



Semantic Analysis of Prepositions and Postpositions in Pashto

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Abstract

Prepositions and postpositions in the Pashto language are considered bound morphemes that appear at the beginning and end of free morphemes, respectively, and serve to establish syntactic and semantic relationships among words. In Pashto, multiple postpositions can correspond to a single preposition, and vice versa, which often leads to grammatical and semantic ambiguities, making comprehension difficult for both writers and readers. Moreover, Pashto grammatical and orthographic works-particularly those written for pedagogical purposes-have paid little systematic attention to this issue. In most cases, authors have unconsciously adopted patterns influenced by neighboring languages, and instructors have continued teaching these structures without critical evaluation. This study employs a *content analysis* and *critical linguistic approach* to investigate the semantic and grammatical roles of prepositions and postpositions in Pashto. The findings provide a comprehensive table of accurate Pashto prepositions and postpositions commonly used in daily communication. These forms do not create semantic inconsistencies, are easy to understand and apply for both writers and readers, and can be logically and linguistically justified for speakers of different Pashto dialects in teaching contexts.

Keywords: Sentence, Word, Phrase, Preposition, Postposition.

Introduction

Grammar, regarded as a branch of descriptive linguistics, serves as the foundation for analyzing the structure of language. In this study, a specific grammatical component-prepositions and postpositions, which belong to the morphological branch of grammar-is examined, as these elements are key to determining in shaping the semantic structure of a sentence.

A sentence, as a complete semantic unit of language and speech, conveys a comprehensive meaning to both the reader and the listener. The structure of a sentence is composed of word and even of tone and intonation, which contribute to its overall sense. Words are classified into free and bound morphemes. Free morphemes possess both lexical and grammatical meaning, while bound morphemes commonly referred to as morphemes

carry only grammatical meaning, which becomes evident within the linguistic structure. Tone and intonation also influence the semantic and conceptual structure of the sentence. This research focuses exclusively on the *semantic contribution of prepositions and postpositions*, which are among the bound morphemes found in Pashto sentences. The grammatical works that have described Pashto prepositions and postpositions are critically analyzed in this study through *content analysis* and *evaluative methods*. Their semantic accuracy and conceptual inconsistencies within the context of Pashto are identified, and a concise comparative discussion is presented.

Ultimately, this study aims to help Pashto speakers and writers avoid the *misuse of prepositions and postpositions*, thereby enhancing grammatical precision and preventing semantic errors in both spoken and written Pashto communications.

Pashto has been the subject of a considerable number of grammatical works, particularly in the field of morphology. These works describe Pashto prepositions and postpositions; however, the criteria for determining their grammatical accuracy and standardization remain undefined. For instance, Zyar (2007), in his comprehensive grammar of Pashto—which covers phonology, morphology, and syntax—identifies certain prepositions and postpositions as standard but does not clarify the basis for such classification.

Based on these grammatical references, several pedagogical texts—such as Sherzad (2020) and Zaghham (2019) have been developed for teaching purposes. However, these works have also perpetuated inaccuracies in the use of prepositions and postpositions, relying on prior descriptions without reevaluating them critically. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze commonly used Pashto prepositions and postpositions among native speakers, examining their syntactic relationships, omission, usage in writing and speech, and their semantic connection with free morphemes.

The objective of this study is to examine the semantic and conceptual impact of Pashto prepositions and postpositions and to clarify their role in the semantic structure of the sentence. And answer, To what extent do Pashto prepositions and postpositions influence the semantic and conceptual structure of a sentence, and how is this influence manifested? Discussions on the morphology of *prepositions* and *postpositions* in the Pashto language have been presented in various grammatical works. Although it is impossible to include all these works here, a selection of key sources used in this study is presented, all of which are instructional texts and considered significant by Pashto linguists. *Pashto Language and Linguistics* (Tanywal, 2018) provides a theoretical explanation of various grammatical areas, including phonology, morphology, and syntax. *Pashto Grammar* (Ziar, 2017) is a comprehensive grammatical work widely used in several universities in Afghanistan, serving as a primary reference for grammar instructors and covering discussions on prepositions and postpositions. *Pashto Grammar* (Sherzad, 2020) focuses on the morphological aspects of Pashto and presents discussions similar to those in *Pashto Grammar*, although less detailed. *Pashto Phonology and Morphology* (Kheski, 2008) also addresses both grammatical areas, closely resembling *Pashto Grammar* and has been used as a teaching resource at Kabul University. A review of these and similar Pashto grammar and writing works shows considerable consistency in the examples and terminology used. Contrasting perspectives are rarely presented; later authors tend to follow the approach of earlier works, making minimal corrections or additions to the original analyses.

Material and Method

This study on the *prepositions* and *postpositions* in the Pashto language employs a qualitative content-analytical and critical approach. The prepositions and postpositions under investigation are critically examined and analyzed in existing grammatical works, highlighting conceptual errors and improper usage. By combining critical review with content analysis, the study adopts a hybrid qualitative methodology.

The primary data for this research were collected from instructional grammatical texts, with the work of Ziar (2017) considered the most comprehensive and reliable source. This text explains all aspects of Pashto grammar descriptively, although it does not fully adhere to prescriptive or standardized norms. As it serves as a reference for subsequent grammatical studies, its content was selected for detailed analysis in this research.

While Pashto speakers do not follow a fixed standard in everyday speech, they approximate a standard in written texts. Nevertheless, some writers overlook this standard in their writing, affecting the correct usage of prepositions and postpositions. This study evaluates prepositions and postpositions that are used with relative correctness in certain Pashto dialects, particularly Central and Western dialects. Although such usage does not reach the full standard, the analysis focuses on conceptual aspects to provide precise and clear findings.

Findings

For formation of a sentence, all its words both *free and bound morphemes* must carry either lexical or grammatical meaning and express a complete thought about something. Otherwise, it cannot be regarded as a sentence, because it fails to communicate any idea or meaning to the listener or reader (Sherzad, 2019, p. 90).

On this basis, *prepositions* and *postpositions* are considered *bound words* within the sentence and carry grammatical meaning. In Pashto sentences, the interchange of prepositions and postpositions, or the omission of either element, affects the *semantic structure* of the sentence.

Prepositions and *postpositions* are *small, bound, and indeclinable linguistic elements* that occur frequently and are highly functional in the Pashto language. Within a clause, they express *meaning and grammatical function* when used in combination with *free morphemes* (such as *adjectives, pronouns, and numerals*). (Zyar, 2017, p. 203)

In the Pashto language, nearly every postposition has several corresponding prepositions, and conversely, each preposition may appear with multiple postpositions. Therefore, careful attention is required in their usage.

Languages contemporaneous with Pashto, such as Persian and English, do not have postpositions corresponding to every preposition as Pashto does. These languages generally use only prepositions. For instance, in Dari (Persian), there exists only one postposition, "*rā*", (Yamin, 2014, p. 59). which largely corresponds in meaning to the Pashto postposition *ta* and the English preposition *to*. In English, postpositions also exist, though they are very limited in number for example: *ago, asleep, and apart*.

Note: In the Pashto language, prepositions and postpositions are considered *bound morphemes*. However, some grammarians have also used certain *free morphemes* in place of postpositions, assigning them lexical meaning. Examples include *wrusta* ("after"), *wrānde*

("before"), and *maxke* ("before"), among others. Such usage, however, does not align with the natural grammatical structure of the Pashto language.

Table 1: Prepositions and Postpositions in Pashto According to the Most Comprehensive Grammatical Reference

Preposition	Postposition	Example	Remarks
Pə	Ke	Pə koṭa ke tiārə da. - "It is dark in the room."	-
Pə	Sara	Pə čūra sara me wəwāhə. - "I struck with a knife."	The postposition sara can be dropped without changing meaning.
Pə	pəse	Pə Zəlmi pəse nə jəm. - "I cannot follow Zalmi."	-
Pə	Pore	Pə čā pore nə xāndəm. "I do not laugh at anyone."	-
pər	Bānde	Qalam pər mez bānde ixay. - "The pen is placed on the table."	The postposition bānde can be omitted.
pər	Sarbera	Pər xorāk sarbera cəxāk ham kaum. - "Besides eating, I also drink."	-
də	ləpāra	Də čakar ləpāra waxt nə larəm. - "I have no time for a walk."	Equivalent to ta (to) or pər (for).
də	γunde	Də mazdur ghunde ie wəgata. - "He worked like a laborer."	Same as pa cer or pa toga (as, like).
də	Kara	Də Acək kara melma yəm. - "I am a guest at Achak's house."	Alternative: Də Acək kara jam also correct.
də	– (non)	Də xār katəna, də melma dənāway, də mḷātaṛ. - "The visit of the city, the respect of the guest, the support of..."	Represents genitive (of) relation.
də	lə pāsa	Də γrə lə pāsa wrez xpara šwa. - "Clouds spread over the mountain."	The preposition də has many false forms.
də	lə lānde	Də wəne lə lānde kenāstəm. - "I sat under the tree."	-
də	lə məxe	Də wraze lə məxe xob nə kaum. - "I do not sleep during the day."	Lə məxe = based on, according to.
tər	Pore	Tər kor pore jəm. - "I go up to the house."	-
tər	Wrusta	Tər γarme wrusta kor ta jəm. - "I go home after lunch."	-
tər	cəxa	Tər zuza cəxa gul xə dəy. - "A flower is better than a thorn."	The postpositions cəxa, na, zəne can be dropped.
tər	Prata	Tər Zmarək prata bəl wror ham larəm. - "Besides Zomrak, I have another brother."	Prata = "except" or "besides."
tər	dənəna	Tər kor də nana. - "Inside the house."	-

Preposition	Postposition	Example	Remarks
tər	də bānde	Tər kor də bānde. - "Outside the house." -	
lə	Sara	Lə Sank sara jəm. - "I go with Sanak." -	False equivalents: rāhisa, pə rāhise, rahise rā pə de xwā.
lə	sara sara	Lə nūruyi sara sara kār ta wlārəm. - "Despite illness, I go to work." -	
lə	cəxa	Lə xwāzəka cəxa me likāni wāxist. - "I took the pen from Khwazak." -	
lə	Wrusta	Lə ɣarmē wrusta kəli ta jəm. - "I go to the village after lunch." -	
lə	Prata	Lə rābaləliyo prata nābaləli ham rāyli wo. - "Besides the invited ones, uninvited ones also came." -	Barsera is incorrect in this context.
lə	Rāhise	La parūna rahise kār ta jəm. - "I go to work since yesterday." -	
lə	pə hise	La sabā pə hise lambā ta jəm. - "From tomorrow onward, I will go for bathing." -	Pə hise = after, later, beyond.
Be	cəxa (cə, na, jəne)	Be la ubo cəxa žwand nə šta. - "There is no life without water." -	Lə and cəxa can be omitted; poetic forms cə, na, jəne occur.
Wa	ta (la, lara)	Wa kor ta jəm. - "I go home." -	Wa is nonstandard; lə and lara are dialectal or poetic.
laka (də)	ɣunde, humra, hase, dāse	Zmarək laka Zarin ɣunde dəy. - "Zmarak is like Zarin." -	Də can replace the postposition for simile or measure.

(Zyar, 2017, pp. 110–112)

If the principles of grammatical research are as: "...Morphology carries out all these processes according to the specific characteristics of a given language, since every language possesses its own structure and particular combinations." (Taniwal, 2018, p. 191), then, in the sentences mentioned above, some prepositions have been incorrectly used in place of postpositions, and vice versa. This inconsistency may have occurred because researchers and writers have been influenced by neighboring languages, affected by translation, or have created artificial structures merely to justify their own usage. The shortcomings of these constructions are presented below, followed by their corrected and standardized forms.

Although the table is comprehensive, it still contains certain inaccuracies. In this article, some prepositions are considered accurate, while others are labeled inaccurate, and some are regarded as standard. However, what is the criterion for determining their accuracy or standardization? There seems to be no clear answer to this question.

The Preposition *pə* with Its Postpositions

The Preposition *pə* with Its Postpositions *ke*

The preposition *pə* combined with the postposition *ke* expresses a *locative (adverbial)* function within a sentence. In written form, it is necessary to include both the preposition and the postposition. However, in spoken language, omitting the preposition *pə* does not

create a semantic misunderstanding from a cognitive perspective. In contrast, if the postposition *ke* is omitted, the sentence meaning may change.

Table 2. Semantic Effects of Prepositions and Postpositions in Pashto Example Sentences Consider the following examples:

Full Form	Without Preposition (<i>pə</i>)	Without Postposition (<i>ke</i>)
Pə koṭa ke tiārə da. "It is dark in the room."	Koṭa ke tiārə da. "The room is dark."	Pə koṭa tiārə da. "It is dark on the room."

In the above table, the first example implies that *the entire environment of the room* its air, interior, ceiling, and overall space is dark. Here, *koṭa* (room) functions as the *locative container* of the darkness. In the second example, the sentence conveys nearly the same meaning. However, in the third example, where the postposition (*ke*) is omitted, the meaning of the sentence changes: it now suggests that *darkness lies above the room*, while the inside and surroundings of the room remain bright. If this latter meaning is intended, then the correct form of the sentence should be written as:

Pər koṭa bānde tiārə da. "It is dark over the room."

***pə* preposition with *sara* postposition**

Using the postposition (*sara*) together with the preposition (*pə*) in Pashto can be considered an influence from Persian and English. The combination of (*pə*) with (*ke*) and (*sara*) with (*la*) is grammatically correct in Pashto, but using both together is incorrect.

Table 3: See the following examples:

<i>pə - sara</i>	<i>Pə</i>	<i>Sara</i>
1- Pə čāṛa sara me wəwāhə. "I struck with a knife."	2- Pə čāṛa me wəwāhə. "I struck with a knife."	3- Čāṛe sara me wəwāhə. "I struck knife together."

In the first example, the influence of Persian and English is evident. Consider the following examples: (*Man ū rā bā čāqu zadam! / I struck him with a knife.*) We can observe that in these sentences, the English *with* and the Persian *bā* correspond in meaning to the Pashto postposition *sara*. Therefore, this cannot justify using the same structure in Pashto.

The preposition *pə* has, due to this and similar influences, become a common yet incorrect usage pattern. Unfortunately, it has spread widely among educated Pashto speakers particularly among those whose professional or academic environment does not primarily operate in Pashto.

This first example also creates additional semantic inaccuracies. The verb "to strike" does not precisely correspond to the natural function of a knife, which is *to cut*, *to sever*, or *to wound*—not *to hit*. Thus, a conceptual confusion arises: was *someone struck with a knife*, or was *the knife itself struck against something*?

In the second example, if the intended meaning is that the *motivation for the striking was because of the knife*, then the sentence is correct in its current form. Here, the word *čārə* (knife) does not represent the *instrument* used for striking, but rather the *cause of conflict* meaning that the fight or quarrel occurred *over* the knife, while the actual striking happened with *slaps*, *punches*, or some other means.

However, if the intended meaning is that the *knife* was the *instrument* of striking, then understanding the difference between the prepositions *pə* ("in/with") and *pər* ("on/upon") becomes crucial.

Examples:

1. *Pə čārə me wəwāhə* - "I struck because of the knife." (the knife is the *motive*)
2. *Pər čārə me wəwāhə* - "I struck with the knife." (the knife is the *instrument*)

If the *third example* is used according to its *intended meaning* , it is correct. However, if it conveys the *same sense as the second example* , it becomes *incorrect* . This is because, upon closer analysis, the sentence implies that *someone or something is taken and struck together with the knife* , which is semantically illogical. Therefore, the sentence should instead be written using the preposition *lə* rather than *pə* , as follows:

La čāre sara me wəwāhə - "I struck with the knife."

The preposition *pə* with the postposition *pəse*

Using the preposition *pə* together with the postposition *pəse* is common in everyday spoken Pashto. However, in writing, one must pay attention to whether *pə* is actually needed.

Any sentence that contains the postposition *pəse* does **not** require the preposition *pə*; omitting *pə* does not cause any semantic loss, and adding *pə* does not produce any semantic gain. Therefore, when *pə* is unnecessary, it is better not to use it.

Table 4. Consider the following examples:

Pə - pəse	Pəse	Pə
1. <i>Pə tiāre pəse raṇā da.</i> - "Light comes after darkness."	2. <i>Tiyāre pəse raṇā da.</i> - "Light comes after darkness."	3. <i>Pə tiyāre raṇā da.</i> - "There is light on the darkness."
1. <i>Pə doḍəy pəse obə cḅəm.</i> - "I drink water after eating bread."	2. <i>doḍəy pəse obə cḅəm.</i> - "I drink water after eating bread."	3. <i>Pə doḍəy obə cḅəm.</i> - "I drink water on bread."

We observe that in the first examples above, compared to the second ones—which represent the intended meaning—there is no semantic loss. However, in the third example, the meaning changes completely. Therefore, according to the structural principles of Pashto, the second examples are considered correct, because they convey complete meaning without the preposition (*pə*). Additionally, this omission contributes to brevity and clarity, making comprehension easier for both the reader and the listener.

The preposition *pə* with the postposition *pore*

The analysis of *pə-pəse* combinations is sufficient to explain how *pə-pore* behaves in Pashto. We present only examples here. In these structures, dropping the preposition *pə* does not cause any semantic loss, and keeping it does not add meaning. Therefore, based on natural Pashto usage, it is better not to include *pə* when it is unnecessary.

Table 5. A. *Pə - pore*

Pə - pore	Pore	Pə
<i>Pə čā pore nə xāndəm.</i> "I do not laugh at anyone."	<i>Čā pore nə xāndəm.</i> "I do not laugh at anyone."	<i>Pə čā nə xāndəm.</i> "I do not laugh on someone."

Just as in the *pə-pəse* constructions, here as well the dropping of the preposition *pə* causes no semantic loss, and its inclusion adds no meaningful value. Therefore, it is preferable not to use *pə* when it is unnecessary.

Note: In Pashto, the preposition *pə* can sometimes appear in sentences without any accompanying postposition. Frequent use of this pattern may create difficulties for Pashto speakers who understand the distinction between *pə* and *pər*. During reading, it may even

interrupt comprehension, similar to the problems we already face with the incorrect use of the prepositions *daa* and *la*. Consider the following examples:

- **Correct:** *Pa paḡtani dranax̄t* - "With Pashtun respect."
- **Correct:** *Las bār-uṛunki xrə ba me par yujəla walaṛ wo...* - "Ten load-bearing donkeys were standing on the stable."
- **Incorrect:** *Pər paḡtani dṛanax̄t*
- **Incorrect:** *Las bār-uṛunki xrə ba me pə yujəla ke walaṛ wo...* (Hotak, 2007, p. 33)

When errors occur in the explicit use of *pə*, its incorrect combination with other postpositions becomes inevitable. Therefore, when its omission does not harm the meaning or clarity of the sentence, it is preferable not to use it.

Pər preposition with its postpositions

The preposition *pər* with the postposition *bānde*

The combination of *pər* and *bānde* is typically used in written Pashto. If either the preposition *pər* or the postposition *bānde* is omitted, the meaning does not change, but at least one of them must be present in order to maintain grammatical correctness.

Table 6. Consider the following examples:

Pər – bānde	Pər	Bānde
1. Pər mez bānde iḡay. "It is placed on the table."	2. Pər mez iḡay. "It is placed on the table."	3. Mez bānde iḡay. "It is placed on the table."

We observe that all three examples are semantically complete. However, the first pattern, in which both the preposition *pər* and the postposition *bānde* appear together, represents the fully formed structure. In written Pashto, using both elements is generally considered preferable and more appropriate.

2- The preposition *pər* with the postposition *sarbera/barsera*

The postposition *sarbera/barsera* expresses the addition of one action, thing, or phenomenon on top of another.

Table 7.

Pər – sarbera/barsera	English Translation
Pər Ahmad barsera pər mā ham ḡamla šwe wa.	"Besides Ahmad, I was also attacked."
Pər mez sarbera pər čawkəy ham duṛe prate di.	"Along with the table, the chair is also covered with dust."

Using the preposition *pər* together with the postposition *sarbera/barsera* is essential, and omitting either one can create semantic errors.

Likewise, replacing *pər* with *pə* leads to both semantic and cognitive misunderstandings. Speakers who properly distinguish between *pə* and *pər* may interpret the first example (*Pə Ahmad sarbera pə mā ham brīd šaway.*) as meaning that Ahmad and I jointly carried out the attack, which is not the intended meaning.

When an interviewer once asked the late scholar (Allama) to clarify the contrast between *pə kāl* and *pər kāl*, he responded as follows: If the postposition *ke* accompanies it, then *pə* must be used, because in such cases the meaning involves a temporal container. There are two types of (adverbial "containers"): temporal containers and spatial containers. *Pə kor ke* "in the house" and *pə maktəb ke* "in the school" express spatial containment. *Pə pəsarli ke*

“in spring” expresses temporal containment. Likewise, *pə kāl ke dāse kege* or *dāse šawi* “this happens in the year” refers to a temporal container. Therefore, for spatial containment *pə* is preferable to *pər*, while for elevation *pər* is more appropriate than *pə* (Hotak, 2007, p. 33).

de preposition with its postpositions

The preposition *də* with the postposition *ləpāra*

In Pashto, *də* is also treated as a possessive marker, and its primary function is to show ownership or a genitive relationship. When *də* appears with the postposition *ləpāra*, it expresses a possessive or genitive relation for nouns and pronouns.

Consider the following examples:

1. *Də čakar ləpāra wəxt nə larəm.* “I do not have time for a walk.”
2. *Də həyə ləpāra kor axləm.* “I am buying a house for him.”

As we observe in these examples, the preposition *də* works together with the postposition *ləpāra* to express a possessive (genitive) relation for nouns and pronouns. Because *də* functions as the possessive marker for third-person referents in Pashto, neither the preposition nor the postposition can be omitted. If either one is dropped, the grammatical structure of the sentence becomes unnatural and falls outside the language’s inherent system, giving the impression that the speaker is either not a native Pashto speaker or has difficulty with Pashto grammar.

The preposition *də* with the postposition *yunde*

As explained earlier, *də* can function as a possessive marker in Pashto. The form *yunde* is a comparative-simile postposition that denotes resemblance (equivalent to “like, similar to, as, in the manner of”). Its semantic equivalents include *pə šān*, *pə daul*, *pə toga*, *pə cer*, and *laka*. Among these, *laka* and *yunde* are the most basic forms, where *laka* functions as a preposition and *yunde* as a postposition.

For these two forms (*laka ... yunde*), the presence of *də* is not necessary. However, in the other extended simile constructions (such as *pə šān*, *pə toga*, *pə cer*, etc.), the use of the preposition *də* becomes obligatory.

Table 8. See the following examples:

With <i>Də</i> - <i>yunde</i>	Without <i>Də</i> (still grammatical)	With <i>Laka</i> - <i>yunde</i>	With <i>Laka</i> only
1. <i>Də mazdur yunde ie wugata.</i> “He used it like a laborer.”	2. <i>Mazdur yunde ie wugata.</i> “He used it like a laborer.”	3. <i>Laka mazdur yunde ye wugata.</i> “As a laborer, he used it.”	4. <i>Laka mazdur ie wugata.</i> “He used it like a laborer.”

In the examples above, we see that for *yunde*, the preposition *laka* is a better choice than *də*, because here the emphasis is on similarity, not possessiveness. This means that *laka* and *yunde* are the strongest and most direct prepositions for expressing similarity. They create a clear, decisive comparison between the model of comparison and the thing being compared, rather than a weak or indirect resemblance.

The preposition *də* with other various postpositions

As mentioned earlier, *də* in Pashto functions as a possessive particle, and it performs more of a grammatical linker role than an independent preposition. Because of this, *də* can occur with many dependent and independent words as postpositions.

Consider the following examples:

1. *Də wrejo lānde hawā dapa da.* “Under the clouds the air is thick.”

2. *Də jāgre məxniway wəkrəy!* "Prevent the war!"
3. *Də wəḡo xeṭe ḡake krəy!* "Fill the bellies of the hungry!"
4. *Də maktub pə wasila me wərleḡalay...* "I sent it through a letter."

In the above examples, *də* functions as a possessive particle in Pashto. From a semantic point of view, whether it appears as a preposition or as a grammatical linker, it must indicate possession or an attributive relationship in both cases.

***tər* Preposition with its Postpositions**

tər* with the postposition *pore

The preposition *tər* used with the postposition *pore* expresses distance or spatial extent. In written Pashto, using both elements are necessary. In spoken language, either the preposition or postposition may drop without harming the meaning, although at least one of them must be present. The strong Pashto vowel *a* may attach to the end of the noun following *tər* and function as a substitute for the postposition *pore*.

Table 9. Consider the following examples:

Tər - pore	Pore	Tər - a	Alternative Combined Form
Tər kor pore jəm. - "I go up to the house."	Kor pore jəm. - "I go up to the house."	Tər kora jəm. - "I go up to the house."	Kora pore jəm. / Tər kora pore jəm. - "I go up to the house."

"All the sentences above are semantically complete, and for written Pashto, the form '*tər kor pore jəm*' ('I go up to the house') is the preferred and more appropriate construction."

The preposition *tər* with *cəxa*, *wrusta*, *məxke*, *prata*, *dənəna*, *dəbānde*, and similar postpositions

For *tər*, the only accurate and grammatically valid postposition is *pore*, because it completes the meaning, is semantically appropriate, is an independent clitic, and is used consistently across almost all Pashto dialects. Using *tər* with postpositions such as *cəxa* (from), *wrusta* (after), *məxke* (before), *prata* (except), *dənəna* (inside), or *dəbānde* (outside) is incorrect, artificial, forced, influenced by other languages, or shaped by dialect interference.

For example:

1. **Be lə tū nə šəm osedlay.** - "I cannot live without you."
2. **Prata lə tū nə šəm osedlay.** - "I cannot live without you."

The postposition *cəxa* is the correct and widely used postposition for the preposition *lə*, and its semantic equivalents are *na* and *a*. There is no need to use it together with the preposition *tər*, neither in writing nor in speech. Any sentence that attempts to express meaning through the combination *tər + cəxa* should instead be written with the combination *lə - cəxa*, which will be explained in the section on the preposition *lə*.

The preposition *lə* together with the postposition *sara* expresses accompaniment or togetherness

In spoken Pashto, the preposition *lə* may drop, but the postposition *sara* must remain, since it carries the core grammatical function.

Table 10. See the following examples:

Lə - Sara	Sara
1. Lə Ahmad sara rāylem. "I came with Ahmad."	2. Ahmad sara rāylem. "I came with Ahmad."

If the postposition *sara* is omitted from the sentence, the meaning and interpretation of the clause will change, and in such a case another postposition *cəxa* ("from") becomes necessary. This point will be clarified further in the section on the postposition *cəxa*.

lə preposition with the postposition sara-sara

The combination of *lə* with *sara-sara* emphasizes simultaneity or concurrence. In spoken Pashto, the preposition *lə* may be omitted; however, the postposition (*sara-sara*) cannot be dropped.

Table 11. Examples:

Lə - sara sara	Sara sara
1. <i>lə nūroghí sara sara rāyləm</i> "I came despite the illness."	2. <i>nūroghí sara sara rāyləm</i> "I came despite the illness."

3- la (preposition) with cəxa (postposition)

The postposition *cəxa* ("from") is used with the preposition *lə* to indicate *source* or *point of origin*. The forms *na* ("from") and *a* (reduced vowel = unstressed -a) function as its *semantic equivalents*. The postposition *cəxa* is clearer and more precise, whereas *na* can be confused with the *negative particle nə* ("not"), which may lead to semantic ambiguity.

In spoken Pashto, both the preposition *lə* and the postpositions (*cəxa*, *na*, *a*) may be omitted, while the intended meaning usually remains identifiable from context.

Table 12.

Lə - cəxa	Lə	cəxa
<i>lə xwanji cəxa(na&a) rāyləm</i> "I came from the school."	<i>lə xwanji rāyləm</i> "I came from school."	<i>xwanzay cəxa rāyləm</i> "(I) came from the school."

The preposition lə ('from') with the postpositions wrusta, prata, rāhista, and pə hise

The forms *wrusta* ("after"), *prata* ("without"), and *rāhista* ("since") are *free morphemes* in Pashto. The form *pə hise* is something I am encountering for the first time; it may belong to a specific Pashto dialect, but even then, its meaning remains *lexically independent*. Although these forms function as postpositions when combined with the preposition *lə* ("from"), strictly speaking, *postpositions in Pashto are bound morphemes*, and these items are not.

Another important point is that *a preposition and its postposition must express a single unified semantic relation*, not two different or conflicting meanings. However, when these free lexical items (*wrusta*, *prata*, *rāhista*, *pə hise*) are used as postpositions for the preposition *lə*, a mismatch occurs: *lə* ("from") expresses *source/origin*, while these forms express *different semantic domains* (temporal sequence, exception, duration, etc.).

In addition, many Pashto sentences can convey meaning *without either a preposition or a postposition*, but with these specific examples, removing the postposition changes the meaning, whereas removing *lə* is often acceptable.

Table 13. Consider the following examples:

Lə - cəxa	Wrusta	Lə - cəxa	Lə - cəxa - wrusta	cəxa
<i>lə ahmad cəxa wrusta rāyay</i> "He came after Ahmad."	<i>ahmad wrusta rāyay</i> "Ahmad came later."	<i>lə ahmad cəxa rāyay</i> "He came from Ahmad."	<i>lə ahmad wrusta rāyay</i> "He came after Ahmad."	<i>ahmad cəxa wrusta rāyay</i> "He came after Ahmad."

In the above examples involving the preposition *lə* ‘from’ and the postposition *wrusta* ‘after’, each sentence conveys a different meaning.

The prefix *be* (“without”)

[*Be ubo cəxa žwənd nəšta.*] “In this sentence, the prefix *be* is labeled as a preposition-like element. In my view, this is one of the greatest mistakes made by contemporary grammar writers, because such usage like the example above is entirely incorrect in Pashto, even if it is used as evidence to justify an argument or due to influence from other languages.

This is because our grammar scholars define *postpositions* as follows:

They are non-inflectional bound morphemes that do not carry meaning independently; rather, they express meaning only when they occur together with free morphemes. (Kheskay, 1387, p. 25)

And they define *affixes* in this way: Affixes are bound morphemes that express meaning only by attaching to free morphemes. By attaching either before or after a free morpheme, they create new meanings and form new lexical items. (Sherzad, 1399, p. 56)

Now, considering the above definitions, examine the following examples to determine whether *be* is a postposition (particle) or a derivational prefix.

Table 14.

Original Word	Negative Derived Form	Positive Derived Form
[obə] “water”	[be ubo] “without water”	[ubo wāla] “water-carrier / water-tanker”
[kor] “Home”	[be kora] “Homeless”	[kor wāla] “house-owner”
[kār] “work”	[be kāra] “unemployed”	[kār wāla] “employer / work-owner”

Table 15. Pay attention to the examples in the sentences.

Original Sentence	Negative Form	Positive Form
[obə də žwand artiū da] “Water is a necessity of life.”	[be ubo žwand saxt dəy] “Life without water is difficult.”	[ubo wāla moṭar rāyay] “The water-tanker arrived.”
[kor ləram] “I have a house.”	[be kora yəm] “I am homeless.”	[kor wāla rāyi] “The homeowner arrived.”

In the above examples, we observe that the words *be* and *wāla* function as affixes rather than adpositions. Likewise, throughout Pashto and in its written texts, the word *be* has been used – and continues to be used – as an affix. Calling this form a “preposition” is incorrect; doing so imposes artificial pressure on the structure of Pashto grammar. Assigning the label preposition to *be* and then inventing pseudo-postpositions for it, and expecting learners and readers to apply such a rule, will only exacerbate the linguistic problems of Pashto.

For example: *be ubo cəxa žwənd nəšta* (“There is no life without water”). Although the sentence conveys its intended meaning, it is not grammatically correct from the perspective of Pashto usage, because the postposition *səxa* (“from”) cannot, in any Pashto dialect, grammatically combine with the prefix *be*.

The particle *wa* as a prepositional dative marker

In the western dialects of Pashto, the particle *wa* is used in place of the dative *ta* “to”. However, *ta* is generally used across all Pashto dialects to indicate one of the participants (speaker, addressee, or third person) in a sentence.

Table 16. For example:

Pashto (Original)	Standard Pashto Usage
Wa kor ta zəm "I am going to thousee h."	kor ta zəm "I am going to thousee h."
Wa tata wā-im "He/she says to you!"	Wa tata wā-im "He/she says to you! He/she says to you!"
Wa ahmad ta ie likəm "I write to Ahmad."	ahmad ta ie likəm "I write to Ahmad."

In literary Pashto and most dialects, only *ta* is used, and the particle *wa* is not employed. In some other dialects, *la* or *lara* may be used instead of *ta*, but *wa* does not appear and is mostly restricted to colloquial speech.

The particle *wa* is an archaic dative marker that historically indicated the dative case along with *ta*. Its oldest trace remains in the western (Kandahari) dialect (Ziar, 2017, p. 209).

Discussion

This study is the first comprehensive investigation into the *semantic effects of Pashto prepositions and postpositions*. Previous works on Pashto grammar, such as those by Sherzad (2020), Kheshki (2008), and Zyar (2016), have addressed the grammatical structure of Pashto in a rather descriptive manner, primarily for pedagogical purposes. These studies have not adequately examined the semantic and functional relationships between prepositions and postpositions.

The present research critically analyzes and evaluates how these grammatical elements are described in the existing literature. It was found that many grammars books list multiple postpositions for a single preposition and vice versa, which does not align with the *natural* grammatical and semantic structure of the Pashto language.

For instance, in the example "*Be ubo cəxa žwənd nəšta*" ("There is no life from without water"), the prefix *be* ("without") has been incorrectly categorized as a preposition, while the addition of *cəxa* ("from") as a postposition is unnecessary. The structure of this sentence does not reflect the natural syntactic pattern of Pashto. A more grammatically accurate version would be "*Be ubo žwənd na kegi*" ("Life cannot exist without water").

Unlike earlier descriptions, this study organizes Pashto prepositions and postpositions according to their *semantic coherence* and *use in natural spoken Pashto*. For example, the following combinations were identified as grammatically and semantically consistent:

- *pə ... ke* → *Pə kor ke yəm* ("I am in the house.")
- *pər ... bānde* → *Qalam pər mez bānde ixay dəy* ("The pen is placed on the table.")
- *pər ... sarbera* → *Pər qaləm sarbera kitābcha ham larəm* ("In addition to a pen, I also have a notebook.")
- *lə ... sara* → *Lə Ahmad sara rāyləm* ("I came with Ahmad.")
- *lə ... cəxa* → *Lə kor cəxa rāyləm* ("I came from the house.")
- *tər ... pore* → *Tər kor pore ju* ("We go as far as the house.")
- *laka ... yunde* → *Laka gul gunde xkulay dəy* ("He is as beautiful as a flower.")
- *də ... pə shān / pə cer* → *Də gul pə šān xkulay dəy* ("He is beautiful like a flower.")

This classification, based on real spoken usage, demonstrates how the combination of prepositions and postpositions contributes to meaning in Pashto syntax.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes that Pashto prepositions and postpositions should be taught and analyzed within their *semantic and grammatical contexts* rather than through the influence of neighboring languages. Most traditional grammar texts were written for instructional purposes and have unintentionally introduced structural inaccuracies influenced by non-Pashto linguistic systems. A precise and context-based approach to teaching these elements will enhance the understanding and correct usage of Pashto grammar and prevent semantic confusion among learners and writers.

Conclusion

Prepositions and postpositions, considered auxiliary elements in a sentence, play a crucial role in conveying meaning. Incorrect usage of these elements can distort the sentence's meaning, misrepresent the author's intent, and prevent the reader from fully understanding the message. In Pashto, each preposition can have one or more corresponding postpositions. In some cases, the omission of a preposition or postposition does not render the sentence incomplete. However, if a writer intentionally or unintentionally neglects the proper use of these linguistic elements, the sentence's meaning and clarity are compromised. This study demonstrates how frequently used prepositions and postpositions interact to convey the precise meaning intended by the author or speaker, ensuring the reader or listener accurately receives the message. The analysis also identifies elements that are currently obsolete or restricted to certain dialects. Additionally, Pashto *pre-fixes* and *suffixes* are distinguished from prepositions and postpositions, whereas some grammars previously grouped them with prepositions. These findings emphasize the need for future research to focus specifically on the postpositions of the Pashto language.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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