

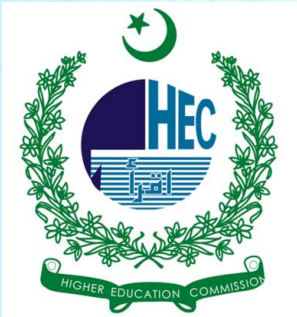
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**Domestication and Indigenization in Imran Khan's 2019 UNGA
Address: A Critical Discourse Analysis**



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Abstract

This study examines the domestication and indigenization strategies employed by former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan in his September 27, 2019 address to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Using Teun A. Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the analytical framework, the research investigates how Khan skillfully tailored internationally significant concerns—including corruption, Islamophobia, the Kashmir conflict, and climate change—to resonate with Pakistan's political and cultural milieu. The findings reveal that Khan purposefully deployed allusions to Islamic beliefs, patriotic rhetoric, and evocative language to construct a strong rapport with his domestic audience while simultaneously projecting Pakistan's position on the world stage. By incorporating linguistic and cultural elements into his speech, Khan effectively bridged the gap between global discourse and local reality, increasing both the impact and the relatability of his message. This study contributes to our understanding of how political leaders employ rhetorical and linguistic devices in international diplomacy, and calls for further research into the efficacy of such strategies in comparable cross-cultural political contexts.

1. Introduction

Language is the primary medium through which political leaders construct identity, negotiate power, and mobilize public sentiment. In the arena of international diplomacy, these functions are amplified: a single speech delivered before the United Nations General Assembly can simultaneously address domestic anxieties and project a nation's aspirations to the global community. This dual imperative—speaking locally while being heard globally—necessitates deliberate rhetorical strategies.

On September 27, 2019, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan delivered a landmark speech to the UNGA in which he addressed four interconnected global concerns: the Kashmir dispute, Islamophobia, climate change, and corruption. The speech attracted significant scholarly attention for its emotional intensity, its use of cultural and religious allusion, and its explicit challenge to Western narratives surrounding the Muslim world.

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

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Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as elaborated by Van Dijk (2001), offers an indispensable lens for unpacking the ideological underpinnings, power dynamics, and cognitive structures embedded in political language. Two concepts drawn from translation studies and sociolinguistics are particularly productive for this analysis: domestication—the adaptation of foreign or unfamiliar content to the linguistic and cultural norms of a target audience—and indigenization—the process of integrating external discourse into local cultural frameworks so that it resonates with indigenous values, beliefs, and social norms.

The present paper applies these concepts systematically to Khan's 2019 UNGA address, demonstrating how domestication and indigenization function as complementary rhetorical strategies that enable political leaders to navigate the competing demands of domestic and international communication.

1.1 Problem Statement

A growing body of scholarship has examined Imran Khan's UNGA speeches through the lenses of CDA, ecolinguistics, and Aristotelian rhetoric. However, a focused investigation of the mechanisms of domestication and indigenization in this address remains underrepresented in the literature. Understanding how linguistic choices in Khan's speech reflect culturally specific rhetorical strategies—and how these strategies negotiate between domestic political goals and international diplomatic objectives—constitutes the central problem this study addresses.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To assess the extent to which Khan employed relatable language and cultural analogies to engage his audience at the UNGA on September 27, 2019.
- To evaluate the mechanisms of indigenization and domestication deployed in the speech, with particular reference to regional history, customs, religious tradition, and linguistic register.

1.3 Research Questions

- RQ1: How are cultural and linguistic elements in Imran Khan's UNGA speech domestically adapted to resonate with the target audience?
- RQ2: What specific rhetorical and linguistic features indicate the operation of domestication and indigenization in the speech?

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the expanding field of political discourse analysis by illuminating the micro-level linguistic choices through which macro-level ideological positions are constructed and communicated. It also has practical implications for practitioners of diplomacy and political communication, offering a model for understanding how international addresses can be calibrated to serve domestic political needs without sacrificing their global persuasive function.

2. Literature Review

The theoretical foundations of this study rest at the intersection of Critical Discourse Analysis, translation theory, and political communication. Van Dijk's CDA model foregrounds the relationship between language, cognition, and social structure, arguing that discourse both reflects and reproduces ideological configurations (Van Dijk, 2000). Fairclough (1992) similarly treats discourse as a social practice, proposing a three-dimensional model that examines texts, discursive practices, and social structures in relation to one another.

Within the domain of translation studies, Baker (1999) established indigenization as a mechanism by which messages are rendered culturally intelligible to a target audience—a process that inevitably involves negotiation between source and target cultural frameworks. This concept has been productively extended to political communication, where leaders routinely adapt global concerns to local registers in order to maximize resonance and support.

Scholarship on Imran Khan's UNGA addresses has employed several analytical frameworks. Kinza et al. (2020) applied Fairclough's three-dimensional model to explore the Us vs. Them dichotomy in the speech, demonstrating how Khan's language constructs a clear boundary between Pakistani and Western ideological positions. Javaid et al. (2022) used Van Dijk's Ideological Square to examine the same address, revealing a consistent pattern of positive self-representation alongside negative other-presentation. Tayyab (2021) drew on Aristotle's rhetorical theory to analyse the persuasive architecture of the speech, finding evidence of deliberate ethos construction and strategic avoidance of potential criticism.

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

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The ecolinguistic dimension of Khan's discourse has also received attention. Shboul (2020) and Mansyur (2021) have demonstrated, in related contexts, how political leaders frame environmental concerns through culturally specific narratives that serve both domestic and international communicative functions. Akram Malik et al. (2020) applied both ecolinguistics and CDA to Khan's 2019 UNGA address, focusing on the ways in which ecological concerns are encoded within a broader ideological narrative of Pakistani victimhood and global responsibility.

Despite this growing body of literature, a systematic treatment of domestication and indigenization as paired mechanisms in Khan's rhetoric has yet to be undertaken. The present study addresses this gap.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

3.1 Van Dijk's CDA Model

Teun A. Van Dijk's model of Critical Discourse Analysis is distinguished by its integration of three analytical levels: the micro-level analysis of textual structures (lexical choices, syntactic patterns, rhetorical devices), the meso-level analysis of cognitive processes (context models, ideological schemas), and the macro-level analysis of social and political structures (power relations, institutional contexts). This tripartite framework enables the analyst to trace the pathways through which ideological content is encoded in specific linguistic choices and decoded by situated audiences.

Van Dijk (2006) characterizes ideology as a system of belief that functions simultaneously as a constituent of group identity, a legitimating force, and a mechanism of social reproduction. In political speech, ideology is operationalized through discourse structures that position speakers and audiences within particular relational configurations—most notably, the Us vs. Them dichotomy that organizes political self-presentation.

3.2 Domestication and Indigenization

In this study, domestication refers to the discursive process by which Khan adapts internationally framed issues—the Kashmir conflict, Islamophobia, climate change, and global corruption—to the cultural, historical, and emotional registers of his domestic Pakistani audience. Indigenization, by contrast, refers to the process by

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which Khan embeds global concerns within locally meaningful narrative frameworks, Islamic values, and indigenous historical experiences, thereby rendering them both intelligible and emotionally compelling to his primary audience.

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

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3.3 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative analytical approach. The primary data source is the official transcript and video recording of Imran Khan's speech at the 74th session of the UNGA, delivered on September 27, 2019. The analysis proceeds through close reading of the transcript, with attention to lexical choice, pronoun usage, metaphor, rhetorical questions, cultural allusion, and appeal to reading of the transcript, with attention to lexical choice, pronoun usage, metaphor, rhetorical questions, cultural allusion, and appeal to religious authority. Findings are organized thematically around the four principal discourse topics of the speech: the Kashmir dispute, Islamophobia, climate change, and corruption.

4. Data Analysis

The following sections present a systematic analysis of domestication and indigenization strategies across the four major thematic domains of Khan's UNGA address.

4.1 The Kashmir Dispute

4.1.1 Domestication

Khan's treatment of the Kashmir dispute exemplifies domestication through the embedding of the conflict within a larger narrative of Pakistan's historical suffering and betrayal. By invoking Pakistan's experiences in the Soviet-Afghan war and the War on Terror—including the 70,000 Pakistani lives lost and the significant economic damage sustained—Khan positions the Kashmir conflict as the latest episode in a long history of Pakistani sacrifice in the service of international peace. This historical framing makes the Kashmir issue immediately legible to a domestic audience whose collective memory is organized around precisely these experiences.

The emotional register of Khan's Kashmir discourse is equally significant. His detailed references to the detention of political leaders, the use of pellet guns against civilians, and the communications blackout in the region are designed to elicit a visceral response from Pakistani viewers by connecting abstract geopolitical disputes to concrete images of suffering that resonate with the domestic audience's sense of shared identity and shared grievance.

4.1.2 Indigenization

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

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Indigenization in this section operates through the invocation of comparisons between the RSS ideology underpinning India's Kashmir policy and the historical ideologies of Hitler and Mussolini. This comparison indigenizes the conflict by placing it within a globally recognized moral framework of resistance to fascism and extremism, while simultaneously appealing to Pakistani cultural and political sensibilities. By drawing parallels with Jewish suffering under the Holocaust and European experiences of totalitarianism, Khan renders the Kashmir dispute accessible to an international audience while ensuring that its moral urgency is felt domestically.

4.2 Islamophobia

4.2.1 Domestication

Khan's discussion of Islamophobia demonstrates domestication through the use of concrete, relatable examples from everyday Muslim experience. His reference to the criminalization of the hijab—"a woman can take off her clothes in some countries but she cannot put more on"—translates an abstract policy debate into an immediately comprehensible image of discrimination that resonates with Pakistani and Muslim audiences globally. Similarly, his reflection on the experience of Islamophobia while travelling abroad personalizes the phenomenon, grounding it in shared experience rather than abstract statistics.

The connection Khan draws between marginalization and radicalization is particularly effective as a domestication strategy: it frames Islamophobia not merely as a moral failing on the part of Western societies, but as a practical threat to global security, thereby enlisting the self-interest of international audiences in addressing it.

4.2.2 Indigenization

Indigenization in this section is achieved through Khan's invocation of Islamic foundational principles and the historical example of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). By presenting Islam as fundamentally a religion of justice and compassion—citing the Prophet's establishment of a welfare state in Medina that extended protection to minorities—Khan challenges Western misrepresentations by appealing to the authority of Islamic history and scripture. This strategy is deeply indigenizing: it grounds the discussion of Islamophobia in a framework of meaning that is central to Pakistani and Muslim identity, transforming what might otherwise be a defensive

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

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response into an affirmative assertion of Islamic values.

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

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4.3 Climate Change

4.3.1 Domestication

Khan domesticates climate change by foregrounding Pakistan's specific vulnerability to its effects: "Pakistan is among the top 10 nations in the world affected by climate change... 80 percent of our water comes from the glaciers and these are melting at an alarming pace." This statistical and geographical specificity transforms climate change from a global abstraction into an immediate national crisis, enabling Khan to appeal simultaneously to domestic concerns about water security and to the international community's sense of collective responsibility.

Khan's reference to Pakistan's tree-planting initiative in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—one billion trees planted in five years, with an ambitious target of ten billion—domesticates the issue further by positioning Pakistan as a proactive and responsible actor in the global climate response, thereby generating a source of national pride while underscoring the inadequacy of individual national efforts in the face of a planetary crisis.

4.3.2 Indigenization

Khan indigenizes the climate change discourse through a theological framework, expressing hope grounded in the belief that "the Almighty has given humans great powers" to overcome the challenges they face. This invocation of divine providence situates the climate crisis within an Islamic cosmological framework in which human stewardship of the natural world is a divine mandate—a frame of reference deeply embedded in Pakistani cultural and religious life.

Khan also indigenizes the issue by framing it as a question of global justice: "Rich countries who contribute the most to greenhouse gas emissions" bear a disproportionate responsibility for climate change, and their obligation to support poorer nations financially and technologically is presented as a matter of equity and fairness. This framing aligns with Pakistan's position as a developing nation and resonates with indigenous notions of justice and accountability.

4.4 Money Laundering and Corruption

4.4.1 Domestication

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

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Online ISSN: 3006-5895

Khan's treatment of corruption is grounded in the concrete economic realities of Pakistan: his reference to the quadrupling of national debt and the allocation of half of all government revenue to debt servicing domesticates a global issue of financial governance by connecting it to the lived economic experience of ordinary Pakistanis. By stating that "if we could access the looted money, we could spend it on human development," Khan makes the stakes of corruption tangible and immediate for his domestic audience.

His expression of frustration at the difficulty of recovering stolen assets from Western capitals further domesticates the issue by identifying a specific, practical obstacle that resonates with the Pakistani public's experience of institutional injustice and the asymmetry of global power.

4.4.2 Indigenization

Indigenization in this section is achieved through Khan's framing of global financial corruption as a structural injustice embedded in the international system. By calling on wealthy nations to demonstrate "political will" to stop capital flight from poor countries, and by demanding accountability from the World Bank, the IMF, and the Asian Development Bank, Khan indigenizes the corruption discourse by positioning it within a broader narrative of North-South inequality and the moral obligations of the powerful toward the vulnerable. His warning that "there will be a crisis soon if the rich get richer and the poor get poorer" further indigenizes the issue by situating it within an eschatological framework of imminent systemic collapse.

5. Linguistic and Cultural Elements

5.1 Cultural Allusions

Khan's speech is richly saturated with Islamic cultural allusions—quotations from or references to the Quran, invocations of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and appeals to Islamic principles of justice, compassion, and stewardship. These allusions serve a dual domesticating and indigenizing function: they signal solidarity with Pakistan's Muslim majority while simultaneously presenting Islam as a civilizationally significant tradition worthy of respect on the world stage.

Historical allusions are equally prominent. Khan's references to the partition of India, Pakistan's founding trauma, and the country's subsequent military and

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

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economic sacrifices situate his policy arguments within a narrative of national identity that his domestic audience can readily decode. These allusions function as shorthand for a complex of shared emotions—pride, grievance, resilience—that Khan mobilizes in support of his diplomatic objectives.

5.2 Emotive Language and Rhetorical Devices

Khan employs a range of emotive lexical choices—"ethnic cleansing," "genocide," "caged like animals," "bloodbath"—that are calibrated to generate intense emotional responses while simultaneously encoding specific ideological positions. The use of such language domesticates global human rights discourse by translating it into the affective register of Pakistani national consciousness.

Personal pronouns are deployed strategically throughout the speech to construct collective identity and shared responsibility. The consistent use of "we," "us," and "our" enacts a discursive inclusion that invites both domestic and international audiences to identify with Khan's perspective. Rhetorical questions and strategic repetition of key phrases reinforce the speech's central arguments and ensure their retention in the audience's memory.

5.3 Linguistic Register and Code-Switching

Despite being delivered in English—the institutional language of the UNGA—Khan's speech incorporates Urdu expressions and idioms that function as markers of cultural authenticity and solidarity with his Pakistani audience. This code-switching strategy is a form of indigenization: it signals that Khan is addressing his home audience even within the formal constraints of an international forum. The use of simplified, plain language alongside more formal diplomatic register ensures that the speech is accessible to audiences with varying levels of educational and linguistic capital.

6. Discussion

The analysis presented above demonstrates that domestication and indigenization operate as mutually reinforcing rhetorical strategies in Imran Khan's 2019 UNGA address. Rather than functioning as distinct or competing approaches, they work in concert to achieve a unified communicative goal: the alignment of global concerns with local experience, in order to generate both domestic political support and international diplomatic traction.

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

Khan's success in this regard reflects a sophisticated understanding of the dual audience structure of international political speech. His address was simultaneously a message to the global community—advocating for Kashmiri self-determination, calling for action on climate change, and demanding accountability for global financial corruption—and a performance of Pakistani national identity for a domestic audience watching via television and social media. The domestication and indigenization strategies he employed enabled him to pursue both objectives without sacrificing the coherence of either.

From a Van Dijk CDA perspective, Khan's speech exemplifies the ways in which ideology is encoded in discourse structures. The consistent deployment of the Us vs. Them dichotomy—Pakistan and the Muslim world as victims of international injustice; Western powers and India as agents of oppression—organizes the speech's ideological content around a clear moral binary that serves both domestic and international persuasive functions. This binary is domesticated through specific Pakistani historical references and indigenized through Islamic theological frameworks, ensuring that it resonates at multiple levels of the audience's cultural experience.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Imran Khan's 2019 UNGA address is a rich site for the analysis of domestication and indigenization as rhetorical strategies in international political communication. Through the systematic application of Van Dijk's CDA model, the analysis has revealed how Khan adapted global concerns to the cultural, historical, and emotional registers of his domestic Pakistani audience, while simultaneously projecting Pakistan's position on the world stage.

The four thematic domains examined—the Kashmir dispute, Islamophobia, climate change, and corruption—each exhibit distinct but interrelated domestication and indigenization strategies, including the use of Islamic allusion, historical reference, personal pronoun, emotive lexis, rhetorical question, code-switching, and appeals to global justice. Together, these strategies constitute a sophisticated communicative architecture that enables Khan to navigate the competing demands of

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domestic political communication and international diplomacy.

7.2 Recommendations

Future research should adopt a comparative approach, examining how domestication and indigenization strategies vary across different national and cultural contexts, and how their efficacy is affected by the specific geopolitical circumstances of the speaker. Longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of these strategies across multiple speeches by the same leader could also yield valuable insights into the relationship between changing political circumstances and shifting rhetorical choices. Finally, reception studies—examining how different audience segments actually decode these strategies—would significantly enrich our understanding of their communicative impact.

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