



RESEARCH PAPER

A Comparative Thematic Analysis of Political Slogans of PTI and PML-N

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of the present research is to determine and contrast the prevailing themes represented by the PTI and PML-N political slogans as well as investigate the ways in which the slogans indicate the ideological position of the parties. Political slogans are some of the most effective linguistic devices that can summarize the ideology, leadership and emotional appeal using few words. Slogans are used by parties such as PTI and PML-N in Pakistan to create opposing political visions and mobilize the voter base. A qualitative thematic analysis has been adopted for the current research which involved twenty slogans by both parties. These slogans were analyzed by using the critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013) as theoretical framework. Findings of the study reveal that the slogans of PTI focus on reform, justice and transformation, whereas the service, loyalty and democratic legitimacy are the focus of PML-N. Such thematic oppositions demonstrate distorted populist leanings. The research concludes that ideological constructions through discursive tools of political slogans are effective in Pakistan, where the former impacts collective identities and political imagination. The study recommends to study these slogans academically to understand the rhetorical strategies used by political parties in Pakistan. It also acclaims to use a larger data to analyze the political implications of political slogans along with cultural and social variations at global level.

KEYWORDS Comparative thematic analysis, political slogans, PTI, PML-N

Introduction

One of the most effective linguistic tools in political communication is political slogans. They are not only persuasive messages but also a powerful representation of ideology, identity and leadership. In democratic states, slogans reduce the complicated political dreams to brief and emotionally evocative phrases that stirred the feeling of the people (Charteris-Black, 2011). With the vibrant politics of Pakistan, the use of slogans has become a central issue in the way parties define collective identities and the way parties present ideological positions. Two of the main political forces, including Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) can be regarded as the representatives of opposite rhetorical strategies. The slogan of PTI is *Naya Pakistan* (New Pakistan) which is a focus on reform and transformation whereas PML-N is focusing on democratic legitimacy and continuity in its slogan: *Vote Ko Izzat Do* (Respect the Vote). These rallies are not just a summation of political intentions but also conflicting images of power and statehood.

The subject of political slogans as a discussion about ideology and identity has not been given much an academic interest despite the use of political slogans in the election campaigns in Pakistan. Some studies have already been done on the topic of populism and discourse in Pakistani politics (Siddiq, 2021; Saeed, 2020), but not many studies have been

conducted to compare how slogans of various parties were used to create different thematic and ideological frames. When analyzed effectively in a thematic manner, political slogans have the deeper stories to morality, nationalism and leadership (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2006). The lack of comparative thematic inquiry of PTI and PML-N slogans creates the vacuum in the comprehension of how the language of politics has formed the democratic imagination of Pakistan.

This study can add to the research of the political linguistics and critical discourse analysis as it underlines the role of political slogans as ideological texts in the South Asian democracies. Using the thematic approach, this study brings forth the ways in which slogans collapse political identities and emotional appeals into words. The analysis of the PTI and PML-N slogans gives an insight into how the two influential parties in Pakistan apply discourse to present their conflicting visions- PTI based on reformist populism as well as moral renewal and PML-N based on service and legitimacy and continuation of leadership. The findings of the study are beneficial to the linguistics, politics and communication scholars and to learn how rhetoric can affect the democratic involvement and voter image.

Literature Review

Political slogans have a major role in the way ideological narratives are created, how they influence a population and that they are used to create political identities. Thus, slogans are short linguistic devices; they sum up the political communication in terms of ideological, cultural and emotional aspects (Charteris-Black, 2011). They are symbolic short-cuts of party vision, moralism and leadership values (Fairclough, 2013). Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) are some of the political parties in Pakistan that have heavily utilized slogans as a way of connecting emotionally and ideologically with the people who are likely to vote. These slogans can be analyzed to understand the role of language in the expression of rival political ideologies and populism discourses.

Political Language Power and Discourse

Critical discourse theorists claim that political discourse is the core element in the construction of power and ideological distribution. According to Fairclough (1995), discourse is a social practice, in which power relations are played out and fought. Equally, van Dijk (2006) claims that ideology is ingrained in linguistic forms of thought that influence the understandings of the self versus outsiders. By the use of slogans, party lines establish social delimitation, moral superiority and group identity. Wodak (2015) builds on this point by stating that political speeches are consisted of emotions, fear and hope to collect popular approval. Therefore, slogans are rhetorical acts that validate the political power and influence the social thinking.

Populism and Representation by Ideology

The idea of populism is also explained as a rhetoric that polarizes the people into the pure people and the corrupt elite (Laclau, 2005; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Populist discourses tend to take place as emotive languages and nationalistic imagery in South Asian politics (Khan, 2020). The *Naya Pakistan* (the New Pakistan) by PTI is an example of what Moffitt (2016) terms performative populism a rhetoric of renewal and moral change. Conversely, the slogans of PML-N, including *Vote Ko Izzat Do* (Respect the Vote), represent what Jaffrelot (2015) believes are democratic populism, in which legitimacy is based on electoral victory and performance of the service. Both create opposing populist imaginaries

in this way, with PTI appeals to moral justice and change and PML-N focusing on loyalty, service and democratic continuity.

Politics and Slogans and Shaping Identity

There is consensus among scholars that political slogans do not exist as persuading phrases, but as identity-forming mechanisms (Cramer, 2016; Chilton, 2004). Lakoff (2004) argues that political slogans use metaphors to define national and moral values as perceived by the citizens. The slogans used in the Pakistani context are usually a combination of religious, cultural and nationalistic symbolism to create the feeling of belonging (Shah, 2019). The *Insaf* (justice) is a resonant word used by PTI which corresponds to Islamic values of fairness which Ahmad (2017) calls moral populism. The use of service and leadership by PML-N appeals to the conventional hierarchies and the family values, repeating the result of Saeed (2020) who shows that Pakistani politics tends to blend personal charisma with party affiliation.

Comparative Views about Political Communication

Research by scholars shows that thematic organization of slogans is different along ideological borders. Left-lean movements or reformist movements are focused on hope, equality and change and the conservative parties are focused on continuity, identity and stability (Halliday, 2018; Chilton, 2004). The speech is based on reformist populism wherein PTI uses futuristic metaphors and uses uniting, unifying pronouns, including we and our, to refer to unity and renewal (Khan and Ahmed, 2021). On the other hand, the slogans of PML-N are based on the personal appeals to the leaders and the heritage, which van Leeuwen (2008) defines as the legitimation through authorization, when the political power is supported by the experience of leadership and previous successes.

Political Linguistics Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a well-known technique in political linguistics, which allows defining common patterns, symbols, and ideological patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Examining the slogans as a unit of theme, the researchers can reveal the structures of power and identity indications (Gee, 2011). The slogans of PTI are primarily dominated by the themes of justice, youth empowerment, and anti-corruption (Niazi, 2019), whereas, the PML-N ones are dominated by the themes of the loyalty, service and democratic legitimacy (Riaz, 2020). These thematic deviations resonate with the idea developed by Ashcroft et al. (2002) that language is a mirror of sociopolitical hierarchies that define subjectivity as well as resistance.

Political Branding and Entertainment

There is also the use of political slogans as a means of branding and emotional persuasion. Scammell (2015) argues that political branding converts ideological promises into the commercially marketable emotional experiences. The PTI slogan *Tabdeeli Aayi Hai* (Change Has Come) is optimistic and empowering and is in line with the political marketing strategies described by Lees-Marshment (2014). The politics of PML-N, *Khidmat Ka Nishan* (Symbol of Service), is based on emotional continuity and personalization of leadership which is one of the fears of the South Asian political culture of loyalty to the family (Yilmaz and Saleem, 2022). The emotional appeal to persuasion (pathos) which is an essential component of classical rhetoric as put forward by Aristotle, is often the most effective in political communication despite the reasons behind such methods being logical appeal (logos) which is reflected in the current Pakistani politics (Jones and Wareing, 2015).

Material and Methods

The current research design is based on the thematic analysis to discuss and compare the political slogans of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on the basis of a qualitative research design. The most appropriate method to the study being under analysis is the qualitative one, as exploring underlying meanings, ideologies, and socio-political connotations within the area of linguistic utterances (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Their thematic interpretation is a feature to have an in depth understanding of the use of the slogans as a tool of persuasion and identity construction and representation of ideologies by both sides.

Research Design and Approach

A comparative qualitative study was used to examine the discursive patterns of the sampled slogans of PTI and PML-N. In this manner, it will be possible to identify the similarities and differences in the thematic organization of both parties in the political discourse. The research uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a complementary theory based on the perspective of Fairclough (1995) that language is a social practice which is informed by power relations. CDA also allows the researcher to determine how political language constructs and supports ideological stances, whereas thematic analysis enables the researcher to discover patterns of meaning that occur in the data set over and over again (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Data Collection

The data included twenty political slogans ten by PTI and ten by PML-N where a purposive sampling technique was used. The slogans have been gathered in the official party documents, televised campaign adverts, manifestos, and authentic social media accounts of 2013-2023. Purposive sampling was used to select the widely circulated and representative slogans that would reflect the central ideological position of each of these parties. The period was chosen in order to cover the significant electoral cycles (2013, 2018 and 2023), which would provide a more substantial perspective on thematic consistency and development.

Data Analysis Procedure

The thematic analysis was conducted in line with the six-step paradigm of the thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching with themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes and (6) producing the final report. In coding, repetitive linguistic and conceptual patterns were determined e.g. the mention of change, service, justice, leadership and democracy. These codes were subsequently divided into overall themes by each of the parties. The comparative interpretation was then conducted to bring out the convergences and divergences in terms of thematic orientation and ideological focus. It was an interpretive process and not statistical as it focused on the meaning-making and contextual analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The model of critical discourse analysis developed by Fairclough (2013) as the approach to language as an arena of ideological struggle and the theory of populist reason developed by Laclau (2005) that recognizes the creation of the people by symbolic unification guides the study. These theoretical prisms give us instruments of

understanding how slogans can be viewed as condensed ideological texts that mobilize identity, loyalty and power.

Results and Discussion

Political slogans have been dominant in influencing the mass mind, creating force as well as formulating the ideological nature of political parties. This part has compared the thematic analysis of the political slogans of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). The discussion examines the slogans of each of the parties to capture prevailing themes that explain their political ideologies, populist orientations and their vision of Pakistan. The data used to conduct this analysis include a purposive sample of ten slogans of each party, which were used in campaigning, in social media. Thematic analysis approach adopted by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed to identify and make sense of recurrent patterns of meaning that presented six phases.

Thematic Foundations

The thematic analysis showed that in the slogans of PTI, three major themes were identified, which included change and reform, justice and accountability and three minor themes were identified in the slogans of PML-N, which included service and development, leadership-centered loyalty and democratic legitimacy. These issues mirror the ideological binary of the parties PTI as a change and moral revival movement, and PML-N as an embodiment of stability, service and institutional prestige.

According to Fairclough (2013), there is no neutral political discourse, it creates social realities. In this regard PTI and PML-N use slogans to naturalize their ideological positions and establish affective relationships with their constituencies. PTI applies the discourse of reformist populism, while PML-N applies the discourse of developmental conservatism.

PTI's Thematic Orientation

Theme of Change and Reform

Change is the most glaring theme of PTI. The slogans, such as *Naya Pakistan* (New Pakistan) and *Tabdeeli Aa Gayi Hai* (Change has come), appeal to the feeling of change in the nation as a whole. This is the same theme of the party being formed in response to several decades of corruption, elite politics and the inability of the government to govern. The semantic focus on the word new and change is used as a symbol of no longer being a part of the past and makes PTI an agent of social and political reawakening. Laclau (2005) argues that populist movements are based on empty signifiers, the general symbols which connect disparate demands into a common ideal. This is exactly how *Naya Pakistan* works and it means a utopian vision that is subject to various interpretations. The ambiguity of the slogan enables the followers to transfer their dreams onto the party thereby developing an inclusive populist identity.

Justice and Accountability

Justice (Insaf) is an ethical foundation of the ideological identity of PTI. The morality and ethical leadership are predicted in such slogans like Justice, Humanity, Self-esteem and Say No to Corruption. In this discussion, PTI presents itself as the correcting force against ethical corruption and political favoritism. Here we can see Van Dijck (2006) ideological square; the slogans of PTI talk of the honesty and selflessness of the party but implicitly want to present opponents as corrupt and self-serving. Besides, such slogans

represent a moral populism, which is consistent with the anti-elite trend worldwide (Moffitt, 2016). The anti-corruption/appeal to justice appeal aligns PTI to the moral fears of the middle-class in Pakistan, in which political reform is discussed as a moral crusade but not as a procedural change.

The National Pride and Empowerment

National solidarity and patriotic pride are appealed to with such slogans like Pakistan First and Vote for Change. These expressions employ collective imagery and inclusive pronoun to create unity. The rhetoric of PTI can be described by Wodak (2009) as discursive construction of national identity, during which political actors employ symbolic language to create a sense of belonging and trigger emotional appeal. The emphasis of the party on empowerment and dignity also addresses the postcolonial desire to rediscover the sense of self-worth and independence by following the concept of linguistic and political decolonization described by Ashcroft et al. (2002).

PML-N's Thematic Orientation

Theme of Development and Service

The PML-N hegemonic slogan discourse is based on service, stability and development. Such expressions like *Khidmat Ka Nishan*, Nawaz Sharif (Symbol of Service) and Roshan Pakistan (Bright Pakistan) are strengthening the image of the party as pragmatic, hard-working and experienced party. Such a populist development creates a sense of continuity and caress which attracts voters who are stable-minded and not revolutionary. Fairclough (1995) asserts that this type of discourse justifies power by performance and the outcomes rather than ideology. Light and brightness used in the title *Roshan Pakistan* are used as a symbol of progress, prosperity and enlightenment- the newness of PTI as compared to the maturity of PML-N. Therefore, the slogans of PML-N are no longer oriented at the renewal of ideology but rather demonstrating the direct results in the fields of governance and infrastructure.

Loyalty Based on Leadership

The other common theme is leader personification. The personalization of political identity through one person can be seen in such slogans as Har Dil Mein Nawaz Sharif (Nawaz Sharif in Every Heart) and Qadam Barhao Nawaz Sharif Kay Saath (Move Forward with Nawaz Sharif). These slogans are symbolic of what Blommaert (2005) calls the charismatic discourse, whereby, emotional commitment replaces institutional trust. The slogans by the PML-N by personalizing leadership leads to the affective connection between the leader and the followers. It makes use of the traditional cultural ideals reverence and trust in the fatherly figure. This is unlike institutional and moral populism of PTI; PML-N populism is based on emotion and generates legitimacy based on devotion and not reform.

Democratic Legitimacy and Respect of the Vote Theme

The ideological opposition of PML-N to what they see as institutional parasitism is best expressed in the slogan *Vote Ko Izzat Do* (Respect the Vote). This slogan came into existence following the disqualification of Nawaz Sharif and it gave the PML-N a new meaning in its fight which was being based on democratic dignity. Izzat (honor) is a compound level that combines the emotional and moral aspects, making the democratic participation an ethical obligation. As explained by Wodak (2015) in his discourse-historical approach, this phenomenon is not to be ignored: political slogans tend to respond

to socio-historical backgrounds and *Vote Ko Izzat Do* is a discourse of resistance a discourse that attempts to restore the supremacy of civilians and the sanctity of elections. Whereas the slogans of PTI offer hope of change in the future, PML-Ns concentrate on protecting the current democratic set ups against foreign influence.

Comparative Thematic Interpretation

In comparison, the slogans of PTI are futuristic, visionary and reformist whereas the slogans of PML-N are past-focused, pragmatic as well as preservationist. The slogans of PTI create a discourse of discontinuity - breaking away of the corrupt customs to create a morally clean society. The slogans of PML-N on the other hand form a discourse of continuity-upholding values of service, loyalty and democracy to the prevailing structures. The slogans of PTI use a universal populist language linguistically in that they use collective and abstract language (e.g., change, justice, Pakistan). However, the slogans of the PML-N are biased, emotional, and focus on the name and personality of Nawaz Sharif. This disparity correlates with the theory of political metaphor developed by Charteris-Black (2011) where the metaphors of rebirth and revolution are typical of PTI, whereas the metaphors of light, family and service are typical of PML-N.

Viewed through the prism of discourse analysis, the slogans of PTI can be seen as moral populism where the politics is defined as a moral struggle between the pure people and the corrupt elite. The slogans of PML-N, on the contrary, are performance populism - the authority that is justified by the rhetoric of service, experience, and democratic respect. The two discourses work within the frameworks of populist ways, but they differ in terms of their ideological ambitions: PTI works towards transformation; PML-N works towards restoration. Political slogans serve as the compressed ideologies, which indicate a greater socio-political division in Pakistan. The slogans of PTI are defined by a reformist populism based on moral principles, and PML-N by the developmental populism based on personal loyalty and democratic respect. They combined form an understanding of how language, ideology, and power collide at the symbolic level of Pakistani politics.

The thematic analysis showed the obvious difference in the ideological and rhetorical content of PTI and PML-N slogans. Change, justice and empowerment were the most prevalent themes of the discussions of PTI because of the populist narrative of change and moral renewal. Reformist vision words like *naya Pakistan* and *Tabdeeli Aa Gayi Hai* are slogans that resonate with the youth and middle-income voters that want political transparency and fairness in the socio-economic system. This is connected to the idea of discourse as a means of social change that Fairclough (2013) claims, according to which language serves to rebuild a sense of collective identity based on moral ideals.

PML-N on the other hand focused on their slogans on service, leadership loyalty, and democratic respect, as evidenced in *Khidmat Ka Nishan* and *Vote Ko Izzat Do*. Those themes can be discussed as the signs of the so-called performance populism as the legitimacy can be based on the experience, continuity, and emotional attachment to the leadership (Wodak, 2015). The language of PML-N makes politics personal to the image of Nawaz Sharif with reference to traditional authority and family love.

In comparison, PTI has institutional and future-oriented slogans, whereas, PML-N has personal and past-oriented ones. The results indicate that PTI builds a populist reformist identity based on moral discourse and PML-N based identity is pragmatic developmental identity based on loyalty and democratic legitimacy. This dichotomy validates the position of van Dijk (2006) that ideology is structured in political discourse by including and excluding others- PTI identifies itself against corruption and PML-N

identifies itself against institutional marginalization. The bottom line is that slogans also serve to create altruistic micro-cosms of Pakistan, as a whole attacking the issue of change versus stasis.

Conclusion

This thematic comparison of political slogans of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has shown the importance of political language as an effective tool of ideology construction, identity creation and mobilization of voters. The analysis of twenty slogans of each party revealed both similarities and differences in their thematic orientations that are indicative of larger ideological and sociopolitical divisions of the Pakistani political discourse. It was found out that the slogans of PTI revolve around change, justice, and empowerment whereas the slogans of PML-N revolve around service, loyalty of leaders, and democratic legitimacy.

The slogans of PTI present a futuristic and a revolutionary language, which is based on moral populism and anti-elitist feeling. The reiteration of the words *Naya Pakistan* and *Tabdeeli* give a sense of inspirational story of rebirth and reformation. This is consistent with the opinion of Fairclough (2013) about discourse as a form of social change that political actors can use to change the consciousness of the people. The rhetoric of PTI is a break with the past that represents the sense of populism as a form of symbolic unity between diverse demands under one moral ideal that Laclau (2005) explains. PTI bases its arguments on such values as justice and dignity, and it is the voice of universal morality and national revival and this would attract young people, urban voters, and reformists.

Conversely, the slogans of PML-N create a discourse of stability, experience-based, which places importance on loyalty, performance as well as the respect to democratic institutions. This can be seen in such slogans as *Vote Ko Izzat Do* and *Khidmat Ka Nishan*, which, according to Wodak (2015), is the form of populism based on a performance justification of power by service and emotional attachment and continuity. The cult of leadership surrounding Nawaz Sharif is part of a historic culture in Pakistan regarding its politics with the traditional political culture being dominated by familial affiliations and charisma of a leader. Therefore, the language used by PML-N is, voter-friendliness, which is based on reliability, development and maintenance of democratic honor that places the party as a protector of democratic legitimacy and not an agent of revolution.

In comparison, the two employ populist speech but they differ in terms of ideological purpose and time orientation. The slogans of PTI are institutional, moralistic, and future oriented and have framed the politics as a moral fight against injustice and corruption. The slogans used by PML-N are individualized, realistic, and historical, which depicts politics as a moral obligation of service and democratic regards. These differences correspond to the ideology of van Dijk (2006), according to which political groups establish their moral in-groups and de-legitimize other out-groups with the help of language. PTI creates the identity by moral cleansing of self (we are honest) and PML-N by democratic victimhood (we are legitimate).

The research adds to the comprehension of the fact that political slogans capture the meaning of populist communication in South Asian democracies. Both parties turn the linguistic shortness to ideological profundity with the help of symbolism, emotion, repetition, etc. Political metaphors and slogans are persuasive as argued by Charteris-Black (2011) since they are emotionally appealing and reduce the complex political realities into a nut shell. Both the metaphor of change by PTI and the metaphor of service by PML-N are

mobilizing narratives in the sense that they link political identity to moral and emotional appeal.

To sum it up, it is clear that political slogans in Pakistan are not only a campaign tool but a discursive tool of ideological compromise. They reduce party philosophies to catch-phrases that mobilize emotions and form the political consciousness. The discourse of PTI is more a moral and reformist populism aiming at change, and that of PML-N is more pragmatic and developmental populism in search of legitimacy and permanence. Combining these opposing discourses, one can see the two opposing forces behind the political imagination of Pakistan, the wish to change and the necessity to maintain stability. This study reconfirms the fact that, as Fairclough (1995) assumes, language is a reflection of power and construction of power and that political slogans are still one of the most powerful means of constructing such a power in a democratic setting.

Recommendations

The scope of what can be compared is to be widened in the future research where the slogans of other Pakistani political parties should be included in order to cover a wider ideological range. They can be complemented by quantitative sentiment or corpus analysis which can provide more information about linguistic patterns and emotional appeals. Linguists and communication experts should also be involved by the political parties to make sure that the slogans are inclusive in nature (based on policy rather than the populist language). Lastly, schools ought to facilitate the realization of the persuasive power of political language to achieve critical media literacy and active informed democratic involvement among voters.

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