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Language & Power: A Corpus-Based Discourse Analysis of Protest Slogans

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Abstract

The paper explores both discursive practices of power, resistance and collective identity in internationally recognised protest slogans inspired by global movements such as Black Lives Matter, the Climate Justice Movement, the Feminist Movement and anti-authoritarian protests in South Asia. Using the theoretical framework of Norman Fairclough as the Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995), the study focuses on the analysis of protest slogans as three interconnecting levels of analysis using the textual, discursive practice and the social practice levels. Sixty protest slogans of data were gathered and coded into a customised corpus and tagged with TagAnt software (part-of-speech tagging) and AntConc (version 3.5.9) with frequency and concordance analyses of keywords. The methodology of the corpus allows conducting a systematic, repeatable analysis of lexical patterns, grammar structure, and rhetorical techniques, implementing an ideological work done by such texts. It is concluded that the protest slogans always use imperative mood, binary opposition, and evaluative lexis to create a clear moral aspect of contrast between the oppressed groups of people and dominant power structures. The slogans used serve as intertextual points that replicate both in the digital and the physical spheres and increase the influence of the idea. The results add to the ongoing corpus-aided critical discourse literature and highlight the analytical significance of short-form political texts to the understanding of the relationship between language, power and social change.

Keywords: Language, Power, Identity, Slogans, Discourse

1. Introduction

Background of the Study

The role of language in the relations of social and political strength has always held a privileged place. No single source is as highly concentrated in abilities of linguistic expression to challenge authority, mobilise people and restructure collective consciousness as the protest slogan. Throughout history, short, rhetorically strong statements have been used to challenge other power structures and express visions of other possible social orders through citizens, activists, and marginalised groups instigating change. From the anti-colonial cries of the twentieth century to the twenty-first century digital movements, protest lyrics have been the discursive structure of resistance culture, cementing intricate ideological standpoints in portable, attractive and emotionally evocative linguistic bundles (Tilly, 2004).

Protest language studies are at the junction of linguistics, political science, sociology, and cultural studies. In the context of linguistics more specifically, the appearance of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) paradigm has equipped researchers with formal means of analysing the social actuality that is created, reproduced, and occasionally subverted through language (Fairclough, 1995). The underlying premise of CDA is the assumption that no language is without politics; all linguistic practices, such as the choice of words and the ways these words are structurally organised, are constituted and configured by the preexisting power relations (Van Dijk, 2001). This approach turns CDA into an invaluable tool to examine protest slogans, which were usefully meant not only to interfere in the political discourse but also to transform the ideological environment.

The modern age has seen an unparalleled spread of protest movements throughout the world, with some of them engaging in creating slogans of extraordinary discursive force. The Black Lives Matter movement, which was sparked in 2013 in the United States but began to gain global voice quickly, created slogans that had centuries of racial injustice reduced into imperative, urgent demands. Efforts inspired by leaders like Greta Thunberg and movements like Extinction Rebellion have produced a body of language of environmental protest, both diagnosing ecological crisis and indicting the same on the political and economic systems that are its cause. The feminist movements of different national settings have produced slogans that question patriarchal beliefs and propose structural equality. Recently, Monsoon Uprising in Bangladesh and student-led actions in South Asia have given birth to protests involving domestically annotated, yet internationally disseminated, slogans, which have shown the transnational nature of modern protest discourse (Abir, Chowdhury and Rahman, 2025).

The main commonality of these various movements is found in the key role of language in building the collective identity, the definition of the antagonist and making the demand to change. Slogans are not a mirror of social realities that exist beforehand; they create social realities. By saying No Justice, No Peace, the activists are not merely expressing the lack of justice, but are creating a predicate to a relationship between social peace and the satisfaction of justice, and in the process formulating a political ultimatum by placing it within a memorable rhythmic equation. These slogans are both speech acts (making demands) and texts that constitute the identities of those who use them, whereby they identify the user into a shared subject with the common cause of grievance and common aim (Butler, 2015; Castells, 2012).

The onset of the digital revolution has radically changed how protest slogans are circulated by multiplying their reach manifold and making the process extremely rapid across the globe. Social media such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have allowed the dispersal of social media-created slogans within a single national location to engage immediate transnational exposure, mostly within hours of initial deployment. The hashtag has become the digitalisation of the protest slogan as a searchable, shareable and amplifiable piece of political speech, which has become analogous in a form of political oratory. An example of such practices is the slogan Black Lives Matter, where more than two billion tweets occurred in almost all countries of the globe, proving that the digital infrastructure can turn a local action into a global discursive one (Freelon, McIlwain and Clark, 2021). The circulation generated through this digital mediation brings up critical issues regarding the interaction of discursive characteristics of slogans with the structural characteristics of digital platforms to determine their ideological acceptance and political success.

Even though the political and linguistic importance of protest slogans could be proved demonstrably, this aspect of protest organisation drumming has been discussed very little in academic discourse studies. Longer and more institutionally legitimised texts like parliamentary or presidential speeches, policy documents and news media have, by far, monopolised the scholarly literature on political language. Although these studies have yielded valuable information regarding the connection between the language of politics and political authority, much of their work has ignored the discursive particularities and ideological labour undertaken by short-form activist writing. Such relative absence stands out especially because it has been clearly shown that slogans have been a very potent influence on modern political history and because corpus-based methodological tools that are good candidates to systematise large bodies of short texts continue to grow in sophistication (Baker et al., 2008).

The current investigation fills this gap by uniting the theoretical and methodological resources of both Fairclough's Three-Dimensional CDA model and corpus linguistics to explore protest slogans at the internationally recognised level in a systematic and theoretically-based manner. The paper discusses that corpus-supported CDA is an especially fruitful approach to the study of protest slogans, as it will allow the researcher both to find statistically significant patterns in lexical and grammatical usage and to interpretively richly analyse the patterns, placing them in their respective social and political backgrounds (Partington, Duguid and Taylor, 2013). Through the combination of the two strategies, the study is expected to generate results that are empirically and theoretically strong in furthering our knowledge about the role of protest slogans as a locus of ideological contest and discursive indemnification.

Problem Statement

The slogans of protest are one of the most distinctive expressions of political action; their ideological density has long been underestimated in the literature through systematic means. Although the scholars succeeded in using CDA productively in the analysis of political speeches, news media, and policy documents, the linguistic processes that it is through which protest slogans are created to construct power relationships as well as encode ideological positions and mobilise collective identity have been theorised and not empirically studied thoroughly. This is an especially notable gap considering the occasion of the spread of protest movements across the world in the post-2020 era and the growing role of slogan-based activism in the formation of social discourse around issues of racial justice, environmental crisis, gender equality, and democratic governance (Wodak and Forchtner, 2017).

Moreover, the corpus-based study of protest slogans is a methodological edge. The few studies which have implemented corpus methods in political language have focused more on longer texts, including political speeches and newspaper articles, which lend themselves more easily to the conventional corpus methods. The methodological adaptation and theoretical reflection necessary for the short, frequently fragmentary texts of protest slogans using corpus techniques are not yet completely available in existing scholarship. The current research thus fulfils a knowledge gap, namely the lack of understanding of the discursively relevant characteristics of protest slogans, and a methodological gap, namely the lack of corpus-based strategies to deal with short-form political text.

Research Objectives

- To examine the most frequently used words and lexical patterns in an internationally compiled corpus of protest slogans to identify the linguistic resources deployed to express collective demands for liberty, justice, and systemic change.
- To analyse how international protest slogans reflect and challenge power relations and ideological structures in society through the application of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of CDA.

Research Questions

- What are the most frequently used words in internationally recognised protest slogans, and what do these frequency patterns reveal about the ideological preoccupations of global protest movements?
- How do international protest slogans reflect, reproduce, and challenge power relations and ideological structures in contemporary society?

Significance of the Study

The study has a number of contributions to applied linguistics, discourse studies, and political communication. In theory, it will promote the usage of the Fairclough Three-Dimensional CDA model to short works in the political genre, and it is evidence of the analytical resourcefulness of this pattern outside of its traditional use on longer texts. The work thus adds to the existing discussions regarding CDA on the ways in which the model could be modified and adjusted to the unique characteristics of various types of texts (Wodak and Meyer, 2016).

The methodology of the paper also shows the usefulness of corpus-assisted methods to the critical analysis of protest slogans. As a combination of TagAnt software to perform part-of-speech tagging with AntConc software to perform frequency and concordance analysis, the study realises a replicable methodology process that can be used by other scholars on other corpora of activist texts. The empirically derived results of the study involve a comprehensive presentation of the linguistic and ideological characteristics of protest slogans in various movements worldwide, which leads to a better comparative picture of how language is used in resistance movements in different cultural and political settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Discourse Analysis: Theoretical Foundations and Development

Critical Discourse Analysis has emerged as a specific academic paradigm in the late 1980s/1990s, as a continuation of the previous traditions of critical linguistics, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis to create a methodology that explicitly anticipates the dependence of a relationship between language, power, and social structure (Fairclough, 1989; Wodak, 2009 In contrast to descriptive linguistics, which is more preoccupied with identifying and categorizing a linguistic configurations without necessarily being normative, CDA is preceded by a very clear political and ethical agenda: that of revealing how language is practised to create, reproduce, and make visible concerns in the world, predominantly in the forms of domination, inequality, and injustice.

The decisive role of the constructive work of Norman Fairclough has been fundamentally important to the formation of CDA as a theoretical framework and methodological practice. The Fairclough (1989) first book, Language and Power, permanently defined the fundamental assumption that discourse is a type of social practice inherent in a given historical and institutional setting, and the analysis of language should thus be concerned with both its textual nature and its social conditions of production and reception. This initial framework was further refined and elaborated over a sequence of influential papers that evolved into the Three-Dimensional Model (Fairclough, 1992, 1995, 2001; 2003). This model views any discursive event as a text, a discursive practice and a social practice, which allows the analyst to proceed systematically between the micro-level of linguistic form and the macro-level of social structure.

Complementary contributions on the CDA tradition have been made by other important contributors. The ideological discourse analysis work by Teun van Dijk introduced highly sophisticated conceptual means of comprehending how ideologies are encoded and discursively replicated on a linguistic level (Van Dijk, 2001; 2006). His ideological square concept, outlining the discursive approach of presenting oneself in a positive light and the other in a negative one, is especially applicable to the protest discourse. The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), by Ruth Wodak, has now provided valuable resources on how to trace out the historical aspects of the political discourse, showing how current political words are constructed using and relying on historical discourses, traditions, and memory (Wodak, 2009; Wodak and Meyer, 2016). More recently, Reisigl and Wodak (2016) have extended the DHA, offering a holistic methodological process of contextually sensitive discourse analysis that concursively considers the micro-textual and macro-social aspects of the political language.

Hart (2010) and Charteris-Black (2011) have added their names to the cognitive-rhetorical strand of CDA, showing how conceptual metaphor and other forms of cognitive-linguistic organisation syntactically support the ideological labour of political discourse. They are especially applicable to the interpretation of protest slogans, which typically involve the use of metaphorical framing in order to make the abstract (political) statement concrete and emotionally salient. Flowerdew and Richardson (2017) edited a valuable handbook that scans the modern situation of CDA through its major traditions and offers a sketched map of the field that guides the current study into a fruitful scholarly discussion.

Language, Power, Ideology in Political Discourse

One of the most important issues of contemporary sociolinguistics and discourse studies is the problem of language and power. Seen as a Foucaultian term that means power is diffuse and productive, that is, working through discourse and not a simple force that suppresses it, power in language does so in complicated and even perceptually implicit ways (Foucault, 1980). In part, dominant groups are strong and well off because of their ability to define what is considered legitimate discourse: what voices are represented, what can be discussed, and what sorts of ways of framing social reality are naturalised as common sense. One of the main accomplishments of CDA has been the theorisation of such a relationship between discursive power and social power.

Hegemony is a concept named after Antonio Gramsci, which was developed in CDA by Fairclough (1992) and others; it offers a valuable theoretical input to this relationship. Hegemony is the process by which the dominant groups retain their power not so much by coercion as by giving birth to consent, that is, by naturalising their interests as the interests of the whole society, and by naturalising their worldview as common sense. Protest slogans serve as counter-hegemonic texts in that they attempt to demystify this naturalisation, trying to denaturalise dominant ideologies, and making apparent the power relations that the hegemonic discourse hides (Gramsci, 1971).

Newer research has been focused on how exactly power and ideology are coded in protest speech. Zafar et al. (2023) have made a political discourse analysis of slogans used by Pakistani political parties and proved that slogans are used to encode ideological stances and create partisan self. Likewise, conducting a study on the subject of political party slogans, including Pakistani election slogans, Nadia Kaleem, Saeed, and Siraj (2022) have revealed that political appeal slogans are resonant ideological tools that build specific modes of political reality. Forchtner (2021) has looked at the connection between ideology, argumentation and identity within the discourse of far-right politics, which has offered valuable comparative insights into how political slogans encode and naturalise ideological positions at both ends of the political spectrum. All of these studies affirm the central role of ideological encoding in the short texts of political character and offer the analytical precedent to the concern of the current study with protest slogans.

Machin and Mayr (2012) have been especially handy in giving methodological guidelines to analysing ideological encoding in short political texts, showing how the choice of lexical patterns of transitivity and noun phrase structure can be utilised ideologically in visual versus verbal political communication. Although their multimodalism is not narrow at the same level of focus that was previously identified in the current study, as they are largely linguistic in their approach, the theoretical means that they offer are valuable towards the analysis of how protest slogans integrate both verbal and visual elements in the accomplishment of their ideological impact. Studied by Ponton (2021), the discursive construction of resistance and critique in different types of political speech adds to the theoretical background of counter-hegemonic discourse that lies behind the present study of protest slogans.

Protest Discourse, Social Movements, and Collective Identity

The belief that discourse is a core component of the creation and reproduction of collective identity - the sense of who we are, what we represent, etc., which is a key ingredient of collective political activity - had long been accepted in social movement theory. The Snow and Benford (1988) frame alignment explains the mechanism by which social movements construct interpretive frames in such a way that they identify injustice, blame, and seek solutions. Slogans of protests are coded versions of these frames, compressing within a small number of words the diagnosis of the problem that the movement presents, the blame that it lays and the change that it proposes. As an example, the slogan Black Lives Matter embeds a diagnostic frame, an attributive frame and a prescriptive frame with three words.

The development of collective identity by means of protest discourse has been the subject of much academic interest. As stressed by such scholars as Melucci (1996), Touraine (2002), and others, current social movements are both interested in the politics of identity and the politics of interests - movements do not only struggle over material objectives that they pursue but also challenge the cultural and discursive parameters according to which social groups are identified and appreciated. This politics of identity is rooted in protest slogans, which are instrumentalised as vessels that serve to interpellate the masses. The protesters are not just a statistical assertion in the arguments of We Are the 99% because they are asserting collectively about political identity: their identity as a group is structured around the contention against the 1 per cent.

The association of protest discourse and digital media has altered the structures of collective identity construction over the past few years. As Castells (2012) has suggested, networked social movements of the twenty-first century make up collective identity by sharing outrage and hope in the digital space, and the protest slogans play a significant role as nodes in the network of discursive solidarity. This dynamic is evident in Abir, Chowdhury and Rahman (2025) examining the Bangladesh Monsoon Uprising as sharing of the protest discourse mediated by Facebook influenced collective identity in the 2024 uprising. Shaheen et al. (2023) critically analyse the discourse of slogans in Pakistani movements protesting women's rights, which reveals how patriarchal ideologies are challenged through feminist slogans redefining gender relations in terms of rights, equality and justice. An almost similar investigation conducted on the manifestation of LGBTQ+ identities in slogans of the Sindh Moorat March (Inception-Journal of Languages and Literature, 2024), illustrating the complexity of intersectional discourse of protest in the Global South.

Methodology, Corpus Linguistics, and Critical Discourse Analysis: Integration

The combination of the corpus linguistics tools and the Critical Discourse Analysis is one of the most fruitful methodological insights into the analysis of political discourse in the past twenty years. Corpus linguistics introduces to CDA the ability to analyse large amounts of text systematically and quantitatively, allowing researchers to determine not just frequency effects, collocational preferences, and semantic prosodies that may otherwise be invisible to the naked eye but would otherwise form a principled empirical basis to qualitative interpretive claims. The theoretical and methodological backgrounds of what Baker et al. (2008) called "corpus-assisted discourse studies" (CADS) entail the premise that the union of the corpus and the critical discourse approach help the researcher to travel between the breadth and the depth of the investigation, respectively.

Corpus analysis via the AntConc software has found extensive application in applications of linguistics and discourse analysis. Anthony (2019) offers an easy-to-use interface to analyse keywords, concordance analysis, and collocational analysis that can be effectively used along with critical discourse analytical interpretation. Some recent studies have revealed that corpus analysis based on AntConc can be of great use to the study of political discourse. The study of Fairclough (2026) uses a critical discourse analysis of newspaper editorials in South Asian countries, referring to the framework developed by Fairclough as well as corpus tools. Akbar, Agassi and Yawata (2019) have shown how the Three-Dimensional Model can be applied to political banner campaigns. Durmaz (2022) used the Fairclough model of CDA for both the visual and textual aspects of political discourse, and Subtirelu and Baker (2018) reviewed the methodological changes in corpus-based CDA, which is an essential comment on the use of quantitative and qualitative methods in corpus-assisted discourse research. Partington, Duguid and Taylor (2013) have given a detailed handbook of the methodology of co-purse based to study political discourse, which helps to place the current study in the traditions of methodology.

Rhetorical Strategies in Protest Language

Scholars of rhetoric, discourse analysis and political communication have shown interest in the rhetorical qualities of protest slogans. One consistent observation in this literature is that the protest slogans made use of a quite limited set of rhetorical strategies in a very consistent way across movements, countries, and history. They feature imperative mood, which is used to give orders, binary opposition, which creates a moral boundary between one and the other, metaphor, which reformulates the political reality in emotionally charged words, repetition and parallelism, which make them easier to remember and to create a rhythmic effect, and presupposition, which claims ideological beliefs as unquestioned background knowledge (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Van Leeuwen,

Probably the most typical grammatical aspect of protest slogans is the imperative mood due to their core speech act as a demand or command to power. Slogans like Defund the Police, Stop the War, Save Our Planet and End Fossil Fuels all use the imperative to make the protester a subject to give command to a strong addressee. The use of intertextuality is also noteworthy: slogans tend to get their rhetorical strength through connection with previous texts. One of the best examples of how protest slogans can borrow authoritative or antagonistic discourse and rebrand it as a form of resistance can be seen in the slogan, "Nevertheless, She Persisted," which was created by the Senate Majority Leader, McConnell, to refer to the persistence of Senator Warren (Fairclough, 1992; Kristeva, 1980). The space of metaphor is also an important element: the environmentalist slogans like There Is No Planet B use the topography of commerce that positions the earth as a singular and irreplaceable resource and implicitly criticise the economic rationality that asserts that environmental devastation is a necessary and valid sacrifice of growth (Charteris-Black, 2011).

Globalisation, Transnational Activism, and Slogan Travel

Modern protest slogans move beyond the national borders and obtain new meanings, play new political roles on their way. On a global level, such as the appropriation of Black Lives Matter by movements in countries as disparate as the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and India, it was used to refer to the local manifestations of racism and caste-based discrimination, which are at once dissimilar and similar to the U.S. racial and caste-based racism. The digital life of the Black Lives Matter discourse on Twitter was analysed by Freelon, McIlwain and Clark (2021), who revealed how the hashtags and slogans are anchors of transnational solidarity networks.

Another instructive example of transnational slogan circulation is the environmental justice movement. One of the slogans developed by the Extinction Rebellion in the United Kingdom and Fridays for Future in Sweden gained international prominence (Doyle, 2020). The universalist horizon of environmental slogans - There Is No Planet B - is in contrast with the more particularist framings of movements that are organised with respect to particular national or racial identities. Della Porta (2020) has discussed transnational mobilisation of protest as well as how collective discourse facilitates cross-border mobilisation, and Tarrow (2011) gives the theoretical basics of how protest repertoires (such as slogans) transport across national and cultural borders. These papers all point towards the need to pay attention to the transnational aspects of protest slogans discourse in an analysis which would aim to be globally comparative.

Research Gap

As can be seen in the above review, a research gap that is highly evident and substantial is the gap in research that the current study is meant to fill. Although the notion of language and power (as well as the protest) has been explored in terms of various disciplinary approaches, the precise linguistic processes in which protest slogans create power relations and ideological standpoints are not well-assessed through corpus-enabled CDA yet. The current CDA research of the protest discourse has been focused on longer texts, predominantly on political speeches, manifestos, and news coverage, but not on the short texts of the slogans themselves. Projects which have specifically focused on slogans have usually done so in a national or movement-specific way without taking on the comparative international lens that would allow a systematic comprehension of cross-movement trends (Chilton, 2004; Hart, 2010).

The gap in terms of methodology is also an important aspect. Although the use of corpus-assisted discourse analysis has been fruitful in studying different types of political discourse, slogans have posed challenges to the process because of their short and mostly disjointed nature. The current research shows that corpus techniques, namely, TagAnt-based part-of-speech tagging and frequency and concordance analyses with the help of AntConc, can productively be applied to the context-specific features of slogan corpora. The analysis, in its turn, adds to the substantive literature on protest discourse, as well as the methodological literature on corpus-supported CDA.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design selected in this study is that of mixed methods, which combines a corpus-based quantitative study and qualitative analysis of critical discourse studies. This synthesis of both quantitative and qualitative approaches is epistemologically driven by the respective advantages of the two approaches: whereas the corpus methods can give systematic, repeatable, and statistically justified analysis of lexical and grammatical patterns, CDA offers the interpretive richness that allows to place the patterns of lexical and grammatical patterns within broader ideological and social contexts (Baker et al., 200 The approach of integration can be traced back to corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS).

The study plan consists of three consecutive stages. During the first stage, the corpus is gathered, cleaned up and submitted to corpus-based analysis with TagAnt and AntConc programs. The second phase involves the application of the Three-Dimensional Model created by Fairclough to the slogans and, overall, slogan groups which were analysed as analytically important in the corpus analysis. The third phase is the incorporation of the corpus-based data and the qualitative discourse analyses into an account of the linguistic processes and ideological practices in the whole corpus.

Data Checking and Corpus Development.

The corpus behind this study is made up of sixty globally known protest slogans in the English language based on four major global movements: Black Lives Matter (BLM), the Climate Justice Movement (CJM), the Feminist Movement (FM), and South Asian Student and Anti-Authoritarian Protests (SAAP). Each movement adds fifteen slogans to the corpus, which allows for a comparative analysis under control. The slogans were chosen based on the international recognisability criterion, the textual completeness criterion, the use of the English language and the currency of the text (20132025). The provenances of the slogans included recorded instances of protests, online accounts of protests, media-only accounts of the movements, and the academic literature of the related movements.

The corpus was cross-compiled as plain text, and each slogan represented a text unit. Each slogan was added to the list of metadata recording the flow of origin, rough date of first usage, and mostly the main medium of circulation (physical protest, social media, or both) in each case. This metadata allows the study to analyse how the slogan properties vary between movements and situations in the media, which enhances the comparative aspect of the study.

Fairclough, Three-Dimensional Model.

Norman Fairclough and his Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis is the theoretical framework on which this study is based. Originally developed in Language and Power (1989) and further justified in other books such as Discourse and Social Change (1992), Critical Discourse Analysis (1995), and Analysing Discourse (2003), the theoretical framework consists of three dimensions, namely. It theorises any discursive event as a text, a discursive practice and a social practice, and suggests that a full critical discourse analysis must reflect on all three aspects.

The first one, which focuses on the formal linguistic characteristics of the text, is text analysis, which pays attention to such aspects as vocabulary (lexical choices, evaluative language, nominalisations), grammar (sentence structure, verb tense, mood, transitivity), cohesion (the connection of sentences and clauses), and text structure. The second dimension is discursive practice analysis to analyse the production processes, distribution, and consumption of texts, that is, how we produce texts, how they circulate and are subjected to consumption. In the case of protest slogans, this dimension looks at the social and organisational context of production, the media of circulation, and the various audiences who don the slogans. The third dimension, social practice analysis, places the discursive event in the wider social, institutional and ideological context and enquires what relations of power and domination it reflects, reproduces or challenges.

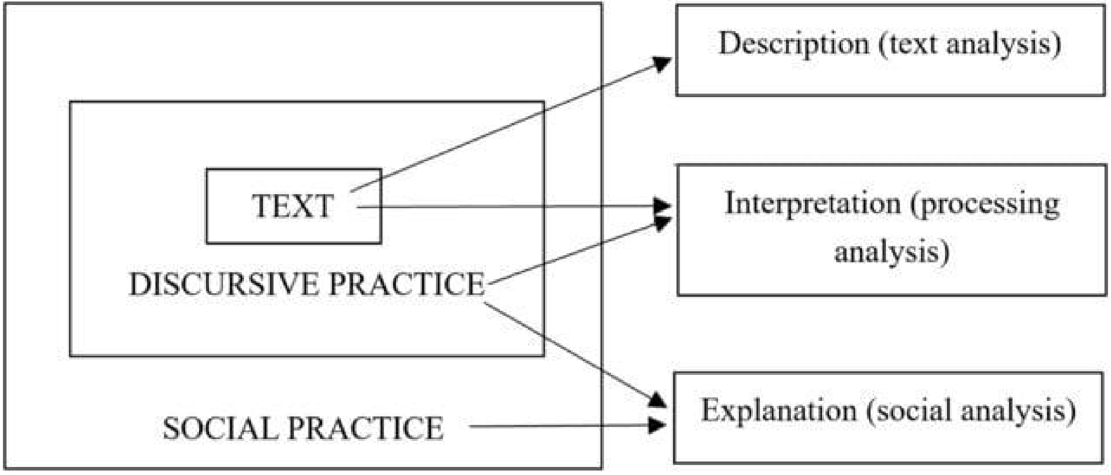
TEXT
DISCURSIVE PRACTICE
SOCIAL PRACTICE
Description (text analysis)
Interpretation (processing analysis)
Explanation (social analysis)

Figure 1. Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of CDA (Fairclough, 1995)

Analytical Tools: TagAnt and AntConc

Two programs, TagAnt (1.2.0) to tag data as a part-of-speech and AntConc (3.5.9) to identify frequency, keywords, and concordance, were used to do the corpus processing and analysis (Anthony, 2019). TagAnt automatically tags the individual words within the corpus with part-of-speech tags based on the Penn Treebank tagset that differentiates between various types of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and other types of words. The tagging of the slogan corpus of part-of-speech allows the systematic examination of the structural features of the grammatical patterns, frequency of imperative verb forms (VB tags preceding subject) and the structure of the noun phrases and the usage of evaluative adjectives that play central roles in rhetorical and ideological analysis of slogans.

AntConc was then used to process the tagged corpus and to offer capabilities to analyse frequency of words, search keywords (compared to a reference corpus to check if the word is statistically over-represented in the target corpus), concordance analysis (viewing the word in its immediate context), and collocational analysis (finding which words occur with the target word far more frequently than would be expected by chance). Before analysis by means of a corpus, data cleaning and normalisation processes took place. The slogans were typed in as separate text portions, and the use of punctuation was standardised in case of uniform tokenisation. The frequency analysis did not utilise a stopword list because some common words, such as "no, not, our" etc., are frequency words which are heavily ideological in protest slogans. A stopword-based analysis would tend to eliminate exactly the linguistically simple and ideologically powerful words which are typical of protest slogans.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Corpus Overview

The protest slogan corpus comprises sixty slogans totalling 347-word tokens and 189-word types. The average slogan length is 5.78 words, reflecting the characteristically compressed nature of slogan discourse. The type-token ratio of 0.545 indicates moderate lexical diversity given the genre constraints: protest slogans must be memorable and easily chanted, which militates against high lexical variation. Table 1 below provides an overview of the corpus composition by movement sub-corpus.

Movement	No. of Slogans	Total Tokens	Avg. Length (words)	Primary Medium
Black Lives Matter (BLM)	15	84	5.6	Physical + Social Media
Climate Justice Movement (CJM)	15	91	6.1	Social Media + Print
Feminist Movement (FM)	15	82	5.5	Physical + Digital Hashtag
South Asian Protests (SAAP)	15	90	6.0	Physical + Facebook
TOTAL	**60**	**347**	**5.78**	—

Table 1. Corpus Overview by Movement Sub-Corpus

The corpus distribution reveals comparable slogan lengths across movements, with the Climate Justice Movement producing slightly longer slogans on average (6.1 words) and the Feminist Movement the shortest (5.5 words). The primary medium of circulation varies meaningfully across movements: Black Lives Matter and Feminist slogans combine physical protest and digital hashtag circulation, while South Asian protest slogans circulate predominantly through Facebook, reflecting the specific digital infrastructure of protest in the region (Abir, Chowdhury and Rahman, 2025).

Frequency and Keyword Analysis

AntConc frequency analysis reveals the twenty most frequent content words in the corpus, as presented in Table 2 below with their part-of-speech classifications derived from TagAnt processing. The prominence of justice (n=18) as the most frequent content word across the corpus is the most immediately striking finding: it appears across all four movement sub-corpora, indicating that the demand for justice functions as the master signifier of contemporary global protest discourse — the concept that unites diverse movements around a common normative horizon (Laclau, 2005).

Rank	Word	Freq.	POS Tag (TagAnt)	Movement Distribution
1	**justice**	18	Noun	All sub-corpora
2	**people**	14	Noun	BLM, SAAP, CJM
3	**no**	13	Negation	All sub-corpora
4	**stop**	12	Imperative Verb	CJM, BLM, FM
5	**our**	11	Possessive Pronoun	All sub-corpora
6	**rights**	11	Noun	FM, SAAP, BLM
7	**now**	10	Temporal Adverb	CJM, FM, BLM
8	**planet**	9	Noun	CJM
9	**lives**	9	Noun	BLM, FM
10	**free / freedom**	8	Adj / Noun	SAAP, BLM
11	**change**	8	Noun / Verb	CJM, SAAP
12	**fight**	7	Imperative Verb	FM, BLM, SAAP
13	**end**	7	Imperative Verb	CJM, FM
14	**power**	7	Noun	SAAP, BLM
15	**matter**	6	Verb	BLM
16	**save**	6	Imperative Verb	CJM
17	**demand**	6	Noun / Verb	FM, SAAP
18	**earth**	6	Noun	CJM
19	**women**	5	Noun	FM, SAAP
20	**resist**	5	Imperative Verb	BLM, SAAP

Table 2. Top 20 Content Words by Frequency — AntConc Analysis with TagAnt POS Classification

These findings are confirmed and extended by a keyword analysis, comparing the corpus with a general English reference corpus, using the log-likelihood statistic. The most statistically notable keywords, i.e., in the protest slogan corpus that are disproportionally common to general English are: no, our, now, stop, justice, rights, people, fight and end. The over-representation of negatives (no), first-person plural possessives (our), temporal urgency markers (now), and imperative verbs (stop, fight, end) all contribute to a discursive portrait of protest slogans: they are texts that are representations of negatives (no), possessive of the first person (plural), insist on immediacy, and incorporate imperative verbs. This verbal portrait is in line with theoretical propositions of CDA scholars regarding the counter-hegemonic role of protest discourse (Van Dijk, 2001; Fairclough, 1995).

Grammatical Mood Distribution

Part-of-speech tagging via TagAnt reveals important patterns in the grammatical mood distribution of verb phrases across the corpus. Table 3 presents the full distribution with illustrative examples and their associated ideological functions.

Grammatical Mood	Token Count	% of Verb Tokens	Example Slogan	Ideological Function
Imperative	59	**34%**	"Stop the War"	Issues demand; enacts political agency
Declarative	73	**42%**	"Black Lives Matter"	Asserts identity; states political claims
Negative Declarative	31	**18%**	"No Justice, No Peace"	Refuses/rejects the dominant order
Interrogative	10	**6%**	"Who Do You Serve?"	Challenges authority; rhetorical critique

TOTAL	**173**	**100%**	**—**	**—**

Table 3. Grammatical Mood Distribution in the Protest Slogan Corpus (TagAnt Analysis)

Imperative verb forms (VB tags which do not contain a subject, and appear in the first position in the sentence) represent 34% of all verb tokens in the corpus - a catastrophically large percentage of any verb choice that could be made in any standard English. Whereas 42 means that declarative forms are numerically more common, it encompasses both simple assertions (Black Lives Matter) and negative declaratives (There Is No Planet B), which, between them, cover 60 per cent of verb tokens. This complicity of imperative and negative declarative mood - altogether 52% - validates the essentially opposite and demanding nature of protest slogan discourse. Although of minor use (6%), interrogative forms serve a unique rhetorical purpose: the slogans like “Who Do You Serve?” directly confront the source of authority, with the rhetoric of interrogation placing the audience in a position of critical consideration of power (Chilton, 2004).

Corpus of Protest Slogans: Sample and Classification

Table 4 presents a representative sample of sixteen slogans from the corpus with their grammatical classification, primary ideological function, and period of active use. This classification provides the foundation for the detailed qualitative analysis that follows in sections 4.5–4.8.

Movement	Slogan	Grammatical Type	Primary Ideological Function	Period of Use
BLM	"Black Lives Matter"	Declarative	Racial justice, identity assertion	2013–present
BLM	"No Justice, No Peace"	Neg. Conditional	Power challenge, ultimatum	1980s, revived 2014+
BLM	"Say Her Name"	Imperative	Visibility, erasure critique	2015–present
BLM	"Defund the Police"	Imperative	Systemic reform demand	2020–present
BLM	"I Can't Breathe"	Declarative (1st pers.)	State violence, bodily harm	2014, 2020–present
CJM	"There Is No Planet B"	Neg. Declarative	Environmental urgency	2015–present
CJM	"System Change Not Climate Change"	Elliptical Imperative	Systemic critique	2009–present
CJM	"Our House Is on Fire"	Declarative	Urgency, collective threat	2019–present
CJM	"Act Now or Swim Later"	Conditional Imperative	Consequences of inaction	2018–present
CJM	"End Fossil Fuels"	Imperative	Direct industrial demand	2021–present
FM	"My Body My Choice"	Possessive Declarative	Bodily autonomy, rights	1970s, revived 2022+
FM	"Me Too"	Identificatory Declarative	Solidarity, survivor identity	2017–present
FM	"Nevertheless She Persisted"	Adversative Declarative	Resistance, counter-discourse	2017–present
FM	"The Future Is Female"	Declarative	Temporal claim, gender politics	2016–present
SAAP	"Azadi"	Single-word Noun/Demand	Liberation, self-determination	1990s–present
SAAP	"Student Power, People Power"	Noun Parallelism	Coalition, political agency	2024 (Bangladesh)

Table 4. Classified Sample of Protest Slogans from the Corpus

Black Lives Matter: Textual, Discursive, and Social Analysis

In the Black Lives Matter sub-corpus, there are fifteen slogans between 2013 and 2024. Analysis of some typical slogans of this sub-corpus provides evidence of the analytical fruitfulness of the Three-Dimensional Model of Fairclough.

"Black Lives Matter"

On the textual level, the slogan is composed of three words and has a declarative sentence structure: subject (Black Lives) + verb (Matter). This predication of matter is judiciously engineered: instead of stating that Black lives are valuable or important, the verb matter states an unconditional, inherent meaning. The all capitalisation of the three words in written form serves to indicate that the phrase is a proper name - the name of a movement and an identity, not a descriptive sentence, and also to give it the stability and permanence of a conclusive political assertion. On the social practice level, the slogan describes one of the fundamental issues with the dominance of systemic racism and undervaluation of Black life that institutional policing, criminal justice, and social provision have initiated (Freelon, McIlwain and Clark, 2021).

“No Justice, No Peace”

On the level of texts, this slogan is syntactically parallel: No X, No Y. The rhetorical strength emphasised by this structure is a result of its two negations, that is, peace and justice are withheld, which form a conditional ultimatum. The slogan has intertextual origins in the previous civil rights discussion at the level of discursive practice and has been disseminated both physically by chanting at demonstrations and digitally, with its rhythmical nature contributing to its strong effectiveness as a chant. At the social practice level, the slogan takes on the hegemonic equation of social order to peace, and asserts that peace devoid of justice is a simple pacification of oppression (Fairclough, 1989).

"Say Her Name"

This is a slogan that can be described as having an imperative structure in slogans used in protests. The use of the second-person imperative Say unconditionally targets the audience, commanding it to speak and be recognised. The title "Her Name" is used as a metonym of the individualised humanity of the Black women victims who are systematically scrubbed out of the frame. The slogan spread both as a hashtag (SayHerName) and as a chant at the physical protests, the hashtag allowing audiences to meet the demand by naming specific women in their posts on social media (Van Dijk, 2006).

"Defund the Police"

Defund the Police became widely debated in the population, largely due to its provocative textual form just after its introduction in 2020. The term Defund is a relative anomaly in everyday American English. When many heard the words, the most understandable interpretation was that it was a demand to abolish, but its proponents interpreted it as a demand to redistribute resources. This polysemy - the ability of the slogan to convey different meanings to different audiences - allows forming a wide coalition as well as creating the contestation. The slogan addresses one of the most highly institutionalised and heavily subsidised tools of state power, directly indexing a systemic analysis of the nexus between policing, race, and social control (Machin and Mayr, 2012).

"I Can't Breathe"

The phrase starts as the final words of Eric Garner, who was killed by New York police in 2014, and was later picked up as a movement slogan after the murder of George Floyd in 2020. Identification effect is induced by the first-person pronoun I: when the protesters are chanting or writing these words, they do it in the voice of the victim, and in some way, their personality fuses with his temporary. On the social practice level, it carries a systemic critique into the most personal statement: “I Can’t Breath” is a literal phrase of asphyxiation as well as a figurative account of how the system is suffocating Black life with state violence on a systemic scale (Charteris-Black, 2011).

Climate Justice Movement: Textual, Discursive, and Social Analysis

"There Is No Planet B"

On the textual level, this slogan is a re-application of the business idea of a Plan B and makes it global. The There Is No negation eliminates the possibility of a way out or the possibility of replacement, but insists on the irreparability of the Earth. This makes inconclusive the techno-optimist story of humanity being able to simply engineer its way out of environmental crisis. On the discursive practice level, the slogan is disseminated mostly in written manifestations - in placards, stickers, and social media, which is more mediated due to the transmitted nature of communications about climate protests (Doyle, 2020).

“System Change Not Climate Change”

System Change / Climate Change in the sense of parallelism forms the rhyme and the conceptual opposition: the expression implicitly contends that environmental remedies to climate change involve alteration of the economic and political system, rather than the symptoms of the same. On the social practice level, such a slogan lays out the Eco socialist view of climate disintegration as a consequence of capitalistic developmental necessities, bringing the climate movement to confront the established economic chassis (Della Porta, 2020).

“Our House Is on Fire”

From the formulation Greta Thunberg makes, which she uses as a movement slogan, we can see the use of domestic metaphor to domesticate the global calamity of climate change. The predatory possessive Our House appropriates the entire earth as the property of a collective and is a collective subject with a collective existential vulnerability. The current progressive-Is on Fire imposes the temporal urgency that the crisis is not in the future but present. This is both an ideological challenge to those who oppose the urgency framing, and thus the slogan becomes a place of discursive struggle (Fairclough, 2001).

Feminist Movement: Textual, Discursive, and Social Analysis

"My Body My Choice"

This statement of purpose claims bodily autonomy by means of the possessive pronoun My that is repeated in two parallel noun phrases. The recursion of My also introduced an emphatic assertion of possessing the body (an overt refusal of patriarchal and state control of the women and their prostitution), a rejection of the state's dominance over the women. The slogan was spectacularly resuscitated with the Dobbs ruling on abortion by the US Supreme Court in 2022, which vacated the constitutional right to abortion. The new circulation of the slogan shows how intertextual protest slogans might develop resonances of history through repetitive cycles of the political struggle (Butler, 2015).

"Me Too"

The two-word slogan coined in 2006 by Tarana Burke and amplified in 2017 as a two-word phrase known as MeToo is an example of the power of minimalist slogan discourse. This epithet functions by an identification logic: this makes the speaker a part of a group of survivors, making a claim of solidarity with only the mere utterance of the shared experience. The global dissemination of the slogan could not have been achieved without the hashtag format, as survivors across the world had a chance to express themselves online, creating a fast-increasing clamour of voices (Castells, 2012).

"Nevertheless, She Persisted"

This catchphrase is a good example of counter-discursive appropriation, namely, the use of offensive language as a medium of resistance. The term was quickly becoming a feminist slogan by the campaigners of Warren, and later on a feminist phrase by the campaigners of Walt Disney Wonder Girl, originally meant by McConnell as a caustic comment on the rule-and-principle persistence by Warren, was turned to affirming purposes. The intertextual irony is the major focus of the rhetorical weight of the slogan: the authority of institutions that tried to silence is redirected against it (Kristeva, 1980; Fairclough, 1992).

South Asian Protests: Textual, Discursive, and Social Analysis

“Student Power, People Power”

This Bangladeshi Monsoon Uprising slogan of 2024 charges parallelism to build a coalition of solidarity between the students and the people at large. The fact that the word power is repeated in both instances: power is vested in the students and then in the people, is an ideological levelling: both the students and the people are established as political agents with legitimacy to power that directly challenges the monopoly of political power of the authoritarian state. This catchphrase was widely spread throughout Facebook, as it was posted together with the photos of massive protests (Abir, Chowdhury and Rahman, 2025).

"Azadi" (Freedom)

The South Asian history of protest has perhaps produced one of the most effective protest slogans in the form of the single-word protest slogan Azadi, which has been used in the Kashmir freedom movement, Indian student protests, the Pakistani feminist movement (Aurat March), and in many other contexts to date. It is powerful because of the conglomeration of semantic density, which is that the Urdu/Hindi word azadi has connotations of liberation, independence, and self-determination, and maximal compression. Azadi acts as a floating signifier which could be relied on to all types of political needs to allow coalition-building across social struggles (Laclau, 2005).

“Go, Nawaz Go / Go, Imran Go”

The versatile slogan formula, Go [Name] Go, common in protest slogans in Pakistan, shows just how effective the grammatical framework of a protest slogan can be: by putting various proper names into a similar syntactical frame, the slogan can quickly be targeted at any political enemy. The word Go is a direct command of movement away, of the ousting of a political leader, and the rhythmic stress is made by repetition. These patterns of structural adjustment in Pakistani political party slogans are recorded by Zafar et al. (2023), validating the effectiveness of the formula in the Pakistani political discourse.

Comparative Rhetorical Strategy Analysis

Table 5 provides a comparative summary of the key rhetorical strategies identified across the full corpus, integrating findings from the quantitative corpus analysis and the qualitative CDA of individual slogans. This synthesis enables systematic comparison of rhetorical patterns across the four movement sub-corpora.

Rhetorical Strategy	Frequency	Movement(s)	Example Slogans	Discursive Function
Binary Opposition	High	All	"No Justice, No Peace"; "System Change Not Climate Change"	Constructs a moral divide between the oppressed and the oppressor
Imperative Mood	Very High	BLM, CJM, FM	"Stop the War"; "Say Her Name"; "Act Now"	Performs political demand; asserts agency
Metaphor	Medium	CJM, BLM	"Our House Is on Fire"; "I Can't Breathe"	Reframes abstract crisis in concrete, embodied terms
Repetition / Parallelism	Medium	FM, SAAP	"My Body, My Choice"; "Student Power, People Power"	Enhances memorability; affirms collective identity
Presupposition	High	All	"No Justice, No Peace" (presupposes who holds power)	Smuggles ideological claims as the assumed background
Intertextual Appropriation	Low–Medium	FM, BLM	"Nevertheless She Persisted"; "I Can't Breathe"	Repurposes hostile/authoritative discourse as resistance
Negation	High	BLM, CJM	"There Is No Planet B"; "No More War"	Refuses and rejects existing conditions
First-Person Plural	High	CJM, SAAP	"Our House Is on Fire"; "Our	Constitutes a collective subject; claims shared

		Demands"	ownership

Table 5. Comparative Rhetorical Strategies Across Movement Sub-Corpora

The comparative analysis reveals that binary opposition and presupposition are the most universally deployed rhetorical strategies across all four movements, appearing in virtually every sub-corpus and serving the shared function of constructing a moral divide between the movement and its antagonist. The use of imperative mood is particularly dominant in the BLM, CJM, and FM sub-corpora, reflecting the demand-oriented character of these movements, while the SAAP sub-corpus shows a higher proportion of noun-form slogans (such as "Azadi") that assert identity and aspiration rather than issuing explicit commands. These cross-movement patterns provide important empirical support for the theoretical argument that protest slogans share a common discursive grammar despite their diverse political contexts.

DISCUSSION

The Grammar of Resistance: Imperative Mood and Political Demand

The most notable grammatical discovery of this research is the use of the imperative mood as the prevailing one in the protest slogan corpus. In which 34 per cent of all verb tokens take an imperative form, vs. rates of only a few percent in standard expository text, the imperative turns out not only to be a common form of choice, but to be the characteristic grammatical signifier of discourse that protests slogans. To explain the reasons why this must happen, it is important to put the grammatical discovery into context in the bigger theory of CDA and speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

Imperatives, in the language of the speech acts theory, are orders/commands (speech acts) that seek to make the addressee act. When protesters shout such phrases as “Stop the War”, “End Fossil Fuels”, “Defund the Police”, they are engaged in a directive speech act: making a command to a power to alter the behaviour. This commanding role is ideologically meaningful as it actualises a certain political association. This demand, being a speech act, places the one who demands as the political subject with the ability and authority to hold power to account. The commanding role of the imperative in the situation where the protesters are less powerful, marginalised groups with little formal political power, creates a counter-hegemonic assertion of political agency in the protesters themselves against a system which might deny it (Fairclough, 1989; Butler, 2015).

This discussion is directly related to the argument by Fairclough (1989; 1995) that the alignment of grammatical structure with social relations is not random but is ideologically predetermined. The frequent use of the imperative mood instead of alternative grammatical moods reflects and supports the political stance of protest discourse. Interrogatives would put the protester in the role of a supplicant seeking permission; conditionals would put the demand in a hypothetic register; imperatives would perform the unconditional, immediate nature of the demand that is vital to protest rhetoric. The results of the current research, therefore, broaden and empirically prove the theoretical assertions of CDA researchers by offering a quantified illustration of the connection using corpus techniques, a methodological apparatus which develops the CADS culture originally laid down by Baker et al. (2008).

Lexical Patterns and Ideological Preoccupations

The frequency analysis and the keyword analysis demonstrate a regular pattern of the lexical profile of the protest slogan corpus, which is the reflection of the ideological interest of present-day global protest discourse. The most theoretically important lexical discovery is the dominance of justice (n=18) as the most common content word. Justice is just what political theorists term an “empty signifier” - something abstract and morally charged to the point that it brings together different demands of a political character under one normative umbrella (Laclau, 2005). Although various movements give the idea of justice various concrete contents, such as racial justice, climate justice, gender justice, and democratic justice, the mutual reference to the very concept “justice”, as a horizon of normative consensus, makes the cross-movement solidarity possible.

The ideological role of possession and community-building is played by a high rate of the first-person plural possessive pronoun “our” (n=11). Making the judgment that climate protesters are saying “Our House Is on Fire” and anti-authoritarian protesters are shouting Student Power, People Power is the use of “our” to construct and assert a collective subject, through whose collective possession of the issue their collective imperative to solve the issue is anchored. This constitutive role of the first-person plural in protest discourse is related to the general theoretical arguments concerning relations between discourse and collective identity (Melucci, 1996; Butler, 2015). The prevalence of negativity, especially negative vocality “no”(n=13), denotes the specifically opposing nature of the protest discourse, more akin in the organisation of Bakhtin (1981) to the dialogic orientation of his discourse towards the discourses that normalise injustice that precede it.

The ideological opposition to gradualist temporality shows how a keyword search “now” (n=10) has been gradual: an ideological opposition to temporality that dominant institutions often use to postpone political demands. By having the authorities address the demands of protests with gradual change and long-term arrangements, the slogan “Now” openly challenges this delay, making the urgency of the injustice an ethically wrong act. Ponton (2021) has reported identical patterns of temporal urgency in other types of protest slogans, and the corpus-based frequency data of the current study are empirical evidence of the importance of temporal politics in protest slogans. This result relates to the idea of temporal deixis in political discourse created by Reisigl and Wodaka (2016), which focuses on how the political texts locate themselves within the past, present, and future to formulate their ideological assertions.

Intertextuality, Appropriation, and Discursive Circulation

The discursive practice dimension of Fairclough's model draws attention to the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption, and in particular to the intertextual relations that link protest slogans to other texts and discourses. The analysis of the present corpus reveals that intertextuality is not merely an occasional feature of protest slogans but one of their constitutive properties: slogans characteristically derive their rhetorical power in part from their relationships with prior texts, whether those texts are earlier protest slogans, official or authoritative discourse, or culturally widespread expressions (Fairclough, 1992; Kristeva, 1980).

The most dramatic case of intertextual appropriation in the corpus is "I Can't Breathe," which derives its rhetorical force from its origin as the literal last words of Eric Garner. The transformation of a dying man's last utterance into a global protest slogan exemplifies the intertextual processes through which protest discourse acquires its political weight. "Nevertheless, She Persisted" exemplifies a different form of intertextual appropriation: the counter-discursive redeployment of hostile language. By adopting McConnell's dismissive characterisation of Warren's behaviour and transforming it into an affirmation, feminist activists performed what Fairclough (1992) terms "intertextual transformation" — appropriating a hostile text and restructuring it in the service of resistant meaning.

The analysis also reveals important patterns in the discursive circulation of protest slogans through digital media. Slogans that originate as hashtags — particularly #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter — are optimised for search engine discoverability and social media amplification, which favours particular structural properties including brevity, novelty, and memorability. The increasing convergence of physical and digital protest repertoires, with chants being simultaneously filmed and shared on social media and hashtags being displayed on physical placards, suggests that contemporary protest slogans are increasingly designed for multimodal circulation across physical and digital spaces simultaneously (Abir, Chowdhury and Rahman, 2025; Castells, 2012).

Binary Opposition and the Construction of the Antagonist

A consistent finding across the corpus is the deployment of binary opposition to construct a moral divide between the movement and its antagonist. Van Dijk's (2001) concept of the ideological square, positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, is powerfully enacted in protest slogans that characteristically construct a clear opposition between a collective "we" (the protesters, the oppressed, the people) and a collective "they" (the oppressors, the state, corporations, patriarchy). This binary structure provides a clear moral map of the political terrain, defining allies and enemies and motivating collective action against a clearly identified antagonist.

The latter is achieved by the construction of the antagonist in the protest slogans both explicitly and implicitly. The targets on slogans like Defund the Police and Tax the Rich are explicit (constructing the antagonist), whereas other slogans like No Justice, No Peace are implicit (constructing the antagonist in terms of presupposition): the slogan assumes the existence of a body of authority capable of providing justice and capable of maintaining or disrupting peace; thus presenting the state or dominant power as the correct actor to do what determines the availability of both Similar tendencies of presuppositional construction as observed by Flowerdew and Richardson (2017) are observed in many types of political writing confirming the universal use of the rhetorical tool. The binary opposition is also used on the plane of the value systems; the slogans used by the protesters are usually binary opposing values of the movement (justice, freedom, equality, the future) to the values of the antagonist (injustice, oppression, inequality, the past), moving a representative of the universality of human values and their betrayal by dominant interests.

Relating the Results to the Existing Literature.

The results of the current research are related to and build on several existing literatures. With reference to CDA tradition, the work empirically justifies the theoretical assertions of Fairclough (1995), Van Dijk (2001), and Wodak (2009) with regard to linking language-power-ideology in political discourse. The corpus-led illustration of grammatical and lexical models with ideologically charged connotations expands the scope of the CDA techniques to a type of text with which relatively few studies in the CDA literature show were implemented, namely, protest slogans. The research thus answers the calls of the CDA tradition, lastly expressed by Flowerdew and Richardson (2017), regarding the willingness to focus more on the methodological diversity of political language.

When compared to the literature of social movement, the results validate and even extend the frame analysis proposed by Snow and Benford (1988), in which the diagnostic, the attributive, and the prescriptive levels of movement frames are condensed into the most memorable and the most emotive linguistic formulae. The paper also relates to the overview by Castells (2012) of networked social movements, illustrating how protest slogans have discursive features that enable them to fit the networked digital environments in which modern movements convey their message. The analysis of transnational protest mobilisation, by della Porta (2020), is a valuable frame in understanding the cross-national patterns of circulation that the comparative corpus analysis of the study has shown.

The results of the study on the South Asian protest, sub-corpus, give valuable comparative insights that enhance the current literature. The discussion supports and elaborates on the description by Abir, Chowdhury and Rahman (2025) about the process of forming protest discourse in Bangladesh through digital media. This study on Pakistani protest slogans relates to the findings of Zafar et al. (2023) and Nadia Kaleem, Saeed and Siraj (2022) on the ideological nature of political slogans that the Pakistani populace uses in protests. The research thus adds to a more geographically varied CDA literature that in the past has been predominated by the analysis of a Western discourse of politics in the Anglophone realm.

Understanding of Power, Language and Social Change.

In addition to the roles it has played in the scholarly literature, the study has wider impacts on how we comprehend the interplay of language, power and social change in modern societies. The results corroborate what the teachings of Gramsci (1971) to Fairclough (1989) have argued that forms of language do not simply represent the medium through which political conflicts are articulated but are themselves a site of political conflict, where meanings, identities and social relations are directly and indirectly shaped, reproduced and transformed. This constitutive component of language can be traced with a special level of clarity through the example of protest slogans, since, due to the limited number of letters, a slogan consists of words predetermined to be ideologically most significant.

The polysemy of slogans - their ability to signify something different to different people also allows them to serve as what Laclau (2005) refers to as empty signifiers, in that they can bring together various demands and constitutions around a shared normative referent, even when there is no consensus over the particular content. A slogan that can attract millions of people to a shared sense of injustice can be more politically effective than one which accurately conveys a policy stance, but does not touch people emotionally to act. By showing the particular linguistic processes by which slogans have their mobilising effects, the results of this study offer theoretical resources to social movements that have the difficult task of producing political language that is both accurate enough to be intellectually plausible and concise enough to be rhetorically effective.

CONCLUSION

This study has an in-depth corpus-based critical discourse analysis comparing 60 internationally recognised protest slogans based on four major movements around the globe, including Black Lives Matter, Climate Justice Movement, Feminist Movement, and South Asian Student and Anti-Authoritarian Protests. Using the Fairclough Three-Dimensional Model of CDA, and using TagAnt to tag the corpus and AntConc to examine frequency and concordance information, the research has yielded textual, discursive practice, and social practice levels understanding of how protest slogans operate as an ideological struggle and discursive site.

At the textual level, the paper has shown that protest slogans have a unique and consistent grammatical and lexical profile. Imperative forms are 34% of all verb tokens in the corpus, and the role of the imperative as characteristic of grammatical protest is substantiated by its characteristic role as a means of the performative statement of political demands. Analysis by frequency shows that the most prevalent content word in the corpus is justice, which makes it the master signifier of the protest discourse in the modern world. The keywords such as our, no, now, stop, and fight are collectively used to describe a discourse that takes collective ownership, rejects the status quo, requires immediate action and exercises political agency by taking linguistic action. These patterns can be synthesised by the five analysis tables in the Results chapter, which combine metric corpus data with an analysis of qualitative discourse, giving a coherent empirical account.

On the discursive practice level, the paper has found significant patterns of production, circulation and consumption of protest slogans. Intertextuality has become a constitutive feature of protest slogan discourse: protest slogans acquire their rhetorical force partly through the relations which they have to pre-existing texts, the discourse of protest slogans, the discourse of authority or of enmity, and cultural texts, and derive their meaning through the intertextual networks in which they are incorporated. The digital circulation patterns analysis reveals that in the modern age, the slogans of protests are developed to be distributed in multimodal forms and simultaneously, both in physical protest spaces and digital spaces.

The study has shown on the social practice level how protest slogans act as counter-hegemonic texts which disrupt naturalised relations of power and domination. By binary opposition, negativistic presupposition and the performative act of expressing alternative social structures based on justice, equality and democratic participation, the slogans challenge the hegemonic conflation between the prevailing state of social organisation and the reality of nature or something natural, and tirelessly enumerate visions of alternative social organisation based on justice, equality and democratic participation (Fairclough, 1989).

Limitations and Future Directions

The study has several important limitations that point to productive directions for future research. First, the restriction of the corpus to English-language slogans, while methodologically motivated, necessarily excludes the vast majority of protest slogans produced in the world's languages. A multilingual corpus of protest slogans would enable genuinely global comparative analysis and would address the Anglophone bias that characterises much of the existing CDA literature on political language (Flowerdew and Richardson, 2017). Future research should develop multilingual corpora and apply corpus-assisted CDA methods adapted to multilingual text collections.

Second, the corpus size of sixty slogans, while sufficient for the present study, limits the statistical power of the corpus-based analyses. Future research should aim to construct larger corpora, potentially encompassing hundreds of texts, that would enable more sophisticated corpus statistical analyses. Third, the study's focus on the textual and discursive dimensions necessarily omits the visual and multimodal dimensions that are crucial to how slogans function in practice. A multimodal CDA approach integrating the analysis of linguistic and visual semiotics would provide a more comprehensive account of how protest slogans mean and how they work (Machin and Mayr, 2012; Van Leeuwen, 2008). Fourth, the study does not systematically address the reception dimension of protest slogans, how they are interpreted by different audiences. Reception analysis employing audience interviews or analysis of counter-discourse would provide important insights into the pragmatics of slogan discourse and enable a more complete account of the discursive practice dimension of Fairclough's model. Fifth, a diachronic corpus-assisted CDA study of protest slogans examining how their lexical profiles, grammatical properties, and ideological content have evolved across time would provide important insights into the relationship between discursive and political change. Sixth, the relationship between protest slogans and counter-slogans remains an important and underexplored dimension. An analysis of the discursive relationship between protest and counter-protest discourse would shed important light on the dynamics of ideological struggle and would enable a more complete account of the social practice dimension.

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