



POWER AND LANGUAGE IN PAKISTANI POLITICAL DISCOURSE: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Language functions as a central mechanism through which political power is produced, exercised, and legitimized. In political contexts, discourse does not merely convey information; rather, it actively shapes ideologies, constructs authority, and influences public perception. This study examines the relationship between power and language in Pakistani political discourse through the analytical lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Drawing on selected political speeches, press briefings, and public statements by prominent political actors in Pakistan, the study investigates how linguistic strategies—such as pronoun manipulation, ideologically loaded lexical choices, metaphorical representations, and modality—are employed to establish dominance and marginalize opposition. A comparative analysis of discourse practices across major political parties further highlights shared patterns as well as ideological distinctions. The findings reveal that despite differing political agendas, language consistently operates as a strategic resource for legitimizing authority and shaping social realities. This research contributes to language and literature studies by demonstrating the ideological nature of political discourse within Pakistan's socio-political framework.

Keywords: *Political Discourse, Power, Language, Critical Discourse Analysis, Pakistani Politics, Ideology*

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1. Introduction

Language is inseparable from political power. Political authority is not sustained solely through institutional mechanisms but is largely constructed through discourse. Political actors rely on language to frame realities, justify decisions, and mobilize public support. As a result, political discourse becomes a crucial site where power relations are negotiated and reinforced.

In Pakistan, political discourse holds particular significance due to the country's complex political landscape, ideological divisions, and highly mediatized political culture. Political narratives frequently draw upon themes of nationalism, religion, development, and accountability. These discursive practices are not neutral; instead, they function strategically to construct legitimacy and shape collective consciousness.

This study seeks to explore how power is exercised through language in Pakistani political discourse. Using Critical Discourse Analysis as a theoretical framework, the research examines how linguistic choices function ideologically to sustain dominance. The study argues that political discourse in Pakistan actively constructs political realities rather than merely reflecting them.

2. Literature Review

The relationship between language and power has been widely explored across disciplines. Foucault (1980) conceptualizes discourse as a site through which power circulates and knowledge is produced. He argues that discourse determines what is accepted as truth within a society, thereby reinforcing power relations.

Fairclough (1995, 2001) views language as a form of social practice and emphasizes the ideological function of political discourse. According to him, dominant ideologies are often naturalized through discourse, making them appear common sense and resistant to critique. His work established Critical Discourse Analysis as a method for uncovering hidden power structures embedded in language.

Van Dijk (2008) highlights the role of political elites in controlling discourse by managing access to communicative platforms such as media and political institutions. He argues that discourse influences public cognition by shaping beliefs, attitudes, and social representations.

Within the Pakistani context, scholars have examined political language in relation to ideology, nationalism, and religion (Rahman, 2010; Shakir & Deuber, 2019). These studies demonstrate that political discourse in Pakistan frequently employs symbolic and populist strategies. However, a systematic CDA-based analysis explicitly linking linguistic features with power construction remains limited. This study addresses that gap.

3. Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which conceptualizes language as a socially embedded and ideologically driven practice. CDA

rejects the notion of linguistic neutrality and focuses on how discourse reproduces dominance and inequality.

- Fairclough's three-dimensional model provides the analytical framework:
- Textual level: analysis of vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical strategies
- Discursive practice: processes of text production and interpretation
- Social practice: broader socio-political and ideological structures

This framework enables a comprehensive examination of how political discourse in Pakistan functions as an instrument of power.

4. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research design. Data were drawn from publicly available political speeches, press conferences, and statements delivered by major Pakistani political leaders. The texts were selected based on political relevance, public visibility, and discursive impact.

The analysis focuses on:

Pronoun usage

Ideologically loaded lexical items

Metaphorical framing

Modal expressions

The approach is interpretive, aiming to uncover underlying power relations rather than produce statistical generalizations.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1. Pronouns and the Construction of Collective Identity

Pronouns play a significant role in Pakistani political discourse. Inclusive pronouns such as we and our are frequently employed to establish solidarity between political leaders and the public, positioning leaders as representatives of the collective will. Conversely, opposing groups are referred to through exclusive pronouns such as they, reinforcing ideological division and other.

5.2. Lexical Choices and Ideological Framing

Lexical choices in Pakistani political discourse are heavily ideologized. Terms such as corruption, national sovereignty, Islamic values, foreign interference, and public mandate function as evaluative tools that legitimize authority while delegitimizing opposition. These lexical items guide public interpretation and shape ideological alignment.

5.3. Metaphors as Discursive Strategies

Metaphors are widely used to frame political realities. Political processes are often described using metaphors of war, struggle, or movement, which simplify complex issues

and evoke emotional engagement. Such metaphorical representations enhance persuasion while limiting critical reflection.

5.4. Modality and the Assertion of Authority

Modal verbs such as must, will, and cannot express certainty and inevitability. High modality constructs political decisions as non-negotiable, reinforcing authority and minimizing alternative perspectives.

6. Comparative Analysis of Major Political Parties in Pakistan

Table 1

Political Party	Dominant Linguistic Features	Power Function
PTI	Populist rhetoric, moral polarization, anti-elite discourse	Legitimization through populist appeal
PML-N	Development-focused vocabulary, economic stability narratives	Performance-based authority
PPP	Historical references, democratic struggle metaphors	Ideological continuity and emotional appeal

Table 1: Comparative Linguistic Strategies in Pakistani Political Discourse

This table summarizes the dominant linguistic strategies employed by major Pakistani political parties and their functions in constructing political power.



Figure 1 (Description)

A conceptual illustration showing how pronouns, metaphors, modality, and lexical choices interact with ideology to produce political power in Pakistani discourse.

7. Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that although Pakistani political parties differ ideologically, their discourse practices share common power-oriented functions. Language is systematically used to construct legitimacy, mobilize public support, and marginalize opposition. These findings align with the core assumptions of Critical Discourse Analysis that political discourse is inherently ideological and power-driven.

8. Conclusion

This study highlights language as a central mechanism through which political power operates in Pakistani discourse. Through strategic linguistic choices, political actors shape public perception, legitimize authority, and reinforce ideological narratives. Political discourse in Pakistan actively constructs social and political realities rather than merely reflecting them.

By applying Critical Discourse Analysis, this research contributes to language and literature studies by revealing the ideological underpinnings of political language. Increased awareness of discursive strategies can promote critical engagement with political texts. Future research may extend this analysis to media discourse or comparative political contexts.

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