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EUPHEMISTIC UNDERSTATEMENT EMPLOYED AS A COUNTER-DISCOURSE STRATEGY IN NIZAMANI'S ARTICLE *IT IS OVER*

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Abstract

This study examines euphemistic understatement as a strategic rhetorical strategy in Pakistani youth counter-discourse specifically analysing how Gen-Z writers employ linguistic restraint to criticize economic inequality despite censorship restraints. While traditional scholarship sites understatement as an instrument used by ruling elite to reduce harm, this study reveals how marginalized groups overturn this function through restraint to elevate the rhetorical effect while maintaining plausible deniability. By employing Fairclough's CDA approach on Zorain Nizamani's article It is over, this study identifies instances of euphemistic understatement, categorized into three functional types: prophetic understatements (33%), dismissive understatements (44%) and euphemistic threats (23%). Each instance connects directly to economic grievances including housing unaffordability, employment precarity and intergenerational wealth inequality. Drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, this research reveals that economic precarity generates linguistic innovation with youth writers developing sophisticated rhetorical strategies that appropriate and invert power's linguistic tools. The article's rapid removal validates the effectiveness of these strategies which demonstrates that euphemistic understatement successfully communicates systemic critique while temporarily evading censorship. This research contributes to understanding how subordinated groups communicate economic critique in restrictive media environments and how material conditions shape generational discourse patterns.

Keywords: *CDA, Counter-Discourse, Doublespeak, Euphemism, Understatement.*

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1. Introduction

The most pressing challenges affecting the Pakistani Generation Z include the inability to afford a home and thus the housing becoming virtually unaffordable to young people in the cities, work-related issues including underemployment and wage stagnation despite required education levels and inflation that has deprived Pakistani youth of buying power by an unprecedented 30% over the past few years (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2025). These material realities generate a need of youth voice despite the oppressive media culture in Pakistan. This paper posits that euphemistic understatement has become one of the key weapons used by the Pakistani young writers to negotiate their way out of this situation. By not speaking much, they convey more and have a plausible deniability which offers a short-lived defence against censorship. The tactic flips the doublespeak game in which the speaker is in authority and employs understatement to hide the damage he has inflicted (Lutz, 2016). Pakistani youths on the other hand use understatement to make the truths known rather than conceal them but rather to lure the other into consciously acknowledging the truth through implicature which is a pragmatic act by which the reader comes to get unstated meaning or inference out of what has not been said. The restraint itself is rhetorical ammunition that indicates confidence as opposed to fear, inevitability as opposed to pleading and demand and cognitive participation as opposed to passive consumption. The article by Nizamani is a good example of such a phenomenon to analyse.

The article, written by a young Pakistani voice which speaks about intergenerational economic inequality is replete with advanced linguistic strategies that call for an extensive analysis. Furthermore, the removal of the article from the website confirms the efficacy of such strategies-the understatements, because they conveyed strong criticism as they were not only polite but were also communicated in a manner that appeared quite superficial. This study has integrated three academic discourses that are in a way separate despite the distinct linkages among them. First, it extends the scholarship of doublespeak and euphemism beyond the conventional emphasis on how power distorts the reality to show how powerless populations can re-use the same language apparatus of doublespeak and euphemism to conduct a counterattack (Lutz, 1999; Orwell, 1946).

Second, it adds to the new research area of youth counter-discourse studies providing accounts of particular rhetorical practices applied by Generation Z all over the world to voice economic grievances in limited communicative settings (Herrera, 2014; Loader et al., 2014). Third, it offers empirical linguistic study of media discourse of Pakistani media that has not been well developed despite the rich and conflicting Pakistani public sphere (Yusuf, 2013). This study is significant beyond the academic interest as the discussion of the Pakistani youth and the way they convey economic critique reflect more expansive trends of generational changes in political awareness, the development of resistance discourse with censorship and the connection between material circumstances

and the creativity of language. With economic precarity becoming the new reality of the youth around the world, whether it be the student debt crisis in Western countries or unemployment crisis in the Global South, the communicative practices that youths have evolved to express these conditions warrant an academic interest. The Pakistani youth writers such as Nizamani are not simply lamenting but they are defining a new age of more advanced forms of rhetoric that could prove to be the future of political expression in the age of augmented surveillance and censorship.

This study examines one piece of text as an instrumental case study in accordance with the methodology suggested by Stake (2005) to study specific cases that shed light on larger phenomena. Although it may seem unsubstantial to concentrate on a single article, the method allows implementing the close linguistic analysis that would unveil subtle pragmatic processes at work in counter-discourse. This study contributes to the knowledge about the adaptation of human communication to constraint and display creativity and sophistication where an everyday viewer could perceive only silence or submission.

1.1. Research Objectives

1. To identify the instances of euphemistic understatement in Nizamani's article that specifically address economic disparity.
2. To analyse how these euphemistic understatements function as counter-discourse strategy.

2. Literature Review

The systematic analysis of politically instigated manipulation of language traces back to Orwell's (1946) foundational essay Politics and the English Language that held that political anarchy leads to linguistic corruption which in turn facilitates further political dismantling in a vicious cycle. Euphemism is one of the main tools that allow making the unpleasant facts pleasant. The insight he obtained was that the purpose of such linguistic softening is to continue to serve the material political interests through softened language. Lutz (1989) built on the work of Orwell to elaborate his taxonomy of doublespeak into four main types: euphemism (turning the bad into the good or the neutral), jargon (expert language designed to exclude laypersons), gobbledygook (so much complexity that the meaning becomes lost) and inflated language (making the simple appear complex). Lutz (2016) was of the view that doublespeak essentially constitutes a twisted application of the social role of communication where it is serving the manipulator and not the recipient of the message. Precisely, Lutz (2016) identifies doublespeak as the language that feigns to convey information but in reality, it does not. It is a language that makes bad appear to be good, portrays the negative as positive the unpleasant is turned into seem acceptable and it is always flowing downwardly – from powerful to general public. Similarly, the study by Bolinger (1980) defines language as a loaded weapon and he is concerned about the impact of peaceful use of euphemism by governments and corporations to ensure their

hegemony. However, the fact that subjugated groups could be using euphemistic understatement as counter-hegemonic discourse has not been addressed in the previous studies. The recent studies are questioning this assumption but not in a systematic way. According to Chilton (2004), political language is capable of a variety of strategic purposes in a variety of situations and even the most blatant discourses presented as such on the surface can have different applications in real life. Kreuz and Roberts (1995) discovered that verbal irony which is closely related to euphemistic understatement is more effective when speakers are restricted to express it directly.

Although existing literature reflects how power applies understatement to reduce the damage, it lacks systematic analysis in terms of how marginalized groups can apply understatement to expose and counter the credibility and legitimacy of those in power. To fill that gap, this paper focuses on euphemistic understatement as a two-way linguistic process the role of which varies depending on who employs a particular euphemism and to which end it is directed.

2.1. Language, Power and Resistance

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a methodological approach that came into existence in the 1990s as a method that was explicitly dedicated to exposing how language reproduces or sustains the social inequality (Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1995, 2001; van Dijk, 1993). The three-dimensional model by Fairclough (1989, 1992, 1995, 2010) has also established a sound foundation in CDA frameworks. This framework gives vigorous theoretical foundations to the studies concerning the mechanism of euphemistic understatement. To comprehend the concept of counter-discourse in Pakistani media, one would have to understand the constraints of its structure that determine what can be published. The press in Pakistan functions in what Yusuf (2013) called a condition of bounded freedom. There exist formal protections of press freedom under the constitution in Pakistan but there are implicit censorship mechanisms that restrict the functioning of press freedom.

3. Methodology/ Theoretical Framework

This study employs Fairclough's (2010) three-dimensional model as the theoretical and methodological tool. This choice is both theoretically and practically compatible with the research objectives. CDA explicitly studies the power relations, therefore, it is best applied to analyse counter-discourse. The three-dimensional approach offers a systematic approach to relating micro-level features of linguistics to macro-level features of social structures to enable the study to prove how certain word choices in the article by Nizamani (2026) are connected to the larger context of economic inequality and the generation gap in Pakistan.

4. Results

The findings reveal that there are multiple instances of euphemistic understatement that can be concentrated to three functional categories. They operate in synergy to express economic grievances by the youth by maintaining the apparent restraint which allowed the publication of this article in the first place.

4.1. Inventory of Euphemistic Understatements

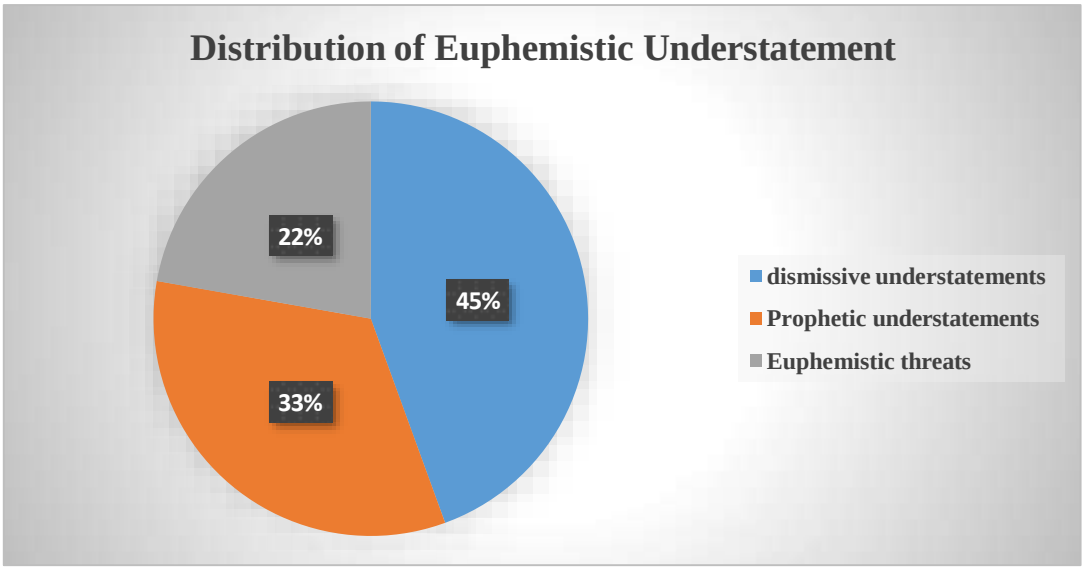
Systematic textual analysis revealed nine instances of understatement which meet all four criteria i.e. semantic gap, contextual evidence, strategic markers and economic connection. Table 1 provides the complete inventory with exact quotations, locations within the text and primary classification by purpose or function.

Table 1: *Inventory of Euphemistic Understatements*

Quotation	**Location**	**Functional Type**	**Economic Theme**
"Times are changing and the sooner you realise the better"	Opening section	Prophetic	Systemic failure
"Whatever you say is hysterical"	Media section	Dismissive	Elite disconnect
"We cannot afford to rent an apartment"	Economic section	Prophetic	Housing crisis
"The economy handed down to us is worse than your morals"	Economic section	Dismissive	Intergenerational theft
"You eat the finest of foods and drink only the cleanest of water"	Privilege section	Dismissive	Class inequality
"Why would you care?"	Throughout (repeated)	Dismissive	Elite indifference
"We continue to trudge along"	Resilience section	Prophetic	Youth endurance
"The other half will make you listen to their music and not in a good way"	Conclusion	Euphemistic threat	Future instability
"It's worn out"	Legitimacy section	Euphemistic threat	System collapse

It is not a random but a strategic distribution that is prevalent across the text. Prophetic understatements are seen in passages that define the general thesis and characterize material conditions. They take the situation as one of historically necessary change instead of contingent political struggle. Dismissive understatements are also concentrated in the text that are a critique of the establishment behaviour and attitudes. They are mild in their language but are contemptuous toward character indictments. Euphemistic threats are also found in the closing parts that warn about the consequences but in a language that is deliberately vague to create some ominous effect and still have a reasonable deniability.

***Figure 1**: Distribution of Euphemistic Understatement*



The majority of dismissive understatements (45%) is a result of the main rhetoric purpose of the article which is the delegitimization of power structures through exposing that the elite is no longer connected to the reality of younger generation. Prophetic understatements (33%) create the inevitability frame which makes generational change an inevitable historical process and not a political requirement that can be denied. Although smaller in number, Euphemistic threats (22%), are disproportionately weighty as implying consequences even as they are not explicitly stated which is a strategy to avoid the risk of censorship.

4.2. Prophetic Understatement

Prophetic understatements use strategically mild expressions to convey a revolutionary statement by framing the fundamental systemic change in the form of simple observation of natural processes. This rhetorical strategy employs the impersonal and factual language whereas in fact, it is performing a politically charged speech acts. This tendency is represented in three different instances each of which deals with one or another aspect of economic reality while keeping the same stylistic manipulation.

***Table 2:** Prophetic Understatements*

Instance	Mild Language	Implied Meaning	Textual Marker	Strategic Advantage
"Times are changing"	Neutral observation	Revolutionary transformation	Present continuous tense	Sounds like fact, not demand
"Cannot afford apartment"	Simple statement	Systemic economic failure	Parallel anaphora "Yes, we..."	Empirically unassailable

"Trudge along"	Persistence metaphor	Resilient autonomy	Subordination "Despite all that"	Conceals strength as weakness

4.3. Dismissive Understatement

Surface politeness or neutrality are employed in dismissive understatements to give scathing character indictments and establishments legitimization. This category is constituting the biggest percentage (44%) which demonstrates the main rhetorical endeavour of the article to show that ruling elite have lost credibility, moral ground and right to rule. This pattern can be demonstrated through four examples which apply various linguistic mechanisms to carry out dismissal by understatement.

Table 3: *Dismissive Understatements: Mechanisms and Effects*

Instance	Surface Tone	Actual Function	Linguistic Mechanism	Target Delegitimized
"Hysterical"	Casual observation	Complete dismissal	Polysemy (funny/irrational)	Government discourse
"Worse than your morals"	Factual comparison	Dual condemnation	Comparative structure	Economic and moral failure
"Finest foods/cleanest water"	Seeming praise	Class critique	Ironic superlatives	Elite consumption patterns
"Why would you care?"	Information request	Accusation of indifference	Rhetorical question	Elite concern claims

4.4. Euphemistic Threat

Euphemistic threats are the negative consequences not explicitly stated using carefully engineered vague language to establish an ominous effect and making the threats plausible to deny. This category includes the least number of instances (23%) but exerts disproportional rhetorical burden to bring element of threat to otherwise analytical discourse. Two evidences can reveal this pattern but each of them addresses the threat by employing different mechanisms of conveying it through understatement.

Table 4: *Euphemistic Threats: Vagueness and Implication*

Instance	Vague Language	Implied Threat	Conditional Element	Strategic Function
"Not in a good way"	Maximum ambiguity	Disruption/unrest	"If situation becomes unbearable"	Forces reader imagination
"Worn out"	Natural process metaphor	Complete illegitimacy	None (already complete)	Makes revolution sound inevitable

4.5. Economic Themes Across Understatements

Although every category of understatement is applied to a different rhetorical purpose, all of them relate to the economic grievances. Table 6 identifies each instance

with particular economic themes proving that the material inequality prevails the article despite the diversity in linguistic strategies.

Table 6: *Economic Content of Each Euphemistic Understatement*

Instance	Type	Economic Theme	Broader Economic Structure
Times changing	Prophetic	Systemic economic failure	Unsustainable model
Hysterical	Dismissive	Elite disconnect from material reality	Ideological crisis
Cannot afford apartment	Prophetic	Housing unaffordability	Blocked life transitions
Worse than morals	Dismissive	Economic harm exceeds moral harm	Priority inversion
Finest foods	Dismissive	Class consumption inequality	Visible privilege
Why would you care?	Dismissive	Elite insulation from consequences	Representation failure
Trudge along	Prophetic	Youth economic endurance	Permanent precarity
Not in a good way	Threat	Consequences of continued deprivation	Instability risk
Worn out	Threat	Legitimacy loss due to broken promises	Hegemonic crisis

This table reflects that the discussion of the economic themes starts with description of the current situation (housing costs, consumption inequality) and then moves to the analysis of underlying causes (elite disconnect, systemic failure) and finally projects the outcomes (instability, legitimacy crisis). The understatements are not just a list of grievances but they create a consistent argument regarding the economy: the system is flawed (prophetic), the elites are not able to fix it since they are not exposed to its consequences (dismissive), thus significant disruptive strategies (threat). The focus on economic and not on cultural or strictly political themes is a strategic move in a number of ways. First, economic complaints are empirically testable, there are housing prices and wage statistics and complaints cannot be as easily dismissed as opinion. Second, the issue of economic hardship is also universal among cohort of youth and this leads to generation solidarity that supersedes other division lines. Third, economic critique is not as ideologically loaded as overtly political critique which may make it appear less dangerous (but the sheer speed of the removal indicates that this tactic was not successful in its entirety). Fourth, economic framing creates the possibility of implicit class analysis without the need to use explicit Marxist or socialist vocabulary that can instantly result in censorship.

5. Discussion

The findings reveal that understatement can be employed on several simultaneous strategic levels such as avoiding censorship, maximizing rhetorical effectiveness,

developing interpretive communities and weaponizing restraint and is especially effective in economic grievances due to their empirical verifiability and universal youth experience.

5.1. Euphemistic Understatement Strategic Functions

Nizamani has employed understatement as a strategy through the mild use of "times are changing" as opposed to making direct accusations of corruption which he does to generate plausible deniability. This enabled the publication and distribution of the piece lasting 24 hours which is long enough to be screenshotted and saved but violent language would have been blocked instantly. Other than avoiding censors, this less is more strategy works because of the following reasons:

The meanings are implied and not expressed and the readers have to draw their own conclusions. This gives the ultimate conclusion that it was their discovery and hence more effective and difficult to refute. Writing in a kind of coded language, a connection develops between the young readers who undertake the language and connects them towards a feeling of shared identity and protest against an older establishment.

Nizamani comes across as being stronger and more commanding when he is speaking of the horrific economic statistics (such as the inability to afford housing). It is an indication that his facts are so real they do not require dramatics. This critique is more difficult to refute as the author concentrates on economic statistics instead of political slurs. It puts the ruling elite into a precarious position: either they admit that the economy is not doing well or look foolish by refusing to acknowledge facts.

Finally, the removal of the article was a sign that it was successful. The fact that such mild language can be censored left the authorities in the defensive and weak position and made the subtle points of the author actually the serious challenge to the status quo.

5.2. Inverting Doublespeak

The analysis reveals that euphemistic understatement is bi-directional, that is it can be used to benefit power elite by reducing harm or can serve as resistance discourse by forcing the acknowledgement of harm. This adds to the unidirectional model of traditional scholarship of doublespeak in which euphemism simply functions to serve the power institutions. The CDA paradigm by Fairclough (1989, 1992) foresaw this opportunity by introducing the ideas of appropriation and inversion that marginalized groups may reap the discursive techniques commonly deployed to subordinate them and use them as resistance. The article by Nizamani is such an example as it reflects the restrained, low-key language by which the oppressive regime accomplishes its process of violence obscuration. Nizamani employs the understatement to rather unveil, not conceal, to provoke a confrontation and not avoid it. This inversion is made possible by virtue of the fact that understatement is a phenomenon which acts by way of implicature and not in terms of natural semantic content. The same linguistic form (stating less than situation warrants) can be applied in reverse to what is understated and for what purpose. Harm

caused by 'power' is downplayed in order to reduce the outrage and the harm caused by power is also downplayed to generate cognitive dissonance when readers realize the difference between mild language and harsh reality. The theoretical contribution consists in showing that linguistic processes do not have an intrinsic ideological value. Like any other rhetorical strategy understatement works in the favour of whoever wields it. The politics is not in the form of language itself but in the context in which it is used, who is using it, to what extent and addressing what content. The studies on doublespeak must thus reject the belief that certain groups inherently use certain types of speech and that it can be assumed that the forms of doublespeak cross political agendas and that they can be used to suit all sorts of purposes. It has particularly implication far and beyond understatement. Provided that the subordinated groups are able to overturn euphemism, they may also be able to overturn other types of oppressive regime's rhetorical strategies such as establishing expertise, providing authority and insisting on civility. These appropriations and inversions are areas that critical discourse analysts should address and in which power relations are being challenged using linguistic innovation.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that economic precarity is a source of linguistic innovation as young writers devise intricate ways of complaining in spite of censorship. It is not only in the context of Pakistan but also elsewhere where youths are experiencing material deprivation and the institutions are not ready to accept or even consider the deprivation. The facing economic precarity of the youth in the global phenomenon (e.g., student debt in the West, unemployment in the Latin countries of Southern Europe, blocked opportunities in the entire Global South) constitutes communicative demands with the potential to give rise to the same linguistic novelty. The study also shows how the economic discourse offers comparatively safe ground in which the political criticism is offered. In a place where overtly political or ideologically based discourse is severely censored, it has strategic benefits to express the dissent in economic terms using empirical data and needs. This is an indication that economic discourse is one of the areas that scholars and activists studying resistance within restrictive contexts must consider carefully because political critique can be disguised. Moreover, the analysis unearths that counter-discourse does not require institutional resources or organization to be effective. The article by Nizamani is a product of an individual writer who has access to mainstream publication platform and uses refined rhetorical strategies but without organizational support. The linguistic innovation in this article emerged from restrictions and ingenuity as opposed to co-ordinated movement infrastructure. This has its consequences to how resistance is formed. Linguistic strategies can be the precursors of and not reliant on organizational forms.

7. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study focuses on single article as case study. Future research should endeavour to examine larger corpus of youth-authored economic discourses to determine whether patterns identified in this study recur consistently or represent eccentric instance.

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