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BEYOND THE LEXICON: TEMPORAL DISCOURSE DYNAMICS, PRAGMATIC MARKERS, AND CONVERSATIONAL TRAJECTORIES IN MULTILINGUAL SUICIDE-RELATED COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The Psycho-Forensic Linguistic Surveillance Initiative (PFLSI) has advanced from qualitative analysis of Pakistani suicide notes to English corpus analysis, theoretical integration, multilingual corpus design, and a prespecified transformer-validation protocol. However, document-level classification alone cannot explain how meanings change across conversational turns, how distress is negotiated through responses, or how culturally situated expressions vary within an interaction. This paper proposes a temporally and interactionally sensitive research framework for analysing suicide-related discourse in English, Urdu, Punjabi, Roman Urdu, and code-switched communication. It operationalizes five complementary layers: turn-level pragmatic action, temporal orientation, interpersonal alignment, culturally situated framing, and sequential change. A prospective mixed-method design combines conversation analysis, discourse-pragmatic annotation, within-conversation trajectories, and leakage-controlled computational comparisons. The paper defines sampling and annotation requirements, reliability and validation procedures, negative controls, interpretive safeguards, and ethical governance. It does not report new data, estimated effects, or model accuracy. Its contribution is a falsifiable methodological bridge between PFLSI's document-based architecture and future studies of interactional dynamics, while maintaining the distinction between suicide-related communication, clinical risk assessment, and individual-level prediction.

1.INTRODUCTION

Research on suicide-related language has often treated a document, post, or note as a bounded unit whose lexical and semantic features can be compared with control texts. This approach is valuable for identifying broad associations but can obscure the sequential organization of meaning. A phrase may be a direct self-disclosure, quotation, reassurance, ironic response, or answer to a prior question. Its significance cannot be recovered reliably from isolated word counts. For dialogue-based material, the relation between turns is therefore part of the evidence, not incidental context.

PFLSI Series Paper 1 analysed 140 Pakistani suicide notes and reported recurrent themes of apology, guilt, family obligation, and relational positioning (Ishfaq, Ahmad, & Sultan, 2025). Paper 2 compared a 452,000-token English Suicide Discourse Corpus with a matched control corpus (Ishfaq & Sultan, 2025c). Paper 3

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proposed a seven-layer psycho-forensic architecture (Ishfaq, Sultan, & Bhatti, 2026). Paper 4 specified a prospective multilingual Urdu–Punjabi corpus (Ishfaq & Sultan, 2026b). Paper 5 prespecified transformer fine-tuning and cross-language validation but expressly did not claim completed multilingual model results (Ishfaq & Sultan, 2026c). The present contribution addresses an unresolved unit-of-analysis question: what changes when the unit shifts from a whole text to a situated sequence of exchanges?

The intellectual progression across the series is cumulative rather than evidence of a validated clinical tool. The notes study offers retrospective textual themes; the English corpus work offers lexical comparisons; the theoretical architecture supplies candidate constructs; and the multilingual and transformer papers specify prospective procedures. The present paper therefore asks whether discourse functions and sequential organization can be operationalized and tested without confusing interpretive categories with individual clinical outcomes (Ishfaq et al., 2025a; Ishfaq & Sultan, 2025e, 2026c, 2026d; Ishfaq, Sultan, & Bhatti, 2026).

Problem statement

Document-level signals may conflate distress content with genre, platform conventions, or interlocutor prompts. The same discourse marker can perform different actions depending on placement, uptake, and language. In addition, code-switching may signal audience design or quotation rather than psychological escalation. Without turn-sensitive annotation, temporal changes and interpersonal repair are difficult to distinguish from simple shifts in lexical frequency.

The methodological gap is especially acute when speakers alternate between Urdu, Punjabi, Roman Urdu and English. A language change may reflect accommodation, quotation, identity performance or platform convention, and should not be coded automatically as increased distress. Work on code-switching in Dawoodi and on Urdu–Punjabi ideophones supplies adjacent evidence that contact phenomena and expressive meanings demand context-sensitive interpretation (Ishfaq & Bhatti, 2023; Ishfaq & Azim, 2025).

Research Objectives:

1 To develop a reproducible, multilingual turn-level annotation scheme grounded in pragmatic function and conversational sequence.

2 To examine whether contextual and sequential features add explanatory value beyond document-level lexical indicators.

3 To test whether relational and izzat-related categories vary by interlocutor role, language, script, and interactional context.

4 To specify ethical, source-held-out evaluation that does not equate linguistic signals with clinical diagnosis.

Research Questions

1 Which pragmatic actions and sequential positions recur in ethically sourced suicide-related conversations compared with matched controls?

2 Do temporal and turn-level features provide incremental information beyond document-level baselines?

3 How do code-switching, relational obligation, and honour-shame framing vary across interactional contexts?

4 How robust are these observations under conversation, source, and language-held-out testing?

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Literature Review and Theoretical Position

From lexical indicators to situated actions

Pennebaker (2011) links language-use patterns with psychological and social attention, while Al-Mosaiwi and Johnstone (2018) examine absolutist vocabulary in mental-health discourse. Neither approach warrants treating isolated words as diagnostic evidence. Conversation analysis instead examines how actions are accomplished in ordered turns, including adjacency pairs, repair, preference organization, and recipient design (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 2007). For this study, the relevant question is not merely whether a lexical item occurs, but what the speaker is doing with it and how the recipient responds.

The relevance of this distinction extends beyond suicide-related texts. A study of conversational turn-taking, politeness and identity illustrates the value of sequencing for interpersonal meaning (Ishfaq, Sultan, & Healy, 2025). A study of Instagram captions as identity performance likewise suggests that genre and audience design must be considered before inferring speaker intention (Sultan & Ishfaq, 2026). These works are methodological analogues, not evidence that their participants exhibit suicide-related discourse.

Speech acts, stance, and interpersonal positioning

Speech-act theory distinguishes the form of an utterance from its communicative force (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). An apology, request, refusal, account, or reassurance can be coded as an action only after considering its local context. Appraisal theory offers a complementary vocabulary for attitude, engagement, and graduation (Martin & White, 2005). These perspectives make it possible to separate negative evaluation from interpersonal negotiation and to examine whether expressions are endorsed, attributed, hypothetical, or contested.

Research on contextual adjective variation in literary discourse further illustrates that lexical form alone does not determine evaluative function (Ishfaq, Sultan, Hassan, Aleem, & Maldonado, 2022). Corpus-assisted analysis of generative-AI discourse and work on linguistic influence offer additional comparisons for framing and persuasion, while remaining outside the present study's crisis-specific evidence base (Ishfaq & Sultan, 2026b; Ahmad, 2026).

Temporality and crisis narratives

Beck and colleagues' work on hopelessness, O'Connor's motivational-volitional model, and Shneidman's concept of psychache provide interpretive anchors for temporal orientation, defeat, entrapment, and psychological pain (Beck et al., 1974; O'Connor, 2011; Shneidman, 1993). These constructs should not be inferred from language alone. At the discourse level, temporal reference can instead be coded descriptively: past-oriented accounting, present-state evaluation, future possibilities, and shifts among these frames. The proposed study tests whether such transitions have stable linguistic correlates without asserting clinical equivalence.

Related work on trauma-sensitive educational practices, narrative healing and cognitive control provides interdisciplinary reasons to distinguish linguistic interpretation from therapeutic or cognitive inference (Ishfaq, Malik, & Sultan, 2025; Ishfaq & Sultan, 2025c, 2025g). These publications concern different settings and cannot establish the prevalence or diagnostic meaning of conversational features in suicide-related communication.

Multilingual interaction and cultural meaning

Urdu, Punjabi, Roman Urdu, and Urdu-English interaction present script, tokenization, and code-switching challenges already identified in PFLSI Papers 4 and 5. The culturally situated izzat register, honor-shame framing, family obligation, relational guilt, coercion, and entrapment—remains a hypothesis requiring reliable

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contextual annotation. Its meaning cannot be assigned by a keyword list alone: family obligation may also signal solidarity, practical responsibility, or a non-crisis moral stance. Token-level language identification should follow explicit codebooks informed by code-switching annotation research (Solorio et al., 2014; Molina et al., 2016).

The Dawoodi research programme offers a cautionary analogy for the risks of decontextualized classification: work on language shift, lexical attrition, contact, linguistic marginalization, attitudes and ethnolinguistic memory documents how social position and language choice are interrelated in a different community (Ishfaq & Bhatti, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024; Ishfaq, 2025). These studies do not constitute evidence about suicide; their limited contribution here is to motivate language-sensitive annotation and a refusal to treat multilingual variation as a deficit.

3. Proposed Conceptual Framework

The proposed Temporal–Interactional PFLSI extension (TI-PFLSI) is an analytic framework, not a validated clinical instrument. It retains the document-level PFLSI feature families and adds ordered conversational context. The framework has five layers: (1) pragmatic action, (2) temporal framing, (3) interpersonal alignment, (4) culturally situated meaning, and (5) sequential transition. A sixth, non-inferential metadata layer records language, script, genre, source, and conversation structure so that potential confounding can be tested.

The six layers are analytically distinct. Pragmatic action identifies what a turn accomplishes; temporal framing records its expressed time horizon; alignment codes the relationship between adjacent turns; cultural framing records contextualized relational meanings; trajectory represents observed sequences; and metadata captures possible confounders. Construct separation is necessary to avoid circularly defining a label by the same lexical cues used to predict it (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Martin & White, 2005; Schegloff, 2007).

Analytic layer	Operational coding	Interpretive boundary
Pragmatic action	Disclosure; request; account; refusal; apology; reassurance; repair	Requires preceding/following turn where available
Temporal framing	Past, present, future, counterfactual; explicit change across turns	Not a measure of clinical hopelessness
Interpersonal alignment	Agreement; resistance; support; withdrawal; topic shift	Must account for speaker roles
Cultural framing	Izzat; family duty; relational guilt; coercion; entrapment	Contextual annotation; no keyword-only assignment
Sequential trajectory	Persistence; escalation in linguistic intensity; mitigation; repair	Describes discourse, not future behaviour

Methodology

Design and study status

A sequential mixed-method research design is proposed. Phase I establishes ethically sourced conversation datasets and matched controls. Phase II uses close qualitative analysis to develop a bilingual annotation codebook. Phase III assesses annotation reliability. Phase IV evaluates descriptive distributions and

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computational models under group-aware validation. No dataset collection, annotation, or modelling is claimed to have been performed for this paper.

A protocol-registration stage should precede annotation. It should define the target population, source eligibility, primary outcomes, codebook revision rules, exclusions, language strata, and comparison criteria. The proposed design is exploratory until these decisions are registered and pilot-tested; no participant recruitment or corpus acquisition is asserted here.

Sampling and units of analysis

Eligible material would consist of consented or otherwise appropriately authorized conversations from moderated support contexts, helpline settings, or comparable interactions, where collection and secondary analysis are permitted. The primary unit is a complete conversation; nested units are turns and annotated spans. One-to-one, multi-party, and asynchronous exchanges must be treated as distinct genres. A source-matched non-suicide-related comparison set should be collected under the same permission and governance rules. The 500,000-token multilingual target proposed in Paper 4 is not an achieved total and does not guarantee enough complete conversations for longitudinal analysis; feasibility must be established through a separate sampling audit.

Sampling must document source-level selection mechanisms, consent conditions, genre and conversation completeness. Where conversations are partial, analysts should record the missing context and exclude them from sequence-based confirmatory comparisons. No numerical sample-size claim can be justified before a feasibility audit of eligible conversation lengths, speaker counts and label prevalence.

Annotation and contextual rules

Each turn receives an anonymized conversation identifier, speaker role, turn index, timestamp if legitimately available, language/script labels, and pragmatic action codes. Optional span annotations capture negation scope, quotation, hypothetical framing, explicit temporal references, and culturally situated meanings. Annotators must review a defined context window and distinguish a speaker's own stance from attributed speech. Multi-label annotation is allowed where actions overlap; ambiguous cases remain marked as uncertain. A decision log records disputed examples and boundary cases.

Codebook development should proceed from a small, separately designated pilot sample. Each category requires an inclusion rule, exclusion rule, positive and negative example, and adjudication protocol. Distinct flags should represent quotation, negation, reported speech, ambiguity and missing turns. Translation should be treated as a secondary analytic layer rather than a replacement for the original script; cross-linguistic meaning and grammatical choices may be consequential (Ishfaq & Azim, 2025; Solorio et al., 2014; Molina et al., 2016).

Reliability and construct validity

At least 15% of eligible material should be independently double-coded, consistent with Paper 5. Cohen's kappa may be used for appropriate nominal labels, while Krippendorff's alpha or other suitable statistics should be considered for multi-coder, missing, or multi-label conditions (Cohen, 1960; Krippendorff, 2018). The Paper 5 target of $\kappa \geq .75$ may be used as a provisional benchmark for comparable nominal layers, but prevalence and disagreement patterns must also be reported. Reliability does not itself demonstrate construct validity; bilingual expert review, counterexamples, and comparisons with source-matched controls are required.

Agreement must be estimated separately by category, language and source; a pooled coefficient can mask weak performance for rare labels. Report category prevalence, confusion patterns, confidence intervals where

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estimable, and adjudication changes. Cohen (1960) and Krippendorff (2018) provide alternative reliability measures, but neither statistic substitutes for independent evidence that an annotation represents the intended discourse construct.

Sequential and quantitative analysis

Descriptive analysis should report pragmatic-action frequencies, transition matrices, adjacency patterns, and temporal-frame changes by language, script, and source. Mixed-effects regression or another hierarchical method can account for turns nested within conversations and sources, provided sample size supports estimation. Primary comparisons should be prespecified, and uncertainty intervals reported. Exploratory sequences should be clearly distinguished from confirmatory tests. Analysts should avoid interpreting a rise in negative vocabulary as a rise in clinical risk without independent outcome evidence.

For trajectory analyses, specify the denominator (turn, speaker or conversation), observation window, and rules for missing timestamps. A transition matrix should be compared with a source- and conversation-preserving null model rather than interpreted from raw counts alone. Statistical models must account for nesting and repeated observations; effect sizes and uncertainty should take precedence over significance-only reporting.

Computational comparisons

Three nested comparisons are proposed: a document-level lexical and TF-IDF baseline; a contextual transformer model using individual turns; and a context-aware model incorporating preceding turns plus prespecified pragmatic and temporal annotations. Models should be compared on the same held-out conversations, with matched sources and language-specific results. An ablation study should remove pragmatic, temporal, cultural, and code-switch streams in turn. This directly extends Paper 5 without asserting that transformer models have already been validated.

Computational analyses should compare identical test partitions, fixed preprocessing rules, and clearly separated tuning and evaluation data. A supplementary human-interpretable baseline can test whether complex models add value beyond simple pragmatic counts. The comparison is about corpus-category discrimination, not clinical forecasting. Related discussions of AI and human-language cognition and advanced academic writing support attention to interpretability and linguistic representation but do not validate this proposed classifier (Ishfaq & Sultan, 2025b, 2025c; Ishfaq, 2026).

Validation and leakage prevention

Splits must group all turns from a conversation, individual, thread, and known duplicate family. The validation plan includes conversation-held-out, source-held-out, language-held-out, and cross-script evaluations. Performance measures should include macro-F1, precision, recall, PR-AUC, and calibration where a probabilistic classifier is trained. Repeated-seed variability, confidence intervals, and explicit error analysis are essential. A model that succeeds only on one platform cannot be described as cross-domain robust.

Ethical governance

Sensitive crisis communications require prior institutional ethics review, lawful and purpose-limited access, data minimization, robust de-identification, retention controls, annotator support, and source-specific permissions. Direct quotations can be identifying even after names are removed; publication examples should be paraphrased or synthetically constructed and clearly labelled. No covert individual monitoring, automated intervention, or diagnostic classification is proposed. Any future applied system would require independent clinical evaluation and accountable human oversight.

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Ethical design also requires a harm-minimization review of any released example, and a decision on whether data may be redistributed at all. Work on autism-related methodologies underscores that specialized populations require context-specific ethical and methodological treatment, not transfer of assumptions across groups (Ishfaq & Sultan, 2024). Legal and human-rights scholarship offers a separate reminder that lawful authority, proportionality and accountability matter in institutional decision-making; it is not a source of clinical evidence for this study (Khan, Khaled, & Ishfaq, 2025).

Prespecified Analysis and Expected Interpretive Scenarios

Because no new corpus has been analysed, the following are interpretive scenarios rather than findings. If context-aware models outperform document-level baselines on independent sources, this would support the added information value of sequential context. If gains disappear under source-held-out validation, genre and platform artifacts would be a plausible competing explanation. If culturally annotated features improve interpretation but not predictive scores, they may still be useful for qualitative validity while not warranting computational claims. If agreement is low for pragmatic or cultural categories, the codebook should be revised before hypothesis testing.

A decision table should be registered in advance: improved source-held-out performance would motivate replication; within-source-only improvement would prioritize artifact audits; unreliable cultural labels would require redefinition; and null sequential effects would argue against retaining a trajectory layer. These are conditional interpretations, not observed outcomes.

A central falsification test concerns temporal change. If changes in future reference, interpersonal stance, or pragmatic action do not differentiate the prespecified classes after matching and adjustment, the proposed temporal layer should not be retained merely for theoretical appeal. Similarly, code-switching should be treated as a contextual variable rather than presumed evidence of distress.

Discussion

Series Paper 1 contributes culturally grounded categories that can be revisited as actions within exchanges, rather than merely themes in completed notes. Paper 2 contributes corpus-based feature groups that provide transparent baselines. Paper 3 contributes psychological and linguistic theoretical anchors, which the present framework translates into observable discourse coding without treating them as diagnoses. Paper 4 contributes multilingual sampling and governance requirements. Paper 5 contributes computational validation, calibration, and source-held-out testing. Series Paper 6 proposes that these foundations be tested at the level of interactional sequences, where meaning is co-constructed and the same words can perform different functions.

The methodological distinction is substantial: a document-level model answers whether a text resembles a labelled corpus category, whereas an interactional analysis asks how an utterance operates within an exchange. These questions are complementary but not interchangeable. Neither by itself predicts an individual's future behaviour. In low-resource multilingual settings, interpretability requires attention to scripts, translation loss, recipient design, and source variation, not merely multilingual model coverage.

A further distinction concerns narrative interpretation. Critical hermeneutic analysis and psycho-hermeneutic work on Surah Yūsuf show the interpretive value of context, but religious-literary narratives and ethically sourced crisis conversations are not interchangeable datasets (Ishfaq & Sultan, 2025f, 2025g). The same boundary applies to language-and-influence analysis, education, identity research and linguistic documentation: each supplies a possible analytic analogy, not direct empirical corroboration.

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Limitations

The proposed study depends on access to ethically governed, naturally occurring conversations with sufficient sequential context. Suicide notes cannot supply interlocutor responses and therefore cannot directly validate turn-level dynamics. Annotation of pragmatics and cultural framing is interpretive and may vary across dialects, age groups, and platforms. Temporal sequences in sampled conversations are not equivalent to longitudinal follow-up of individuals. Differences between source types may remain even after matching. Finally, suicide-related discourse labels are not clinically anchored risk outcomes, and this paper provides no empirical evidence of predictive validity.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This sixth PFLSI paper proposes a disciplined extension from words and whole documents to temporally situated conversational actions. Its distinctive contribution is the integration of pragmatic force, interpersonal alignment, cultural meaning, and sequential transition into an auditable multilingual research design. The next empirical step is a small, ethically approved pilot to test feasibility and coding reliability, followed by prespecified comparisons against the Series Paper 5 baselines. Only independently replicated evidence could justify claims of robust linguistic generalization; clinical risk assessment would require a separate clinical study. The broader objective is not automated surveillance of individuals, but a more contextually valid understanding of crisis-related communication that can inform carefully governed research and professional interpretation.

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