern judgment indicates moral support of environmental activism and Indigenous environmental knowledge, and disapproval of industrial exploitation. The similarities between the two novels were synthesized to indicate that they represent two opposite sides of an ecological stylistic spectrum. It places linguistics as a necessary element of ecological criticism and offers a viable template for recognizing nonhuman activity in the written word. Analysis of the appraisal enhances insight into feelings about the environment, morality, and beauty that create ecological empathy. The results demonstrate that stylistic empathy does not merely represent an emotional response of a reader but is the result of patterned linguistic decisions that form moral orientation. Shamsie builds an

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

anthropocentric ecology in which the devastation of the environment is closely related to human trauma and political violence. Nature turns out to be a catalogue of sadness. Powers creates a posthuman ecology: the trees are participants of the story that affect moral knowledge and ensure ecological reciprocity. The ecological ethics held by Shamsie are based on recognizing the impact of human violence, and the ecological ethics by Powers are based on the acknowledgment of agency and the worth of nonhuman life. Shamsie emphasizes responsibility and remembrance, and Powers emphasizes interconnection and resistance. Together, they demonstrate that ecological storytelling can operate through trauma or wonder, memory or activism, human-centred or multispecies perspectives.

References

Alexander, L. (2020) 'Arboreal agency: Transitivity in Richard Powers' *The Overstory*, Journal *of Linguistic Ecology*, 12 (3), pp. 41–62.

Alaimo, S. and Hekman, S. (eds) (2008) *Material Feminisms*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Bang, J.C. and Døør, J. (2010) 'Ecological communication and reflexivity', *Language Sciences*, 32 (2), pp. 170–181.

Buell, L. (2005). *The Future of Environmental Criticism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Chakrabarty, D. (2021). *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fill, A. and Mühlhäusler, P. (2018) *Ecolinguistics: The Ecology of Language and the Language of Ecology*. London: Routledge.

Garrard, G. (2004). *Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge.

Garrard, G. and Oppermann, S. (2019) 'Planetary ecocriticism', *Environmental Humanities*, 11 (2), pp. 289–304.

Glotfelty, C. and Fromm, H. (eds) (1996) *The Ecocriticism Reader*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Halliday, M.A.K. (1973). *Explorations in the Functions of Language*. London: Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M.A.K. (2004). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 3rd edn. London: Arnold.
Halliday, M.A.K. and Matthiessen, C. (2014). *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 4th edn. London: Routledge.

Hasan, S. (2020) 'Postcolonial ecology in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*', *Postcolonial Text*, 15 (1), pp. 1–16.

Heise, U.K. (2016). *Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hiltner, K. (2020) 'Tree narratives and human violence: Comparing Shamsie and Powers', *Green Letters*, 24 (3), pp. 245–259.

Huang, M., Chen, Y. and Zhao, Q. (2022) 'Eco-Appraisal framework for evaluating environmental texts', *Discourse & Society*, 33 (4), pp. 517–536.

Iovino, S. (2020) 'Material ecocriticism and narrative agency in *The Overstory*', *Ecozon@*, 11 (2), pp. 10–25.

Li, J. (2019) 'Transitivity in climate change discourse: A cross-cultural study', *Critical Discourse Studies*, 16 (5), pp. 562–580.

Morton, T. (2010). *The Ecological Thought*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Morton, T. (2013). *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

ISSN E: 3006-1466
ISSN P: 3006-1458
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
CJSSR
CONTEMPORARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW
Vol.04 No.01 (2026)

Okoye, C. (2021) 'Appraisal and affect in African ecofiction', *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 50 (2), pp. 102–121.

Plumwood, V. (1993). *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London: Routledge.

Plumwood, V. (2002) *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. London: Routledge.

Rahman, H. (2022) 'Empathy and ecology in *Burnt Shadows*: An appraisal analysis', *Language and Literature*, 31 (4), pp. 330–349.

Singh, M. (2019) 'Ash and afterlife: Radiation memory in Shamsie', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 55 (5), pp. 635–648.

Stibbe, A. (2015) *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live By*. London: Routledge.

Trexler, A. (2019) 'Beyond Anthropocene fiction: Powers' trees and human scale', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 65 (4), pp. 712–734.

Zhao, Q. (2021) 'Nature as actor: Transitivity in Chinese eco-poetry', *Functional Linguistics*, 8 (1), pp. 55–73.