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**Language, Ideology and Power: A Critical Discourse Analysis of  
Pakistani News Headlines on Electronic Media**



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**Abstract**

This study undertakes a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to systematically investigate the intersection of language, ideology, and power as enacted within Pakistani news headlines on electronic media. The study implies Three-Dimensional Model of CDA developed by Norman Fairclough, the research is founded on the argument that news discourse is never neutral but is instead a strategically manufactured product that is designed to reflect specific institutional and political interests. This is a qualitative analysis specifically select four different high-impact news headlines covering political affairs international, economic, and military themes. The analysis proceeds across three dimensions Text, Discursive Practice, and Socio-Cultural Practice to achieve its primary goal of moving beyond sentence structure to uncover the strategies that are used for manipulating public opinions. The findings reveal that news headlines consistently used specific linguistic features, including emotive lexical choices, and passive voice to obscure accountability, and rhetorical devices to construct dominant narratives. This current research demonstrates how these discursive patterns function to de-legitimize political opposition, reinforce institutional hegemony, construct narratives of victimhood, and normalize economic hardship among the populace.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Language Ideology, Power, Electronic Media, News Headlines, Fairclough's 3D Model, Pakistani Discourse.

### **1. Introduction**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) covers a vital area of research, dedicated to mapping the avenues through which analysts can uncover the hidden ideologies existing beneath the apparent simplicity of spoken or written discourse. This methodology of this study is founded on the idea that language is never a neutral vessel that is used for information rather it is inherently political and reflective of power dynamics. As McGregor (2006) asserts, "our words are never neutral." Similarly, Fiske (1994) supports the notion that language possesses the inherent capacity to reflect the specific interests of its producers.

In contemporary society, news itself is not merely a transparent reflection of social

reality but it is strategically constructed product that is shaped by commercial, political, and institutional requirements.

For the purposes of this research, the news headline serves as the fundamental textual unit. News headlines are strategically designed texts, operating under severe spatial constraints, which forces them to be maximally potent in their linguistic construction. This means that every word choice, grammatical structure, and rhetorical device is highly significant and plays very important role in designing news headlines. These lexical devices act as a powerful tool of the news organization's intended narrative. Headlines perform a dual ideological function: first, they prime the audience, establishing a framework through which the subsequent story will be interpreted; and second, particularly in the rapid-fire environment of electronic media, they often function as the definitive statement that informs public opinion, especially when audiences fail to consume the full report (Taiwo, 2007). Thus, analyzing these headlines on Pakistani electronic media provides a direct and high-impact pathway into understanding the procedure by which media discourse constructs social and political ideologies within the nation.

To understand this relationship between language, media, and power, this study employs the three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis developed by Norman Fairclough (1995). This comprehensive analytical framework concludes that any discursive event can be analyzed across three interconnected dimensions proposed by Fair Clough. Text (Description), which involves the linguistic analysis of the headline; Discursive Practice that is also called (Interpretation), which examines the processes of headline production, editing, and audience perception; and the last Sociocultural Practice (Explanation), which connects the discourse to the broader ideological and social structures of the society.

By Applying this CDA framework, this research focuses on the intersection of Language, Ideology, and Media by conducting a critical analysis of Pakistani News headlines on Electronic media. By identifying the specific linguistic, grammatical, and rhetorical choices embedded within these headlines, this study ultimately aims to dissect how ideological positions are constructed, reinforced, or contested within the fast-moving, politically charged environment of Pakistani news discourse.

### **1.2 Problem Statement**

The core problem is that despite the widely acknowledged sensationalism and political alignment of news production in Pakistan, there is an insufficient critical and systematic linguistic analysis that analyze how the concise, high-impact discourse of electronic media news headlines functionally embeds and reproduces specific power relations and dominant ideologies. Therefore, this Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aims to fill this gap by uncovering the strategic linguistic features in Pakistani news headlines, where language is used as a tool of power maintenance and ideological dissemination to manipulate public opinions and influence the national discourse.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

1. To identify the dominant linguistic and rhetorical strategies used in Pakistani electronic media news headlines.
2. To uncover the underlying ideological positions and biases embedded within the news headlines.
3. To examine how the language in these headlines constructs or reinforces particular power relations and social identities.
4. To determine the extent to which the language choices in news headlines contribute to the shaping or manipulation of public discourse and perception in Pakistan.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. What are the dominant linguistic and rhetorical strategies employed in Pakistani electronic media news headlines?
2. What ideological positions and biases are embedded within the news headlines concerning key issues in Pakistan?
3. How do the linguistic choices in the headlines construct or reinforce power relations between various social actors and institutions?
4. How do the identified discursive patterns in the headlines potentially influence or shape public perception of the reported events?

### **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

For the past few decades, research utilizing the paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has firmly positioned the media as a fundamental social and discursive institution an establishment that both reflects and shapes society. This study

focuses on the news headlines analysis presented in the Electronic Media particularly the socio culture analysis of news discourse and language to identify how power relation are embedded. The CDA has been developed significantly influenced by the work of prominent researchers such as Van Dijk (1985), Fairclough (1995a), Fowler (1991), Bell (1991), and Richardson (2007), among others.

The current study particularly adopts the CDA model proposed by Britain linguist Norman Fairclough (1995). Fairclough's model is distinctive because it aims to provide a detailed discourse analysis framework that provides a social and cultural analysis by integrating detailed textual examination. The model evaluates language in a focused context while simultaneously relating it within the dynamics of the larger community. Fairclough primary theoretical interest lies in examining language as an expression of power. His framework evaluates linguistic analysis of the text with social thought and politics, making it a prominent model for analyzing processes of social change.

Fairclough's fundamental model defines the use of language or discourse as a social practice, moving beyond its traditional view as a mere individual action or personal reflection. This framework has two major implications: first, discourse is a type of action where language is used to act upon the world and second, this framework recognizes that discourse and the overarching social structure are deep interconnected. For the analysis, Fairclough divides discourse into three dimensions: text, discursive practice, and social practice. The text dimension that is also called micro level analysis requires rigorous linguistic analysis, which involves identifying the lexical choices like text's vocabulary, semantics, and sentence order, along with evaluating its coherence and cohesion. The second dimension, 'discursive practice,' or interpretation level focuses on the processes of production and consumption of the texts being analyzed. The third and broadest dimension is 'social practice,' or macro level which roots the discourse within broader social and cultural practices.

In the context of media, Fairclough identifies three main categories of participants: journalists, media audiences (news readers), and public participants. The third dimension, discourse as 'social practice,' is critical as it explicitly links the discourse to ideology, power, and hegemony, thereby demonstrating how language can either reproduce or transform unequal power relations. Consequently, analyzing

this dimension, especially in highly debated topics within news headlines, necessitates looking past the literal text to investigate the complex relationship between journalism and the formation of ideology (Richardson, 2007).

## **2. Literature Review**

The critical study of media discourse is increasingly vital for understanding how linguistic choices in news presentation shape and reflect political and social ideologies. Within this field, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has emerged as methodology used for investigating the power dynamics embedded in language use, particularly in the concise yet impactful news headlines. The existing literature strongly establishes the foundation that news headlines are far from neutral information carriers; rather, they function as powerful ideological tools that strategically frame events, individuals, and movements to influence public perception. Hassan (n.d.) explicitly addresses this core relationship between language, media, and ideology in Pakistani news bulletins.

A significant body of academic work grounds its approach in examining the linguistic strategies employed by media organizations in politically charged environments. Scholars consistently focus on how mechanisms like lexical selection, rhetorical devices, and strategic omission are used to construct binary oppositions the Us vs. Them narrative essential for managing public opinion. Specifically, focused case studies have been instrumental in revealing the discursive operations employed when covering major national events, such as the analysis of headlines related to the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) by Butool et al. (n.d.). This work extends beyond traditional media, with analyses also incorporating digital platforms like social media. Shah (n.d.b), for instance, focuses on "Manipulating Public Perception" through the analysis of political headlines on social media, acknowledging that the speed and virality of online content amplify their manipulative potential.

Furthermore, the research highlights that the ideological function of news headlines extends beyond partisan politics to the reproduction of social stratification. Jamil (n.d.) uses a critical social analysis of newspapers' headlines to demonstrate how class-based hierarchies and interests are implicitly and explicitly validated or ignored by media gatekeepers. Headlines function to prioritize the concerns of the elite while often marginalizing the issues relevant to the working class, thereby

contributing to the cultural reproduction of inequality. This necessity for systematic analysis is further underpinned by the use of specialized frameworks, as demonstrated by Shah (n.d.a), who utilizes Carvalho's Framework for Media Discourse Analysis to structure the investigation of print media headlines. The ultimate goal of this collective body of research, particularly evident in the focus on the "Impact on Viewers" in Hassan's (n.d.) work, is to connect the linguistic features identified in the discourse to their real-world consequences, establishing a link between headline manipulation and its cognitive impact on the audience.

The existing literature, while comprehensive, reveals a distinct gap in the current scope of analysis. Many seminal studies employ a range of sophisticated theoretical frameworks, often synthesizing models like Carvalho's with broader CDA approaches, and frequently center their analysis on print media headlines or focus on one specific, high-profile political news event (Buttool et al., n.d.; Jamil, n.d.; Shah, n.d.a). In contrast, the current study is designed to overcome these limitations by specifically and exclusively applying Fairclough's three-dimensional model (text, discursive practice, and social practice). More crucially, this research focuses on the unique discursive environment of Urdu news presented in electronic media, a domain that, despite its massive reach and cultural impact in Pakistan, often receives less dedicated CDA attention than English print media. This targeted approach allows for a deeper and more culturally relevant understanding of how ideology is encoded and disseminated within the most consumed form of news in the region.

### **3. Methodology**

This research employs a qualitative research design centered on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate the complex interplay between language ideology and power as manifested in the news headlines of Pakistani electronic media. The qualitative approach is essential as the study seeks to conduct an in-depth interpretation of latent meanings, power dynamics, and the socio-political context embedded within media language, rather than focusing on quantifiable frequency counts. The analytical procedure is rigorously guided by Norman Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model. This framework provides a systematic, multi-layered approach to analysis: Text (Description) involves the linguistic analysis of the headline itself; Discursive Practice (Interpretation) examines the processes of the text's production

and consumption; and Socio-Cultural Practice (Explanation) critically links the discursive event to broader social power structures and ideologies. For data collection, the study utilized a purposive sampling approach, by observing and collecting breaking news headlines across various electronic media channels. The four distinct news headlines were selected specifically because they represented diverse and politically significant themes crucial to the study of power and ideology (covering political conflict, international relations, domestic economic crisis, and military affairs). The data analysis followed the sequential steps of the Fairclough model, beginning with the transcription and textual analysis of key linguistic features, progressing to the interpretation of media framing and audience reception, and culminating in a critical explanation of how these headlines enact and sustain specific power relations within the Pakistani socio-political environment.

## 5. Analysis

### Headline No.1



Translation: Spokesperson of the Pakistan Armed Forces declared the founder of PTI mentally ill.

The headline operates as a powerful instrument of state discourse, systematically attempting to disqualify the political opposition through the pathological language. At the textual level, the analysis focuses on the specific linguistic choices, or lexical choices, that build the meaning and ideological stance of the headline. The headline's syntax is simple and declarative, establishing a clear power dynamic. The active subject (Agent) is "ترجمان پاک افواج" (Spokesperson of the Pakistan Armed Forces), a phrase that carries immense institutional authority and state legitimacy in the Pakistani context. This choice immediately frames the statement as an official, weighty pronouncement. The direct object is "بانی پی ٹی آئی" (Founder of PTI). Crucially, the subject is identified by the clinical, stigmatizing label "ذہنی مريض" (Mentally Ill Person). This choice avoids all political terminology (like opponent, former Prime Minister, or politician) and functions to pathologize the subject, suggesting their actions stem from delusion and personal incapacity rather than

legitimate political motivation. The choice of the verb “قرار دے دیا” (declared) further emphasizes the finality and judicial nature of this powerful institution’s judgment.

The discursive practice dimension examines the processes of text production and consumption, which govern how the meaning is interpreted. In this case, the Producer is a complex entity involving two main actors. First, the primary producer is the Spokesperson of the Armed Forces, who initiated the declaration; the discourse is thus an institutional discourse designed to manage the political landscape. Second, and equally important, is the Electronic Media Outlet that chose to publish this specific statement as a headline. This media house seems to amplify the most inflammatory, stigmatizing aspect of the statement and present it as breaking news reveals an editorial choice that favors sensationalism and/or aligns with the powerful state institution. The Consumer is the mass public, which receives this headline instantly via electronic media. Their interpretation is governed by the social context: they are likely to interpret the statement not just as political mudslinging, but as an authoritative, definitive judgment given the source’s powerful position in society. The media’s production choice placing it in the genre of a “Breaking News” headline instructs the consumer to interpret the content as urgent and factual, masking its politically motivated nature. This practice makes the media a key agent in the contextualization of a political attack into a seemingly objective piece of news .

The final dimension addresses how this discursive event is embedded within the broader social structures, revealing how power and ideologies are embedded and reinforced. The headline is a stark manifestation of a particular language ideology where the language of the state/military institution holds supreme authority over the language of civilian leadership. The use of “mentally ill” serves the dominant ideology of de-legitimization, which is a powerful mechanism of social control: it attempts to neutralize a political threat by classifying the political actor as fundamentally “Other” unfit and unstable thereby managing public opinion and justifying potential repressive actions against him. This practice reinforces institutional hegemony, the process by which the dominant military structure exercises influence over civilian politics, and the media helps to naturalize this intervention. Furthermore, the headline embeds and exploits a destructive socio-cultural stigma surrounding mental health in Pakistani society. The discourse

weaponizes this stigma, suggesting that psychological instability is grounds for political exclusion. By equating political opposition with madness, the dominant power attempts to silence dissent and reinforce the existing asymmetrical power structure where the legitimacy of institutional authority is preserved by discrediting its political opponents' sanity. This is how the language choice in the news headline acts to reinforce and reproduce power relations in the socio-political sphere.

### **Headline No.2**



Translation : In Britain, restrictions have been placed on university admissions for Pakistani and Bangladeshi students

The textual analysis is centered on the headline's dramatic and emotive lexical choices. The most significant term is "پابندی لگا دی گئی" (restriction has been imposed). This term is highly charged, maximizing reader impact by framing the policy change as a definitive, punitive action rather than a procedural tightening of visa compliance rules. The headline uses a passive voice construction, deliberately omitting the active agent (the specific UK universities or the regulatory bodies) and instead focusing the reader's attention entirely on the victims identified explicitly as "پاکستانی اور بنگلہ دیشی طلبہ" (Pakistani and Bangladeshi students). This grouping of the two nationalities reinforces a perception of shared systemic targeting by an external power. The overall linguistic structure emphasizes the severity of the action and the national identity of those affected, effectively constructing a narrative of exclusion and national grievance through the choice of words.

At discursive level, the Producer (the electronic media channel) makes a strategic editorial decision to select and highlight the most sensational aspect of the UK's policy change by using the language of a ban. The media thus acts as a recontextualizer, transforming a bureaucratic decision potentially linked to high visa refusal rates or regulatory compliance into a compelling narrative of national affront. The headline is distributed in the high-impact genre of a news alert, instructing the Consumer (the mass audience) to interpret the event as an urgent, hostile act. This interpretation is often fueled by intertextuality, drawing on pre-existing national

narratives of external forces unjustly targeting Pakistan. By pairing ‘Pakistani’ and ‘Bangladeshi’ students, the discourse encourages an interpretation of shared victimhood by ‘South Asian’ entities at the hands of a ‘Western’ power, thereby mobilizing powerful, emotionally charged public sentiment over technical policy details.

And at the social practice level the headline is deeply embedded in the societal structures and power dynamics of international relations and domestic aspiration. The core ideology of power at play is the reinforcement of neo-colonial disparity, where the UK is perceived as a gatekeeper whose decisions drastically affect the educational and economic mobility of South Asian youth. By sensationalizing the restrictions, the media discourse taps into and exploits the high socio-cultural value placed on securing a Western education as a key pathway to success and emigration. This discourse contributes to the reproduction of a victimhood ideology a politically convenient narrative that attributes national setbacks and institutional failures to the actions of external powers. This focused blame effectively deflects critical attention away from internal socio-cultural and governmental issues, such as the need for tighter regulation of educational consultancy agents or addressing the root causes that drive high rates of visa default or asylum seeking. By framing the issue as unilateral oppression by the UK, the language choice in the news headline ultimately serves to solidify a particular nationalistic perspective while preserving the domestic status quo, demonstrating how power is maintained through the externalization of blame.

### **Headline No. 3**



Translation: Electricity consumers beware, be alert. Be ready to bear a new burden

The textual analysis of this headline reveals an escalating use of lexical choices to convey urgency and impending crisis. The text is generalized and highly emotive. It employs two distinct, successive warning imperatives: “بجلی صارفین خبردار، ہو شیار” “

Electricity consumers beware, be alert). The doubling of the warning serves as an immediate, intense rhetorical device designed to generate maximum anxiety and capture attention. The impending event is not quantified but is instead referred to abstractly as “نیا بوجہ” (a new burden). This abstract noun is a highly loaded metaphor for financial hardship (bills, taxes, fees) that resonates powerfully with the collective experience of economic struggle. The consumers are given a directive: “برداشت کرنے کو ہو جائیں تیار (be ready to bear). This grammatical structure positions the consumers as passive victims whose only agency lies in their readiness to endure the suffering, rather than their ability to question or resist the source of the burden. The language is purely sensational and evocative, replacing factual reporting with emotional mobilization.

At discursive level the Producer (the electronic media channel) makes a clear editorial choice to engage in a discourse of paternalistic warning and economic catastrophe. By framing the news with such alarming language, the media outlet positions itself as the vigilant guardian warning the populace, thereby enhancing its own credibility and viewer engagement. The production choice is to entirely forgo factual reporting (no figures, no regulatory source, no timing) in favor of pure emotive speculation. The Consumer (the mass audience) interprets this news through the persistent intertextual framework of economic crisis in Pakistan, where utility hikes and new taxes are chronic and expected. The headline’s ambiguity the “new burden” allows the consumer to fill the void with their worst fears, amplifying the overall sense of helplessness and impending financial doom. The discourse here is not about information but about managing public expectation preparing them psychologically for an inevitable, painful outcome determined by unseen powers.

At social practice level this headline is deeply embedded in, and actively reinforces, the core ideology of economic powerlessness prevalent in Pakistani society. The discourse establishes a highly asymmetrical power relation where the source of the “new burden” (the economic elite, regulatory bodies, or the government) is utterly dominant and faceless, and the common electricity user is reduced to a vulnerable subject who must simply prepare for and “endure” the consequences. The use of the powerful metaphor “new burden” reinforces the hegemony of the political-economic structure, suggesting that the suffering of the common citizen is an inescapable,

permanent requirement for the functioning of the state. By commanding citizens to “be ready to bear” this burden, the media’s language ideology subtly performs an act of social control it normalizes the expectation of hardship, diverting attention from critical scrutiny of the structural causes (like inefficient governance, corruption, or circular debt) and discouraging collective action or political resistance against the perpetual financial pressure. This mechanism helps sustain the status quo by channeling public energy into anxiety and preparation for suffering rather than demands for accountability.

**Headline No. 4**

The textual analysis highlights the use of highly emotive and superlative lexical choices to celebrate military success. The phrase “پھر چھا گئی” (has dominated again) is a powerful, informal idiomatic expression that transcends factual reporting. It signifies a repeated, decisive victory or overwhelming superiority, thereby elevating the technical missile test into a moment of national triumph and emphasizing the Navy’s continuous dominance. The word “شان دار مظاہرہ” (spectacular display) is a superlative adjective that frames the event as not merely successful, but aesthetically and militarily glorious. The headline focuses on the collective institutional Agent (پاک بحریہ) the actor, reinforcing the identity and status of the armed forces as the ultimate guarantor of national safety. The grammatical structure is an enthusiastic assertion, functioning as a celebratory declaration rather than a neutral piece of defense reporting.

The discursive practice reveals how the media recontextualizes a military exercise into a source of national psychological assurance. The Producer (the electronic media channel) makes an editorial decision to use language typical of a sporting victory or a dramatic achievement, not sober defense analysis, thereby maximizing positive emotional impact. The primary goal is to foster national unity and pride. The Consumer (the audience) interprets this headline against the

intertextual background of regional rivalries and security concerns. The discourse is meant to assure the public that the military is powerful, professionally competent, and capable of defending the national maritime borders against any threat.

At the socio-cultural level, this discourse is instrumental in reinforcing the ideology of militarism and national security as the preeminent state priority. The headline embeds and reproduces a power structure where the military institution is positioned as the nation's indispensable hero and savior. By using triumphalist language (eclipsed again), the discourse contributes to the naturalization of the military's pervasive role in the national consciousness and media narrative. This celebration of military powers serves a dual ideological function: domestically, it generates public confidence and diverts attention away from persistent socio-economic and political crises (like inflation or political instability); internationally, it projects a desired image of strength and deterrence. The constant highlighting of military success is a key mechanism of hegemony, solidifying the armed forces' institutional power and cultural prestige within the Pakistani state structure.

#### **4.5 Discussion**

The analysis of the selected Pakistani electronic media news headlines, executed through the lens of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, provides compelling empirical evidence supporting the study's central thesis: that the language of concise news headlines is a potent tool for the systematic exercise of power and the dissemination of dominant ideologies. The findings across the four analyzed themes consistently demonstrate that linguistic choices are not incidental but are strategically employed to structure public perception. The analysis demonstrates that Pakistani electronic media headlines function as strategically manufactured "ideological capsules" rather than neutral information carriers. By leveraging potent lexical choices and specific grammatical structures, such as the use of the passive voice to obscure accountability or clinical labels to anthologize dissent, these headlines actively construct asymmetrical power relations. The discourse consistently prioritizes institutional narratives, reinforcing hegemony and naturalizing social or economic hardships. This linguistic manipulation serves to prime public perception, framing complex socio-political events through lenses of nationalistic grievance, institutional superiority, or collective powerlessness. Ultimately, the study reveals that the brevity

of headlines is weaponized to disseminate dominant ideologies, ensuring that even a momentary glance reinforces the existing socio-political status quo.

### **5. Conclusion**

This research concludes that news headlines on Pakistani electronic media are not merely summaries of events but are powerful linguistic instruments used to reproduce and sustain dominant power structures. Through the application of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, the study reveals how media outlets utilize strategic lexical choices, emotive metaphors, and grammatical shifts to favor institutional narratives while marginalizing dissent. Whether through the pathologization of political figures, the normalization of economic burdens, or the cultivation of nationalistic pride, these headlines function to instill specific ideologies in the public consciousness. Ultimately, the study highlights a critical need for media literacy, as the common sense reality presented in rapid-fire headlines often masks a sophisticated mechanism of ideological control that maintains the socio-political status quo in Pakistan.

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