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**CONSTRUCTING IDEOLOGY THROUGH PRONOUNS: A
CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PERSUASIVE AND
MANIPULATIVE STRATEGIES IN IMRAN KHAN'S SPEECH**



Abida Khalil^{*1}, Syeda Aeman Hashmi²

*^{*1,2}MS English Linguistics at Foundation University Islamabad*

Abstract

In the current paper, the author analyzes the ways Imran Khan develops ideology, power relations, and political legitimacy in his April 16, 2022 post-ouster speech by use of personal pronouns and associated discursive methods. Although past literature has examined the subject of pronouns in political identity in various countries and in Pakistan, most of the studies concentrate on the pre-regime-change speech of Khan including the elections campaigns, UN addresses, victory speeches, and the dharna speeches. Little has been focused on the use of pronouns as persuasive and manipulative instruments during the time of political crises. This paper examines how the ideological meanings of victimhood, resistance and legitimacy following the removal of Khan to power are constructed by use of inclusion/exclusive pronouns, deletion of agents, use of evaluative expressions and interdiscursivity under the three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis model proposed by Fairclough. The results indicate that pronouns not just distinguish between allies and opponents but also rebuild collective identity, blame, and mobilise the popular sentiment by affixing ideological accounts to the 2022 sociopolitical landscape in Pakistan. Through combining pronoun use with a detailed CDA methodology, the study fills a major gap in the current study of Pakistani political rhetoric and emphasizes how seemingly simple grammatical decisions can be used as potent tools of ideology, sense-making, and influence.

INTRODUCTION

Political language plays a pivotal role in shaping political realities, public opinion, and the relational bonds between leaders and citizens. Speeches serve as important platforms for the negotiation of power and the advancement of ideological stances in modern political communication. In his speech on April 16, 2022, Imran Khan emphasizes how language is an active force that shapes public perception and determines political realities. He presents political discourse as a tool for establishing identity, legitimacy, and authority through deliberate linguistic choices. In this context, personal pronouns become implicit but powerful instruments for negotiating political power, forming identities, and blending leadership in national discourse. Pronoun usage facilitates alignment with supporters, separation from opponents, and the establishment of authority in both stable and turbulent political situations as political speeches increasingly become venues of ideological disputation.

Language, as articulated by Imran Khan in his April 16, 2022 speech, is more than just the rules of grammar; it provides a strategic means of influencing and manipulating the audience. The choice of personal pronouns (I, we, you and they) allows the speaker to create a sense of inclusion or exclusion, assignment of responsibility or allocation of blame, and a sense of opposition between the audience and himself. By making first- and second-person references, the speaker generates closeness with the audience, while making third-person references creates distance and ideological division. All of these pronouns can be utilized to build a political identity where the leader becomes the primary figure in the national conversation and where political realities are framed in ethical or moral terms. Therefore,

an analysis of pronouns will reveal how political leaders construct their persuasive strategies to manipulate public opinion and ideological alignment.

Despite the rise in research related to political discourse, there is limited investigation into the way that pronouns act as instruments for constructing ideological meaning, especially as this relates to political discourse in South Asia. In contrast, in Pakistan nearly all research about political discourse focused on political turmoil, protests, or regime changes, and failed to consider the fact that the pronoun choices of political leaders reflect the political identity, authority, and legitimacy of those political.

The current research aims to address the existing knowledge gap by analysing a political speech made by Imran Khan on the 16th April 2022 using Critical Discourse Analysis. It will focus on analysing how personal pronouns are used in constructing authority, solidarity and ideological positioning in political discourse. It will also look at how the choice of a particular pronoun affects the construction of meaning in political discourse based on Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional framework, i.e. as texts, discourse and society (socio-political dimension) and the way in which this influences the public's interpretation of politics in Pakistan and therefore the public's understanding of the ideology behind Pakistani politics. The goal was to build on existing research in this area to provide a better understanding of the development of Pakistani political discourse and how contemporary political leaders use language to create perceptions of legitimacy, as well as construct and consolidate their authority.

Literature Review:

Critical discourse analysis gives a strong framework for how language creates and maintains power, ideology, and social relations. The key concept of CDA is that discourse is not neutral; rather, it both portrays and molds ideological stances and societal structures. In particular, Fairclough's three-dimensional model is particularly useful for examining political speeches and rhetorical devices because it enables researchers to link textual elements (lexical, grammatical, and stylistic choices) with discursive practices and sociopolitical contexts. In order to examine how pronouns, as linguistic components, have persuasive and manipulative roles in the construction of ideology during times of political crisis, this study uses Fairclough's framework.

The strategic use of pronouns in political discourse is known as an important linguistic resource for shaping ideology and power and impacting public perspective. Foundational work by De Fina (1995) established that pronominal choices not only serve grammatical functions but are instrumental in shaping identity and social roles. Pandey (2004) further demonstrated how pronouns create cultural boundaries in discourse, especially through the formation of in-group (“us”) and out-group (“them”) categories—an idea later expanded by Gyuró (2015) and Ali (2017), who showed that inclusive pronouns enhance unity and national identity, while exclusive forms strengthen ideological polarization.

The researchers have also studied pronoun usage by political leaders in establishing identity, exerting authority, and gaining the public's confidence in Pakistan. Mah-e-Rab and Tahir (2025) stated that self-referential pronouns make the leader credible and establish a connection with the audience. Similarly, Jasim (2021), by using CDA with Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, demonstrated that Pakistani leaders strategically use pronouns as a way of maintaining their authority and influencing the public's perception.

Cross-contextual research strengthens this understanding. Liu 2024 demonstrated how the use of first-

person plural pronouns like "we" creates different group identities in institutions, which relates to how Khan changes "we" to mean his party, the nation, or a political movement. In similar fashion, Laiba Khan 2025, on her part, applied Fairclough's CDA to the speeches of Trump and showed how pronouns reflect power and ideas-providing a useful comparison for explaining speech strategies which Khan used during his political conflicts. More broadly in political studies, Dahnilyah 2017 analyzed Obama's speeches and found consistent patterns: "I" shows authority, "we" shows unity, and "they" shows opposition.

The narrower approach to the Imran Khan politics has been gaining momentum over recent years. According to Nusrat et al. (2020) and Afzal and Hassan (2021), the dharna and victory speeches of Khan shared similarities, and two major patterns could be identified:

- We because there is unity, common struggle, and national identity;
- They delegitimize the opponents;
- Purposive deletion of strategies to break down responsibility.

Through these studies, it is evident that the linguistic tactics of Khan are based on establishing moral binaries and mobilizing the general sentiments. Based on the three-dimensional model of Fairclough, Tahir, Nawaz, and Yousaf (2022) demonstrated that the UNGA speech of Khan was linked between lexical and pronominal options and the general ideological images of morality, nationalism, and victimhood. In more recent work, Khan speeches were analyzed by Kazmi, Hussain, and Ahmad (2023) after the regime change in 2022, and it was found that through the usage of the pronouns, the stories were built around injustice, resistance, and moral superiority, which was in close relation to the thematic context of the April 16, 2022 speech.

Altogether, the existing literature proves that pronouns are effective means of language to build ideologies, negotiate power relations, and create political identities. Nevertheless, available literature on Imran Khan mostly dwells upon his pre-ouster rhetoric - dharna speeches, electoral discourses, UN speeches, or overall political stance. Few studies focus on his after ouster address of April 16, 2022, even though this is a crucial event, characterized by political crisis, identity reconstruction, and ideological re-framing. Although previous literature discusses unity (we), opposition (they), and power (I) they fail to examine how pronouns are instrumental in creating victimhood, reclaiming credibility and organizing resistance after office removal.

This paper will fill these gaps through a critical discourse analysis of the post-ouster speech of Imran Khan based on a three-dimensional model proposed by Fairclough. The investigation of the usage of pronouns as one of the essential linguistic resources reveals the way in which ideological inferences, group identities, and convincing accounts are created at the very time of political crisis. It does not only incorporate textual patterns with discursive and sociopolitical analysis, it also offers context-related information on Pakistani political communication. By doing, the research will be able to cover a notable gap as it will serve to depict how pronouns can be used as the instruments of ideological control and strategic persuasion in a high-stakes post-ouster context and bring a subtle, theoretically informed insight to the current CDA literature.

Methodology:

This paper applies a qualitative research design based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyse the use of Imran Khan, an important political leader and figure in the 16 April 2022 post-ouster speech, to create meanings about an ideology using personal pronouns. The Fairclough three-dimensional model (textual, discursive, and social practice) is followed with the help of the socio-

cognitive approach of van Dijk and the discourse-historical principles developed by Wodak that assists in the analysis of pronominal-oriented ideological constructions.

Theoretical Framework:

The theoretical framework of this study is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), that perceives language as a sociopolitical social practice that both mirrors and influences the sociopolitical reality. The importance of CDA is that it pays attention to the discourse to construct ideology, determine power relations, and influence the common understanding, which are significant concerns when discussing political orations, CDA is an appropriate tool to use in the current study. Academics such as Fairclough (1992, 1995), van Dijk (1998, 2006), and Wodak (2001) posit that political discourse is highly ideological in that it tries to persuade people, prove certain positions right and wrong and disprove the antagonists. The use of pronouns has been recognized within this tradition as a strategic means of language used by political actors to negotiate audience attachment, agency or blame, and form in-groups and out-groups.

The three-dimensional model by Fairclough is the theoretical basis of the given research. To allow a systematic study of the interaction between linguistic features and more general ideological and sociopolitical arrangements, Fairclough views discourse analysis on three levels (interrelated) including the text, discursive practice, and social practice. The textual analysis primarily focuses on the use of personal pronouns in the speech by Imran Khan, who referred to himself as well as to the people on the post-ouster speech. The fact that pronouns are capable of altering reference frames and an opportunity to construct collective identities, claim credibility, blame, and generate ideological opposition makes them theoretically important. They are powerful manipulative and persuasion devices due to their contextual and changeable meanings.

On the discursive practice level, this paper analyses the creation, perception, and sharing of speech within a specific time in politics when there was a sense of political division, crisis, and activism of the people. Fairclough focuses on how already existing intertextual and interdiscursive resources are applied in discursive practices. The observations of Imran Khan thus merge with bigger stories of nationalism, populism, resistance and moral struggle that dominate Pakistani politics. Such interdiscursive elements affect the perception of the audience of the references to the pronouns and, consequently, the way they conceptualize the ideological framing of the speech. Therefore, the pronouns can be as well interpreted guides in that the listeners would be guided towards a certain ideological position besides being the linguistic indicators.

At the social practice level, the model by Fairclough relates textual options with other issues in the wider society, such as institutional configurations, political relations of power, and ideological conflicts. In this case, the use of pronouns is considered as the instrument of either supporting or opposing the existing political discourses. The formation of a unified we and an adversarial they as seen in the speech of Imran Khan is an indication and encouragement of greater ideological polarization within the political arena of Pakistan. This can be attributed to the concept of the ideological square by van Dijk who explains the features of the discourse where the in-group and the out-group are underscored and their demerits and merits respectively. Through these language styles, the speaker is able to justify his own politics and diminish the one of his opponent and control the masses as well as increase ideological polarization.

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Analytical Framework:

Imran Khan's post-ouster speech (April 16, 2022) employs personal pronouns, evaluative expressions, and religious-moral allusions to establish ideology, reinforce authority, discredit opponents, and spur public action. This analytical framework provides a comprehensive analysis of these strategies. This framework progresses step-by-step from the formation of collective identity to the development of individual authority, according to the format of the reference article. The portrayal of others as opponents, the application of moral principles, the creation of conspiracy theories, and the encouragement of public mobilization are all examined. Each level of analysis uses a Critical Discourse Analysis approach and is solely based on the speech itself.

Pronoun / Expression (English)	Textual Example (with timestamp)	Type	Ideological Function
Your children	"Your children will not forgive you." (39:07)	2nd person possessive	Emotional manipulation through vulnerability; uses family as moral leverage.
America / Americans	"Why is America upset with me?" (25:08)	External actor	External enemy construction; frames geopolitics as hostile interference.
This / That	"This nation will not accept slavery." (34:29)	Demonstrative	Creates polarisation, contrasting national dignity with subjugation.
Mir Jaffar	"I am not the Mir Jaffar of this country." (27:29)	Historical label	Extreme delegitimation; opponents equated with betrayal and treason.
I am not a boot-polisher	"I am not a cherry blossom boot polish." (27:28)	Metaphorical self-reference	Constructs anti-imperialist ideology, rejecting submission to foreign powers.
Religious 'I / We'	"I made a promise to Allah." (31:29); "When we pray..." (41:42)	Religious self-reference	Divine legitimisation: political stance is presented as religiously sanctioned.
Against us	"Against us." (47:30)	Collective victimisation	Frames institutions/actions as systematic oppression against the people.
We will not be slaves to America	(42:44)	Collective refusal	Resistance ideology, legitimised through nationalism and religion.
Jihad / Path of Truth	"Do jihad against the thieves." (43:16)	Religious directive	Moral absolutism; restricts alternative viewpoints using religious authority.
We want elections	(45:35)	Democratic collective	Claims democratic legitimacy; presents demands as people's will.

Collective Self-Representation through First-Person Plural Pronouns:

The repetition of the first-person plural pronouns (ham, humara, hamare) is a central aspect of the speech and serves as a strong mechanism for constructing collective identity. The use of these pronouns blurs the line between speaker and listener allowing Imran Khan to represent the nation rather than simply speak to it. For example, the word choices "hamara mulk" ("our country"), "hamari qaum" ("our people") and "hamari azadi" ("our freedom") all position political happenings as an experience of the nation as a whole, thus diminishing diversity and differences of opinion internally. This collective framing is ideologically significant. By repeatedly asserting "*yeh qaum ghulami nahi kare gi*" and "*America ki ghulami nahi karain ge*," the speaker constructs a homogeneous national will that is inherently resistant, moral, and unified. The pronoun "we" thus becomes an ideological device that naturalizes agreement and marginalizes alternative perspectives. Anyone who does not align with this collective "we" is implicitly positioned outside the nation's moral boundaries.

Construction of Personal Authority through First-Person Singular Pronouns:

After discussing the concepts of legitimizing one's own actions as an individual, in the previous paragraph, the analysis is focused back onto the way that leaders seem to establish their authority by using first person pronouns (e.g. meri, mera, mujhay). These pronouns allow leaders to claim authority as "good men", "brave", and "responsible" - through their moral foundations. The verbs used (e.g. meri zimmedari hai; main apnay logon ko kisi aur mulk ke liye qurban nahi kar sakta) indicate a moral obligation to lead, rather than simply a political one.

The act of self-victimization is key to understanding how self-transcending language works. The phrases "I was pressured" and "I was blackmailed" ("mujhay pressure dala gaya" and "mujhay blackmail karne ki koshish ki gayi") create an image of the speaker as being victimized by an injustice, as well as supporting the notion that moral leadership exists, and hence can be destroyed, through a corrupt system. Victimization becomes more than just a passive act of suffering; it creates an opportunity for moral superiority. The phrase, "I am not a Mir Jafar of my country," develops identity for the speaker by creating a fitting distance from historical acts of betrayal and establishing their identity in terms of loyalty and sacrifice.

Delegitimization of Opponents through Pronoun-Based Othering:

Along with presenting himself positively, the speech undermines the opponent's position by representing them as outsiders using pronouns and symbolic labels. The clear reference to the third person through "Mir Jafar" does not alter the meaning of the statement when the word itself is changed to a noun or historical reference. The meaning of the sentence can still be interpreted the same way in both examples. The use of "Mir Jafar", "zameer farosh", and "chor" was intended to create a strong moral stigma regarding the truthfulness and opportunistic nature of the opposition, thus removing any political or ethical legitimacy from them.

The strategy creates a strict two-group moral division "we" as virtuous (and loyal) and "they" as disloyal (corrupted or treasonous) to their nation. In addition, the repeated admonition, "apnay zameer ka sauda na karo," does not solely condemn corruption; it presents any opposition to the governing body as not only morally wrong but also a disloyalty towards one's own homeland. Thus, the speech diminishes the space available for discussion of political issues and turns disagreement into "treason."

Future-Oriented Warnings and Threat Construction:

A central persuasive mechanism in the speech is the use of **future-oriented warnings**, primarily articulated through second-person pronouns (*aap*). The audience receives personal messages with these pronouns and is thus held responsible for any moral decisions made by them today which will have consequences in the future *aap ka mustaqbil ka masla hai*” and “*aap ke bachay aap ko maaf nahi karain ge*”. These comments elicit feelings of fear, guilt and responsibility.

This strategy of persuasion places extreme emotional pressure on people by personalizing national crises. The future is not portrayed as being 'uncertain'; rather, the moral outcome is already predetermined—if you do not take action, your nation will be humiliated, and generations of your offspring will be condemned for that failure. The constant repetition of the phrase "You cannot be neutral" ("*aap neutral nahi ho sakte*") effectively removes any possibility of ideological impartiality from the audience, forcing them to take sides in a morally divided world.

Moral and Religious Positioning through Pronoun Use:

The framework further explains how religious discourse is integrated with pronoun usage to moralize political action. Expressions such as "*mera rab*," "*main ne allah se wada kiya*," and "*hum jab namaz parhtay hain*" combining an individual's faith with their broader religious community/collective identity. The use of the inclusive pronoun "*we*" turns religious practice into a collective moral obligation and strengthens the sense of ideological unity among believers.

The use of Qur’anic and Hadith references as well as quotations from respected individuals such as Maulana Rumi provides the basis for the strong moral basis of this speech. By combining these references with other command sayings, such as “*choron ke khilaf jihad karo*” and “*rah-e-haq par chalo*,” religion serves as a means of guiding and controlling politics and political behaviour. In this manner, political views are limited within each other by making it obligatory for an individual to see their resistance to political oppression as their duty to God.

External Conspiracy and Internal Betrayal Narratives:

The development of conspiracy storylines through the shifting of pronouns, which divert blame both internally and externally, is a key element of the larger framework. By creating references to outside sources (i.e., America) as in the statement of "*bhair mein saazish*," the narrative presents national politics as outside the realm of local influence; however, when referencing internal participants (i.e., "*zameen farosh*" or the London-based "*mastermind*"), the implication is that those individuals are cooperating with outside sources.

The possessive pronouns “*meri adlia*” and “*meri NAB*” are particularly significant. They create a sense of ownership towards that institution but also indicate betrayal from that institution. By using this dual framing around his situation, the speaker gains credibility as a person who is not part of a corrupt international–local relationship but acts alone against corruption both at home and abroad.

Mobilization and Call for Collective Action:

The framework culminates in an explicit call for **collective mobilization**, where pronouns transition from descriptive to performative functions. Commands such as “*sab ko apni galiyon aur shehron mein nikalna hai*” and “*hum ne pur-aman rehna hai*” transform discourse into action. The repeated address “*mere Pakistanio*” sustains emotional engagement and reinforces loyalty.

Here, pronouns function as organizational tools: “*we*” coordinates collective movement, “*you*”

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assigns responsibility, and “they” justifies resistance. Mobilization is framed as both a moral obligation and a national necessity, legitimizing protest while controlling its boundaries through calls for peaceful behavior.

Summary:

Imran Khan builds an ideological discourse using strategic pronoun use, predication, and pathos and ethos appeals to the extent that he predicts his own source of moral authority, rallies the citizens, and discredits opponents. The first-person singular (I / me / my) focuses on personal integrity and godly responsibility, the first-person plural (we / our) builds the collective identity and national unity, the second-person singular (you / your) empowers the citizens with the morality and political agency, and the third-person plural (they / their) constructs a negative out-group which employs immorality and illegitimacy. The textual and socio-cognitive strategies that have been manifested in the speech by Khan shows that pronouns are strong instruments of ideological power to create a perception, shape identity, and gain political action.

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