

## Role of Pakistani Media Discourse in Shaping the Public Perception through Linguistic Devices

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### Abstract

*As language is not a transparent tool of conveying meaning from post structuralist perspective, media enjoys a power position in shaping the realities through discourse. With particular reference to Pakistan, media, in recent years, has attained a powerful position from where it establishes certain practices and is capable of influencing public opinion in the process of political representation. The speeches of prominent leaders of leading political parties have been selected to be reflected through leading newspapers of Pakistan. Those newspapers selected for representation are The Express Tribune, The News and Dawn. This study critically analyses lexical choices used in the news reports of the selected political speeches of prominent political leaders of Pakistan. Three angles of lexical items namely connotations, euphemism and metaphoric expressions were selected for the analysis of media reports. The theoretical framework surrounds the concept of power of discourse in shaping the realities. This research has identified specific patterns and meaningful tendencies in the media discourse when it deals with political speeches exclusively in Pakistani context. A significant difference in the selection of lexical choices is identified in the representation of different political leaders. Different newspapers adopt their preferred setting of lexical choice in the speech representation of various leaders.*

**Key Words:** Newspaper, Connotations, Euphemism, Metaphor

### Introduction

Recent studies analyzing social and linguistic dimensions particularly in media discourse have established discursivity in this institution, and this power standardizes and further regulates social life along with the creation of knowledge and beliefs with the means linguistic approach (Fowler, 1991). Linguistic variety in this discourse often develops specific views by generating favored social realities to attain specific targets and watch vested interests.

Moreover, researchers propounded that media influences the public perception. This power of media particularly print media constructs the meanings for its readers and in this way, it is called *hidden power*. To study how media transcripts are reorganized and transformed through various discourse surely can give insights what processes are involved in the media for reality construction.

With the above-mentioned perspective, Pakistani newspapers shape the representation of the national leaders as well as their political discourse resulting to influence the public perception. In this way media practices contribute to control the political scenario in general.

With this understanding, the political speeches delivered by Pakistani political leaders are featured persuasive techniques for their political agendas are published commonly in Pakistani English newspapers. This study is an attempt to apprehend the characteristics of English newspapers in Pakistan through the analysis of lexical choices. It is an attempt to understand the implicit practices of Pakistani newspapers.

### **News Discourse**

News discourse has some salient features. In this regard Reah (2002) is of the view that news items are “information about recent events that are of interest to a sufficiently large group, or that may affect the lives of a sufficiently large group” (p.4). According to these descriptions news is about the most recent happenings on one hand and on the other they are about the relatively important events though the term ‘important’ is relatively subjective. Moreover, news is the statement of much selected information. In this vein, Fowler (1991) thinks that print media chooses events in accordance with their news values, and they ensue from common values prevailed in a society for example ‘hierarchy’, ‘consensus’, ‘journalistic conventions’ and so on. Consequently, the information of news is not mere facts, but in a broad sense they contain ‘beliefs’, ‘values’, and ‘ideology’. Besides, in Fowler’s view news is not an important event in itself but it is a creation of collection and alteration of that real event.

Furthermore, the selection of information and events gives a limited and partial view to the readers as the majority of events remain without being selected in media reports. On the other hand the selection of news is generally accompanied by alteration and change due to different political, cultural and social reasons. Therefore, the world of information and news is not the actual and real world rather a world slanted and subjectively judged. The role of language, particularly the selection of words, in news formation is dominant. Fowler thinks that news is certainly not a true manifestation of reality. So it is insightful to discover the way of how language particularly selection of words, affects the readers’ perception of the events and the world.

Every language has a tendency to represent different aspects of the same reality in a different way and different languages are used in many countries for media discourse. Therefore, various languages used to represent the same event may affect the features of same reality of the world. It is a common assertion that print media discourse generally maintains its impartiality and objectivity in the representation. However, the practitioners of CDA, Critical Discourse Analysis, have a different point of view. In this connection, Richardson (2007) states that media discourse carries specialized and peculiar textual features, and those features can be understood by observing a particular type of its relationship with other agents of symbolic as well as material power.

Despite the fact that news discourse is considered to present facts objectively and without prejudice, it is not simply the presentation of reality as it presents values and their orientations. Therefore, lacking a critical ability makes it difficult for a reader to find the embedded values of those words.

It has been studied through various researches that print media reports demonstrate a number of features that are diverse from other types of discourses. For example, news reports mainly employ descending order to portray advancement in that particular event, and relatively critical news is presented along with semiotics. In addition, news discourse is frequently placed between colloquial and academic areas of language. The news discourse stresses the use of lexical items that belong to the essential level of understanding so as to be simpler for the perception of the reader. To summarize, newspaper discourse carries its own style and structure. Due to the deep rooted ideologies in language, people cannot identify its impact under the superficial language.

Post modern theorists believe that ideology is present in most of human actions. For example, van Dijk (1998) says that “ideologies are typically, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication” (p. 17). He is of the opinion that ideological analysis includes the examination of linguistic features of different structures at various levels of discourse. They include efficient expression along with the influence of ideological meanings, and that include surface structures, syntax, and most importantly lexicon. Regarding lexicon, the most common are the choice of words along with different connotations and the use of euphemisms. It is a common idea that to point out the same person or social issue, the user of a language normally has a choice of variety of words categorized on the basis of personal, social and cultural contexts. It is believed that this choice is normally ideologically based.

Consequently, the same news report are shaped differently by newspapers and it depends chiefly on the various ideological assumptions (Tabak & Fieze, 2018). Classification of lexicon in Halliday’s (1994) theory about linguistics is a key component of ideational structure. It maintains that the classification of lexical items is a central mode of people’s thinking. While persons belonging to various backgrounds have diverse social orientation and experiences; hence, they may develop dissimilar sociolinguistic capabilities. Moreover, this phenomenon might overpower their language tendency from the viewpoint of basic ideational experience. In this regard, Kress and Hodge (1979) present their point of view that this sort of classification has been considered as the linguistic categorization of the globe.

Fairclough (1989) is of the opinion that, “the structure of a vocabulary is ideologically based” (p. 115). In the similar vein, van Dijk (1988) claims that every newspaper reflects “opinion-controlled lexical choices”. Furthermore, this concept of classification is related with language and thought, and nobody can communicate ideas or lexicons to novel ideas, without classification, because they can just be presented through classification. In addition, classification is the depiction of the objects or events which are primarily recognized by diverse choices of lexical items. Xin (2005) thinks that lexical items transmit the imprint of society in general and of important and meaningful verdicts in particular. For instance, they pass on connoted and denoted meanings. In other words, language remains, normally, influenced by some ideology, and it influences lexical choices.

On the other hand, news discourse may employ implicit techniques to hide the opinions as well as judgments in lexical choices. Van Dijk (1988) examines that

lexical choices may have specific semantic implications. Some theorists are of the view that lexical items carrying judgments should not be used in news reports (Bigot, Terrier, Jamet, Botherel, & Rouet, 2010).

Lexical classification, being an important analytical instrument, can efficiently facilitate to unveil the implicit meaning and intensions in texts. In this regard, Zhang (2009) stresses that linguistic items cannot be employed as a tool to portray images or events objectively; therefore, the concepts people attach on events and objects may not represent their true sense. For instance, the various dimension of the perspectives with the word like 'radical' and 'liberal', 'kill' and 'eliminate' and 'censorship' and 'restrictions' can represent different mindsets used to reflect the same phenomenon. Moreover, the choice of words between 'freedom fighter' and 'terrorist' or 'pro-choice' and 'pro-life' indicates favored and unfavored perspectives for the same phenomenon. Thus, the change of words can change the tone of sentences, and, thus, it can create an entirely dissimilar connotation. In so doing, the lexical preferences affect the impression that the audience receives from a news report.

Pu's (2005) theory separates lexical items in the following categories: commendatory, derogatory and neutral words. Commendatory words show the favorable attitude to describe things or events; derogatory terms reflect the negative attitude; neutral words show no comments in the description of objects, and they present facts. As a result, journalists may employ favored words, particularly adjectives and adverbs.

Pisarek (1983) is of the view that, "The lexical surface of the language of a journalistic text reflects and at the same time impresses upon a reader a specific image of the world and a particular attitude towards reality" (p. 157). It shows that when one lexical item is preferred over the other in a news report, the media person is in a position to decide how events are reflected and how the audience should comprehend them (Pape & Featherstone, 2005).

In using lexical choices in reporting news stories, the reporting verbs structure the sentences that come after them. Moreover, Bell (1991) says that these verbs have a tendency to express the writer's attitude: "the verb can be evaluative, keying the audience in how to interpret the speaker's statement" (p. 207). For instance, Bell (1991) and Caldas-Coulthard (1994) consider 'tell' and 'according to' as neutral (p. 206, 305). Furthermore, Merrill (1965, 73) considers 'smiled' and 'snapped' as instances of subjectivity, 'snapped' bearing negative connotation and 'smiled' having positive affect.

With the understanding of the role of the choice of vocabulary in media reports, Pakistani English newspapers actively report the political events on front pages; therefore, their role in the structuring of political environment needs a thorough exploration as they influence the public perception.

#### *Statement of Problem and Purpose*

Pakistani politicians use newspapers as a tool to portray their speeches to convey their message to masses. In this way they rely on the hidden power of media to change the public perception. However, the newspapers commonly manipulate the political affairs utilizing their power and authority to craft a favored perspective. The intention behind conducting this study is to comprehend practices of Pakistani English newspapers involved in the political process through the analysis of the choice of vocabulary.

## Material and Methods

Theorists of CDA have come to an agreement that lexical choices are ideologically contested, and words used for the text are in fact meaningful in contributing toward goals; therefore semantic perspective is of great importance in the present study. Fairclough (1989) says that significant are the words that befall in some texts because they have been chosen with free choice. Furthermore, he confirms that the construction of words is usually based on ideology. van Dijk (1988) thinks that a specific type of vocabulary items are used in news reports that have some peculiar features, and some are preferred over the others. In this regard, Wodak and Meyer (2001) think that critical discourse analysts take interest in discovering the connection of language with power.

To comprehend and appreciate the characteristics of Pakistani print media in the construction of semantic reality, the speech coverage reports of three Pakistani English newspapers have been selected: *The Express Tribune*, *The News*, and *Dawn*. Two speeches have been chosen: One is given by Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif who was the prime minister of the country, and the other is delivered by the popular leader in opposition, Mr. Imran Khan. Both of the speeches have been considered as a representative piece of discourse because it is a recognized and well known practice in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and in this way it gives a space to the researcher to feel liberty in the selection of text for the analysis. Therefore, only two speeches and not the others have been selected; similarly, three newspaper reports have been considered sufficient on each speech as representative of the whole Pakistani print media practices. The news reports of all the above-mentioned newspapers on different political speeches of different political figures have been analyzed with the perspective of their lexical choices.

This study focuses on lexical choices made by those news reports to reflect the speeches of both the political leaders. The perspective of analysis of lexical items constructing the reality is taken from Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of CDA. The special focus in this study, beside the choice of vocabulary, is on the use of connotations (adjectives and metaphors have also been added) and euphemistic expression in news reports.

## Results and Discussion

First and foremost, speech selected for the study was given by the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mian Nawaz Sharif, on electronic media on December 24, 2014. The main focus in the speech was terrorism. It was a high time because a great tragedy of Army Public School had befallen eight days ago. It was a callous terrorist activity taking around one hundred and fifty innocent children's life. The

speaker had just presided over a meeting, just before the speech, of political as well as army leadership, and it lasted about 10 hours, to conclude the action plan to cater terrorist activities in the country. So, the speech was delivered with the purpose of taking the nation in confidence about measures to be taken to deal terrorism with iron hand. At this critical time, reporters of newspapers were mindful of the subtle security situation and delicate political conditions in Pakistan.

Report presented by *The News*, focuses the contents and the details are published under various sections on the front page since it is a common tradition in news discourse. The portrayal of the event has constructed a reality and it is conveyed to the readers with a specific lens. With regard to reporting verbs together with their connotations and denotations, numerous evidences have been found in the principle clauses. For instance, to refer to the speaker the verbs like 'said', 'explained', 'assured', 'added', 'announced', etc. have been employed. This lexical choice for verbs reveals the presentational view of the report. The lexical items employed in the report have like connections and seem similar type of words, for instance: 'emotional tone', 'giving an ultimatum to the terrorists', 'strong action', 'marathon meeting', 'days are numbered', 'iron hand' etc. It indicates that majority of the report is permeated with what is mirrored from the selected examples. Another projecting example is 'constitution' in the sense of legally setting up military court. The report has employed the word for military courts when they were about to be permitted through constitutional amendment. In this context, the term 'constitution' in both senses is not without implicit intension.

Utterances in the report have not been used with euphemistic style to give positive impression. To cover up the negative things, the report has omitted that chunk of the speech; moreover, it has ignored numerous statements of the speaker before he could announce the twenty points of action plan. The other element analyzed was metaphor in the report and they are more or less the same employed by the speaker. Nevertheless, very few expressions with metaphors have been added: 'lauded', 'marathon', and 'butchery'. In other words, these additional expressions which are not the part of the actual speech give the impression that the newspaper is trying deliberately to set the perspective for its reader.

The second report selected for the analysis of the lexical choices used in the presentation of Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif's speech is of *Dawn* and it was the leading headline of the day. Significant lexical choices and their semantics along with connotations are having too short scope of investigation due to its format. The indications found are just 3 words: 'radicalization', 'special military courts' and 'hardened terrorists'. The term 'special' for military court is redundant since the formation of military court in democracy along with legal justice system, is a rare occurrence; same is the sense carried with 'hardened' for terrorists; the expression of 'radicalization' for terrorism is also an important term.

However, euphemistic expressions have been avoided and in place of it, majority of the contents have omitted. Even the report has used another heading for the twenty points of action plan. Metaphors are very few.

The third report used for the analysis of the first speech is taken from *The Express Tribune*. The vocabulary used in *The Express Tribune* is very significant. For instance, political parties are ‘approving’ the action plan while the PM is ‘describing’ it. Here the employment of verbs is significant. The tone of the text has been established through the critical terms like ‘atrocities’, ‘horrendous attack’, ‘massacre’, ‘eradicate’, ‘backing of nation’, ‘defining moment’, etc.

It is essential to comment that the report under study has combined the meeting of political parties and the speech of PM instead of providing arguments. Hence, lexical choices constitute the discourse that is not political but strong and nationalistic. A specific ideology is presented in the use of lexical choices.

Euphemistic expressions have been employed to provide a supportive image to expressions. Few examples can be provided: In the second paragraph, the formation of military courts has been portrayed as an ‘*establishment of special courts for speedy trial of terror suspects*’ just to avoid using the term of ‘military courts’. This expression has been reiterated in another place in the report. However, the term ‘military courts’ have been used later in the report in same context: “An amendment will be made in the Pakistan Army Act 1952 for the establishment of these courts. The number of military courts will be according to the number of terrorists in a province” (Manan, 25 December 2014).

The constitutional amendment has been mentioned earlier and the establishment of ‘*military courts*’ later. It appears to nullify any imprint of military rule. Metaphors used are almost similar that were used by the speaker. However, there have been some lexicons that were additional, for example, ‘massacre’, ‘marathon’, ‘defining moment’, ‘atrocities’, and ‘backing of nation’. These metaphors contribute to shape a specific ideology in the minds of the readers. Moreover, these expressions which are not the part of the speech set the tone of the report and these words can influence the minds of the reader.

The second speech selected for the study was of Imran Khan, the Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, in a *Jalsa* on June 7, 2014 Sialkot as a protest against the electoral rigging. This gathering was, in fact, a show of power through which the speaker intends to attain political gains.

The first newspaper, *The News*, reported the speech in three parts. The employment of adverbs and adjectives served the purpose of creating impact towards the main issues. For instance, ‘painfully late’, ‘no avail’, ‘activists’, ‘virtually impossible’, etc. have been used to emphasize the arguments. To take an example, the lexical item ‘activists’ has been deployed in the meaning of ‘worker’. This expression has been presented to generate a specific impression of PTI workers, and it provides a adverse connotation.

Though, the *Jalsa* has been named as ‘public meeting’ in the report, yet many other leaders who addressed the same crowd were giving speech to ‘rally’. It means expression ‘meeting’ has been used frequently, but the term ‘rally’ was once employed and that, too, for other speakers except Mr. Imran Khan. The term ‘*special*’ along with ‘security measures’ carries importance for hidden meaning when the text is about the occasion and not about the contents of speech.

Euphemistic expressions have not been identified during the study; though 'tsunami'. the cliché term has commonly been used by Mr. Imran Khan and he has employed this term in this speech also; however, the expression in headline as "tsunami would hit Bhawalpur on June 22" seems violent and forceful. The nearest translation of Urdu expression would be: "Tsunami is leading towards Bhawalpur on June 22". Variance between 'hit' and 'leading' has been found significant. The variation looks deliberate to construct the impression of damage by using this metaphor. Some more examples of similar ideological expression can be identified.

The news report published in *Dawn* regarding the speech delivered by Imran Khan has selected the reporting verbs very carefully and mostly neutral terminology, for example, 'said', 'told', 'added' is used. In early lines that are comprised of comments and not report, idiomatic expression like, '*make a clean breast of*' gives somewhat substantial variation in terms of semantics. Not extracting from the original content, the newspaper has generated the image of speaker's stance firstly, and secondly, supposition is there that PML-N has rigged election deliberately, and its biased opinion.

The expressions like 'stalwarts' for the rest of the leaders set a specific angle to set the mind of the readers to think in specific direction. This impression intensifies when the argument regarding Swiss bank accounts has been placed. Similar feel to intensify the portrayal has been identified in 'dispelled the impression'. Though the speaker has expressed his view about democracy, yet the newspaper has taken it as its comment.

Expressions like 'the port of call' have not genuinely been employed by the speaker in the speech. The above-mentioned expression has been used to avoid the negative impression of 'tsunami'; hence, euphemistic technique has been employed. Euphemism can also be identified regarding Mr. Khan's remarks about judiciary. This lexical choice used in this report takes the perspective of the speaker. It has avoided discussing the points the speaker spoke against judiciary and its role in the general elections of 2013.

The report published in *The News* deliberately omitted speaker's remarks about Geo TV and its owner, Mir Shakeel-ur-Rehman. It is quite contrary to the fact that Mr. Khan gave 8 minutes to this issue in actual speech. This all exclusion of points in the report can be studied under the concept of euphemism as it was an ethical responsibility to prepare a media report without any prior judgment, and this act may be considered as taking sides.

Moreover, 'stigma' and 'detecting the fraud' are few examples in the text tells how the newspaper has put a deliberate effort to construct a reality. In other words, these statements are being owned by the newspaper of reporter, and in this way, support the speaker's point of view. Hence, these expressions have ideological values. Again, the role of newspaper in creating a subjective reality through the use of words is evident.

Some statements like "the masses were getting restless with every passing day due to many issues" carry metaphoric perspectives since they said nothing in



concrete and objective form but have constructed an impact of factual matters. The most striking fact is the above quoted statement is that it is not uttered by Mr. Khan

The next report analyzed was of *The Express Tribune* that is comparatively a detailed report. The use of reporting verb shows on many places that the speaker is given a favorable coverage in the sense that favored terminologies have been employed. However, some expressions have conveyed the impression of intensity, for instance, 'alluding', 'swell', 'single stroke' etc.

So far as the study of euphemistic technique in the report is concerned, astonishingly, very few unambiguous expressions have been found. For instance: 'He requested the chief justice of Pakistan to feel the pulse of people and give justice to them'. With emphasis on the role of judiciary, Mr. Khan used punitive tone implicitly blaming it for the rigging; whereas, the report has employed very the mild tone along with euphemistic expressions to express the situation. In this way, it seems a deliberate effort of a newspaper to avoid any confrontation and give the favor to the speaker. 'Typing error' as a metaphor has been employed here in report though Mr. Khan uses the term of 'Typing error' as one of the so many ways of excuses against the rigging evidences. Anyhow, the newspaper has picked up 'typing error' and exploited it spacing a full first paragraph. This term has been treated on an ideological scale. Through this technique the newspaper wants its reader to believe the speaker's narrative.

## Conclusion

Though the speech of PM Mr. Sharif to Nation on December 24, 2014 is of eleven minutes, the report published in *The News* is nearly of 650 words and it is first part; whereas the number of words of complete report reaches to 2450. The report on speech published in *Dawn* is about 275 words although the entire report is about 1000 words. *The Express Tribune* has published a report on speech of about 180 words and the entire coverage of the event is in around 800 words. Furthermore, all the newspapers have included a picture on the front page with caption.

On the other side, *The News* has employed ideologically contested vocabulary; lexical choices opted to refer to the speaker depict positive connotations which construct his strong image; whereas, *Dawn* has avoided connotative expressions. *The Express Tribune* mostly uses denotations; however, a reasonable number of connotations have been used to portray the general tone of NS. Additionally, the earlier two reports avoided euphemism, but *The Express Tribune* describes speaker's views about military courts through euphemistic expressions. The reports selected for study have diverse evidences for using metaphors: *The News* uses metaphors; *The Express Tribune* does very little; and, *Dawn* deliberately avoids metaphoric lexicons. *The News* in its report has repeated *constitution, action and legislation etc.*; *The Express Tribune* repeatedly employed *terrorists, attacks, military*; however, *Dawn* does not repeat in its report terms and ideas.

For the speech coverage of Imran Khan at Sialkot (June 07, 2014), *The News* uses vocabulary having ideological connotations and also uses subtle adjectives

relatively opposite to two other newspapers. Furthermore, *The News* completely avoids euphemism contrary to *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune* where expressions to avoid negativity have been employed. All the under studied reports have employed metaphoric expressions.

In the overall analysis of the newspapers, *The Express Tribune* ignores the details given by the speaker but does not miss any major point covering the entire speech in 14 paragraphs. Although Mr. Khan spoke for 33 minutes, the report published in *The Express Tribune* is 4 times bigger than that of *The News* and 2 times bigger than that of *Dawn*.

With regard to the image of Mr. Khan, the report in *The News* tries to curtail through lexical choices; however, *Dawn* tries to construct and promote pro-democratic image. Contrary to the report published in *The News*, the report in *The Express Tribune* has constructed an influential and dominant image.

As a result, present study verifies that Pakistani English newspapers have the tendency to shape a particular reality and adopt different patterns of applying lexical choices in the presentation of political speeches. Notable amount of evidence shows that newspapers' reports about the political speeches tend to shape the perception of the readers through the use of specific shades of vocabulary.

To conclude, this study of lexical items proves that preferred choices are in practice in reports of Pakistani English newspapers about the political leaders; hence, they influence public perception. It means that biasness in the selection of lexicon is evident; consequently, media discourse, Pakistani print media at least, through the power of having access to readers and the power of choosing lexical items is influencing Pakistani political discourse.

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