



A Transitivity-Based Analysis of Hijab Meaning in Algerian Women's Narratives

Moulai Hacene Yacine ^{1*}, Benyoucef Radia², Ouali Farida³

¹University of Ibn Khaldoun – Tiaret (Algeria), yacine.moulaiyacene@univ-Tiaret.dz

²University of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis Mostaganem (Algeria), radia.benyoucef@univ-mosta.dz

³University of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis Mostaganem (Algeria), farida.ouali@univ-mosta.dz

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Abstract:

This study examines how Algerian women construct the meaning of the hijab in narrative discourse using a Systemic Functional Linguistics framework. It analyzes transitivity patterns, sources of authority, and narrative shifts in participants' accounts. Data were collected through an online questionnaire combining Likert-scale items and open-ended responses. From 311 responses, 48 narratives were selected for qualitative analysis. The findings show a clear predominance of relational processes, indicating that participants mainly define the hijab through identity-based and categorical meanings rather than actions. Divine authority appears as the most frequent source of legitimation, followed by personal authority, while family influence remains limited. More than half of the narratives also show shifts in interpretation, suggesting that meanings are often reconstructed over time. By linking linguistic patterns with authority and narrative development, the study explains how religious meanings are produced and negotiated in everyday discourse across contemporary Muslim societies.

Keywords: Systemic Functional Linguistics; transitivity; hijab discourse; narrative analysis; identity



1. Introduction

The hijab occupies a complex position in contemporary discussions of religion, gender, and identity. While commonly understood as a form of modest dress worn by Muslim women, it also functions as a social and cultural symbol whose meanings vary across contexts. In many Muslim societies, it has traditionally been associated with modesty and religious commitment, while in contemporary settings it is often interpreted through competing narratives of identity, autonomy, and cultural belonging.

A substantial body of research has examined the hijab from sociological, anthropological, and feminist perspectives, focusing on its role in identity formation, gender norms, and cultural practice (Ahmed, 1992; El Guindi, 1999; Shirazi, 2003; Bucar, 2017; Almila, 2019). These studies show that the hijab cannot be understood as a fixed symbol but as a dynamic social practice whose meanings are continuously negotiated.

However, comparatively little attention has been given to how individuals linguistically construct the meaning of the hijab in their own narratives. While existing research has explored what the hijab represents within broader social contexts, fewer studies have examined how speakers construct and negotiate these meanings through language when describing their personal experiences.

To address this gap, the present study adopts a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective, which views language as a social semiotic resource for meaning-making in context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). From this perspective, individuals' accounts of the hijab can be analysed as linguistic constructions that reveal how identity, authority, and experience are organised in discourse.

This study focuses on narrative responses produced by Algerian women and aims to examine how participants construct the meaning of the hijab in discourse, with particular attention to transitivity patterns, sources of authority, and shifts in interpretation over time.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How do Algerian women linguistically construct the meaning of the hijab in their narratives?
- 2) Which transitivity processes dominate the discourse used to describe the hijab?
- 3) What sources of authority are invoked when participants explain their relationship with the hijab?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Hijab and Identity

A substantial body of scholarship has examined the hijab as a marker of identity within Muslim societies. Research suggests that veiling practices have developed through complex interactions between religious interpretation, cultural traditions, and political structures. Ahmed (1992) argues



that the meanings attached to veiling cannot be understood solely through religious doctrine, as they are shaped by broader social and historical transformations. From this perspective, the hijab functions not only as a religious practice but also as a cultural resource through which identity is negotiated.

Anthropological studies further emphasize the communicative role of veiling in social interaction. El Guindi (1999) conceptualizes the veil as part of a system of modesty and privacy that regulates visibility and social relations. Within this framework, dress operates as a form of cultural communication through which individuals signal social status, moral values, and community belonging. The hijab can therefore be understood as a semiotic resource that conveys socially recognizable meanings about identity.

More recent research highlights the role of the hijab in contemporary identity construction. Shirazi (2003) argues that in modern contexts the hijab functions as a visible marker of religious and cultural belonging, particularly in multicultural environments. Similarly, Bucar (2017) shows that modest fashion practices allow women to combine religious commitment with personal style and self-expression. In these contexts, the hijab operates simultaneously as a religious practice, a cultural symbol, and a resource for identity construction in public space.

Taken together, these studies indicate that the hijab does not carry a fixed meaning but is continuously reinterpreted across social contexts. This variability highlights the importance of examining how such meanings are constructed in discourse, particularly through the linguistic choices speakers make when describing their experiences.

2.2 Hijab and Agency

Discussions of the hijab frequently intersect with debates concerning women's agency. In public discourse, the hijab is often framed through polarized narratives that present it either as a symbol of patriarchal control or as an expression of empowerment. Recent scholarship has challenged this binary by examining how Muslim women interpret and negotiate the meaning of veiling within specific social and cultural contexts.

Anthropological research suggests that veiling can function as an active social strategy rather than a passive response to external pressure. El Guindi (1999) argues that women may adopt the veil to regulate public interaction and manage visibility in social space. Within this framework, veiling becomes part of a broader cultural system that structures social relations and allows women to shape how they are perceived.

Research on contemporary modest fashion further highlights the relationship between veiling and agency. Bucar (2017) shows that women reinterpret religious dress practices through



engagement with fashion and aesthetics, combining religious commitment with personal style. These practices suggest that agency does not necessarily emerge in opposition to religious norms but may develop through their reinterpretation in everyday contexts.

Taken together, this body of work indicates that agency in relation to the hijab cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between coercion and freedom. Instead, it emerges through ongoing negotiation among religious belief, cultural expectations, and personal identity. This perspective highlights the importance of examining how such meanings are constructed in discourse, particularly through the linguistic choices speakers use to describe their experiences.

2.3 Contemporary Transformations

In recent decades, the meanings associated with the hijab have been shaped by processes of globalization, media representation, and transnational cultural exchange. As Muslim communities engage with global cultural systems, the hijab increasingly appears within discussions of modernity, fashion, and identity. These developments have led scholars to examine how religious dress practices are reinterpreted within changing social and economic contexts.

Almila (2019) observes that modest fashion industries have expanded internationally, creating new relationships between religious practice and consumer culture. Within these contexts, the hijab may function simultaneously as a religious symbol and as a stylistic element within contemporary fashion markets. Similarly, Shirazi (2003) argues that the hijab operates as a flexible symbol whose meaning varies across contexts, signifying religious devotion, political identity, or cultural belonging.

In Algeria, these transformations are shaped by specific historical and social conditions. During the colonial period, the veil became associated with cultural identity and resistance, as described by Fanon (1959). Following independence, processes of urbanization, economic change, and global cultural influence contributed to new interpretations of religious dress among younger generations. In contemporary contexts, the hijab may function simultaneously as a religious practice, a marker of identity, and an element of everyday style (Shirazi, 2003; Almila, 2019). These developments suggest that the meanings associated with the hijab are not fixed but continuously reinterpreted within changing social conditions.

Taken together, these studies indicate that the meanings of the hijab are dynamic and context-dependent. This variability highlights the importance of examining how such meanings are constructed in discourse, particularly through the linguistic choices individuals make when describing their experiences.



3. Systemic Functional Linguistics

The present study draws on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), a framework developed by Halliday and further elaborated by Matthiessen, which conceptualizes language as a social semiotic resource for meaning-making in context. From this perspective, language is not simply a system of grammatical rules but a resource through which speakers construct meaning.

A central concept in SFL is that language simultaneously performs three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Eggins, 2004). The ideational metafunction concerns how language represents experience, the interpersonal metafunction relates to the negotiation of social relationships and attitudes, and the textual metafunction organizes linguistic elements into coherent messages appropriate to context.

Because these metafunctions operate simultaneously, each clause encodes multiple layers of meaning. Linguistic choices therefore reflect not only what is represented but also how speakers position themselves and structure their discourse. From this perspective, analyzing how individuals describe the hijab provides insight into how meaning, identity, and authority are constructed in discourse.

3.1 Transitivity and Ideational Meaning

Within Systemic Functional Linguistics, the ideational metafunction is realized through the transitivity system, which explains how clauses represent experience in terms of processes, participants, and circumstances (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Through this system, speakers linguistically represent actions, perceptions, and relationships in discourse.

Halliday and Matthiessen identify several process types, among which material, mental, and relational processes are particularly relevant for narrative analysis. Material processes describe actions or events, mental processes express cognition, perception, and emotion, and relational processes establish identification or attribution, allowing speakers to define what something is or what qualities it possesses.

In discourse concerning personal beliefs and social practices, relational processes often play a central role in defining identities and values. Statements such as “the hijab is part of my identity” or “the hijab is a religious obligation” illustrate how relational clauses assign meaning to social practices. Mental processes, in turn, indicate reflective narratives in which speakers describe



changing interpretations or personal realizations, while material processes typically appear in accounts of actions related to adopting or wearing the hijab.

Accordingly, the present study employs transitivity analysis to examine how Algerian women construct the meaning of the hijab in their narratives, focusing on the distribution of relational, mental, and material processes.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a mixed-methods design grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to examine how Algerian women construct the meaning of the hijab in narrative discourse. It focuses on how these constructions reflect different sources of authority and patterns of interpretive change.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The instrument combined Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. The Likert items were designed to capture participants' attitudes toward the hijab across dimensions such as religious motivation, identity, social expectation, personal agency, and family influence, providing contextual background for the analysis.

The open-ended section invited participants to describe their understanding of the hijab, explain the circumstances surrounding their decision to wear or not wear it, and reflect on whether their interpretation had changed over time. These responses constitute the primary qualitative dataset. A total of 311 responses were collected. From these, a subset of narratives containing substantive content (approximately 80 words or more) was selected for detailed analysis, resulting in a core corpus of 48 narratives (Core_48).

The study combines two levels of analysis. The first provides a contextual overview of attitudes based on the Likert-scale data. The second applies SFL-based analysis to the Core_48 corpus to examine how meaning is constructed through transitivity patterns, authority references, and narrative development.

4.2 Contextual Attitudinal Mapping

Before analyzing the narrative corpus, the study considers the broader attitudinal patterns reflected in the full questionnaire dataset. The Likert-scale items captured participants' orientations toward the hijab across dimensions including religious motivation, identity, social expectation, personal agency, and family influence. Responses were recorded on a five-point scale (1 = strongly



disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Mean scores and the percentage of agreement responses (4–5) were calculated to provide an overview of prevailing attitudes.

The results indicate a strong orientation toward religious motivation and identity-based interpretations. Religious motivation records the highest mean score ($M = 4.48$), with 93.25% of participants indicating agreement. Identity-related interpretations are also prominent ($M = 4.25$; 87.46% agreement), suggesting that many participants view the hijab as part of personal or social identity.

Social expectation and personal agency also show relatively high levels of agreement, indicating that participants perceive the hijab as embedded within social interaction and individual decision-making. In contrast, family influence records the lowest mean score ($M = 3.04$) and agreement rate (42.77%), suggesting that participants do not primarily frame their relationship with the hijab in terms of familial pressure. Table 1 summarizes these patterns.

Table 1: Contextual Attitudinal Mapping (N = 311)

Variable	Mean	% Agree (4–5)
Religious motivation	4.48	93.25%
Identity	4.25	87.46%
Social expectation	3.99	79.42%
Personal agency	4.16	83.28%
Family influence	3.04	42.77%

4.3 Coding Procedure and Analytic Reliability

The coding procedure followed a systematic multi-stage process to ensure analytical consistency. After constructing the Core₄₈ corpus, each narrative was read in full to identify its overall discursive orientation. The analysis focused on the narrative as a whole rather than isolated clauses in order to determine the dominant meaning-making pattern in each account.

Each narrative was coded for three analytical variables: dominant process type, authority source, and narrative shift. Dominant process type was identified based on whether relational, mental, or material processes carried the primary explanatory function. Authority source was determined by identifying whether participants grounded their interpretation of the hijab in divine, personal, or family-based justification. Narrative shift was coded based on the presence or absence of a change in interpretation over time.

In cases where multiple process types or authority sources appeared, coding decisions were based on the central argumentative structure of the narrative. Relational coding was applied to definitional statements (e.g., “the hijab is...”), while mental coding was used for reflective accounts (e.g., “I



realized,” “I felt”). Material coding was applied to action-oriented descriptions related to adopting or wearing the hijab.

A coding framework was used to analyze how transitivity processes interact with authority sources and narrative trajectories. By combining these variables, the study identifies recurring discursive configurations through which participants construct and reinterpret the meaning of the hijab.

To enhance reliability, an intra-coder consistency check was conducted on approximately 20% of the dataset. These narratives were re-coded after a time interval and compared with the initial coding. Discrepancies were reviewed, and coding criteria were refined to ensure consistency.

Participation was voluntary, and all responses were collected anonymously. No identifying information was included, and all excerpts were anonymized to protect participant privacy.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Dominant Discursive Patterns

The first stage of the analysis examines the distribution of discursive configurations in the Core_48 narrative corpus. Each narrative was coded for a dominant transitivity process and a dominant source of authority, providing an overview of how participants construct the meaning of the hijab.

The results show a clear predominance of relational processes. Of the 48 narratives, 42 (87.5%) construct the hijab through relational definitions. These narratives use identifying or attributive constructions to define what the hijab is or represents, frequently associating it with religious duty, identity, dignity, or moral commitment. This pattern indicates that participants primarily construct meaning through categorical definitions rather than descriptions of actions.

Mental processes account for 6 narratives (12.5%), where participants describe their relationship with the hijab through internal states such as reflection, perception, or personal realization (e.g., “I felt,” “I realized”). In these cases, meaning is constructed through reflective interpretation rather than definitional statements.

Material processes do not emerge as dominant patterns in the dataset. Participants rarely frame the hijab in terms of physical actions, instead focusing on defining its meaning or reflecting on its significance.



A similar pattern appears in the distribution of authority sources. Divine authority is the most frequently invoked form of legitimation, occurring in 27 narratives (56.3%), where participants refer to religious obligation or divine command. Personal authority appears in 20 narratives (41.7%), reflecting individual conviction or identity. References to family authority are minimal, appearing in only one narrative (2.1%). Table 2 summarizes the distribution of dominant process types and authority sources.

TABLE 2: Dominant Discursive Patterns in the Core Corpus (N = 48)

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Relational (process)	42	87.5%
Mental (process)	6	12.5%
Material (process)	0	0%
Divine (authority)	27	56.3%
Personal (authority)	20	41.7%
Family (authority)	1	2.1%

Overall, the results indicate that participants predominantly construct the meaning of the hijab through relational definitions supported by religious authority, while reflective and personal constructions appear less frequently. This distribution provides the basis for the more detailed analysis presented in the following section.

5.2 Narrative Shift Distribution

In addition to process types and authority sources, the analysis examined whether participants described a change in their understanding of the hijab over time. This variable, labelled narrative shift, captures whether participants explicitly indicate a transformation in interpretation within their narratives, typically through temporal contrasts (e.g., “at first... but later...”).

The results show that narrative development is a common feature. Of the 48 narratives, 27 (56.3%) include a clear shift in interpretation. These accounts often describe a movement from an initial, simplified or externally influenced understanding toward a more personal or reflective interpretation. For example, participants may move from viewing the hijab as a social expectation to interpreting it as a religious obligation, or from seeing it as a dress practice to understanding it as part of a broader ethical framework.

In contrast, 21 narratives (43.7%) show no explicit shift. These participants present their understanding of the hijab as stable, describing it as a fixed concept that has remained consistent over time. Table 3 summarizes this distribution.

Table 3: Narrative Shift Distribution (N = 48)



Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Yes	27	56.3%
No	21	43.7%

5.3 Process × Authority Cross-Distribution

Following the analysis of process types and authority sources, this section examines how these variables interact within the Core_48 narratives. The aim is to identify patterns of co-occurrence between transitivity processes and sources of authority in participants’ constructions of the hijab.

The results show a strong alignment between relational processes and divine authority. Of the 42 relational narratives, 27 ground their definitions of the hijab in religious authority. These responses typically use categorical statements that link the hijab directly to religious obligation or divine command (e.g., “the hijab is a duty,” “the hijab is worship”), presenting it as a stable religious category.

A second pattern appears in the relational–personal configuration, where 14 narratives define the hijab through identity-based or self-referential constructions. In these cases, participants retain relational definitions but shift the source of legitimation from divine authority to personal conviction or identity.

A smaller cluster is observed in the mental–personal configuration (6 narratives), where participants construct meaning through reflective discourse centered on personal thought and experience. Mental processes such as thinking, feeling, or realizing position the hijab as something interpreted rather than categorically defined.

Two patterns are notable in their absence or rarity. Mental–divine combinations do not appear in the dataset, suggesting that references to divine authority are framed through definitional certainty rather than reflection. Similarly, family authority appears only once, indicating its limited role in participants’ narratives. Table 4 summarizes these distributions.

Table 4: Process × Authority Cross-Distribution (N = 48)

Dominant process	Divine	Personal	Family	Total
Relational	27	14	1	42
Mental	0	6	0	6
Material	0	0	0	0

Overall, the findings show that most narratives cluster within the relational–divine configuration, indicating that participants predominantly construct the hijab through religious definitions. At the



same time, the presence of relational–personal patterns suggests that identity-based interpretations also play a significant role. These patterns provide the basis for the analysis of narrative trajectories in the following section.

5.4 Process × Authority × Narrative Shift

The final stage of the analysis combines the three variables—dominant process, authority source, and narrative shift—to examine how discursive configurations relate to narrative development. This step identifies how linguistic constructions interact with authority references and temporal trajectories in participants’ narratives.

The results reveal several distinct configurations. The most prominent pattern is the relational–divine configuration (27 narratives), of which 18 include a narrative shift and 9 remain stable. These narratives define the hijab through categorical religious statements while often describing a development in understanding over time.

The second major pattern is relational–personal (14 narratives), with 13 showing a narrative shift and only one remaining stable. This suggests that identity-based interpretations frequently emerge through reinterpretation, with participants moving from externally influenced understandings toward personal conviction or identity-based framing.

A smaller but analytically significant pattern is the mental–personal configuration (6 narratives), in which all cases include a narrative shift. These narratives are characterized by reflective discourse, where participants describe changing beliefs or evolving perspectives. The consistent presence of narrative shift in this configuration indicates a strong link between reflective processes and reinterpretation.

Two configurations are absent or rare. Mental–divine combinations do not occur, suggesting that references to divine authority are framed through definitional certainty rather than reflection. Family authority appears only once and does not involve a narrative shift, indicating its limited role in the dataset. Table 5 summarizes these distributions.

TABLE 5. Process × Authority × Narrative Shift (N = 48)

Dominant process	Authority	Shift Yes	Shift No	Total
Relational	Divine	18	9	27
Relational	Personal	13	1	14
Mental	Personal	6	0	6
Mental	Divine	0	0	0
Relational	Family	0	1	1



Dominant process	Authority	Shift Yes	Shift No	Total
Mental	Family	0	0	0

6 Qualitative Exemplars of Dominant Configurations

To complement the quantitative results, this section presents representative excerpts from the Core_48 corpus. These examples illustrate how the identified configurations are realised in participant discourse. Excerpts are presented in their original form to preserve relevant linguistic features.

6.1 Relational–Divine: Definitional Religious Framing

Narratives in the relational–divine configuration construct the hijab through definitional statements grounded in religious authority. Participants typically frame the hijab as a religious obligation or act of worship, using relational clauses that present its meaning as stable and divinely sanctioned.

One participant describes the hijab as a religious duty whose meaning develops over time:

الحجاب هو عبادة خفية وطاعة معلنه مثله كمثل العبادات الاخرى كالصلاة والصوم... في البداية كنت أظن أن الحجاب مجرد ستر للشعر... لكن مع الوقت والبلوغ وفهمي الأعمق لديني، أدركت أن الحجاب الشرعي هو ستر كامل...

In this excerpt, the participant defines the hijab through a relational construction (“الحجاب هو عبادة”), grounding its meaning in divine authority. The narrative then introduces a temporal shift from a simplified understanding to a more comprehensive religious interpretation.

Other narratives maintain a stable definitional frame without a narrative shift. For example:

الحجاب عبادة وليس عادة... شرعها رب العالمين لا تتغير ولا تتبدل على مر الأزمان...

Here, the hijab is defined categorically as a religious institution established by divine authority, with no evidence of reinterpretation.

6.2 Relational–Personal: Identity-Based Framing

In the relational–personal configuration, participants continue to rely on relational clauses but shift the source of legitimation from religious authority to personal identity. The hijab is frequently described as part of the participant's values or sense of self.



One participant writes:

الحجاب بالنسبة لي هو اختيار نابع من إيماني... لا أراه مجرد لباس بل هو هوية وسلوك وأخلاق تعكس قناعاتي ومبادئ.

The relational clause (“الحجاب... هو اختيار”) defines the hijab as a personal choice. The narrative also reflects a shift from viewing the hijab as a requirement to interpreting it as a broader ethical commitment.

A contrasting example appears in a narrative that rejects the hijab while maintaining relational framing:

الحشمة والحياء تكون في أخلاق الإنسان... والحجاب أمر شخصي بحت.

Here, modesty is defined independently of clothing, and the hijab is positioned as a personal matter. The narrative remains stable throughout.

Mental–Personal: Reflective Reinterpretation

The mental–personal configuration foregrounds internal states of thought and reflection. These narratives rely on mental processes to construct meaning through evolving interpretation.

One participant explains:

أشعر أنه يمثل علاقتي بالله قبل أي شيء آخر... في البداية كنت أراه بشكل بسيط جدًا... لكن مع مرور الوقت بدأت أفهم أن الحجاب أعمق من مجرد مظهر.

Mental processes such as feeling and understanding structure the narrative, marking a shift from an initial to a more developed interpretation.

Another participant describes a similar trajectory:

at first, I was just excited about the idea... then I started regretting... later I began looking for the meaning of hijab from a social, religious, and cultural perspective.

This sequence of cognitive and emotional states illustrates how meaning is constructed through reflection and reinterpretation.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate how the configurations identified in the quantitative analysis are realized in discourse. Relational definitions, identity-based framing, and reflective processes provide distinct linguistic pathways through which participants construct the meaning of



the hijab. The following section interprets these patterns in relation to the theoretical framework and broader sociocultural context.

7. Discussion

7.1 Relational–Divine Dominance as Categorical Construal

The results show that the dominant configuration in the dataset is the relational–divine pattern, in which participants construct the meaning of the hijab through definitional statements grounded in religious authority. From a Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective, this pattern reflects a preference for relational identifying and attributive clauses that present the hijab as a stable category rather than a negotiable practice. Statements such as “the hijab is an obligation” or “the hijab is worship” position the hijab as a fixed element of religious knowledge.

This finding is consistent with Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2014) account of relational processes as a resource for classification and definition. By relying on relational constructions, participants present meaning as given rather than contested. The alignment between relational processes and divine authority therefore produces a discourse in which the hijab is treated as a religiously stabilized concept. Participants do not typically argue for its legitimacy; instead, they define it as already established within a moral and religious framework.

At the same time, the presence of narrative shifts within many relational–divine narratives introduce a dynamic dimension. Although the definitional frame remains grounded in religious authority, participants describe a development in understanding over time. This suggests that categorical religious constructions can coexist with processes of reinterpretation, allowing participants to refine their understanding without challenging the underlying divine frame.

7.2 Relational–Personal as Identity Recontextualization

A second pattern emerges in the relational–personal configuration, where participants retain relational definitions but shift the source of authority from religious doctrine to personal identity. In these narratives, the hijab is constructed as an expression of values, self-respect, or individual conviction. Statements such as “the hijab is part of my identity” illustrate how relational clauses are used to position the hijab as a defining feature of the self.

This shift reflects a process of recontextualization, in which a religious practice is reinterpreted within the speaker’s identity framework rather than presented solely as an external obligation. The high frequency of narrative shifts in this configuration indicates that participants often describe a trajectory from externally grounded interpretations toward internalized meanings.



These findings align with previous research on identity and modest fashion (Bucar, 2017; Shirazi, 2003), which shows that religious dress can function as a site of personal expression. The present analysis extends this work by demonstrating how identity-based interpretations are realized linguistically through relational constructions that define the hijab as part of the self.

7.3 Mental–Personal and Reflective Positioning

The mental–personal configuration, although smaller in frequency, is analytically significant. In these narratives, participants construct the meaning of the hijab through mental processes such as thinking, feeling, and realizing. These constructions foreground internal experience and frame the hijab as something interpreted through reflection rather than defined categorically.

Unlike relational patterns, which present meaning as stable, mental-process narratives depict the hijab as an evolving understanding shaped by personal experience. Participants describe moments of reconsideration or renewed conviction, using mental verbs to trace how their interpretations develop over time. The consistent presence of narrative shift in this configuration indicates a strong association between reflective discourse and reinterpretation.

A notable absence in the dataset is the mental–divine configuration. When divine authority is invoked, it is rarely expressed through tentative mental constructions. Instead, it is realized through relational definitions that present religious obligation as categorical knowledge. This contrast reinforces the broader pattern in which divine authority is framed through definitional certainty, while mental processes are associated with personal reflection and interpretive change.

8. CONCLUSION

This study examined how Algerian women construct the meaning of the hijab in narrative discourse using a Systemic Functional Linguistics framework. By analyzing narrative responses, the study explored how meaning is organized through transitivity processes, authority sources, and narrative development.

The findings show that the hijab is predominantly constructed through relational processes, which frame it as a definable concept associated with religious obligation, identity, or moral values. Divine authority emerges as the most frequent source of legitimation, indicating that participants often position the hijab as a religiously grounded category. At the same time, personal authority plays a significant role, with many narratives presenting the hijab as an expression of identity and individual conviction.

Narrative development further shapes meaning construction. More than half of the narratives include a shift in interpretation, suggesting that participants often construct meaning through



reflection and reinterpretation. These shifts are especially associated with mental processes, which foreground evolving perspectives.

From an SFL perspective, the findings demonstrate how different process types structure meaning in distinct ways. Relational constructions tend to produce categorical definitions, while mental constructions support reflective interpretation. The interaction between process types and authority sources shows how participants position the hijab within broader narratives of religion and identity.

This study has several limitations. The analysis focuses on a subset of longer narratives, which may not capture shorter responses in the dataset. In addition, the dominance coding approach simplifies variation within individual narratives. The findings therefore reflect patterns of meaning construction in discourse rather than observable practice.

Overall, the study highlights the value of SFL for analyzing religious discourse. By examining linguistic choices in narrative data, it shows how the meaning of the hijab is constructed, negotiated, and reinterpreted within contemporary contexts.

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