



RESEARCH PAPER

Confronting the Opposition: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Murad Saeed's Speeches against PML-N and PPP Governments in the National Assembly

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ABSTRACT

The current paper aims to analyze the speeches delivered by Murad Saeed, a Pakistani politician who served as Federal Minister for Communication and for Postal Services, in the National Assembly, in which he compares the performance of Imran Khan's government with that of the former governments (PML-N and PPP). Otherization in political discourse is a prevalent tool of establishing legitimacy. Political discourse may express an event or expose the hidden agenda of a particular political figure, party, or organization. Therefore, political discourse analysis seeks to highlight the discursive strategies used by political actors. The researchers have analyzed various indicators of Van Dijk's Ideological Square Model in the speeches. The analysis sheds light on how language and linguistic techniques are employed as instruments to establish a distinct contrast between political parties. The findings reveal that the speaker has employed various discursive strategies such as evidentiality, number game, comparison, and hyperbole to legitimize his political stance. His discursive strategies are politically persuasive and reinforce the image of PTI as a reformist party. Further exploration of additional indicators of "US" vs. "Them" is recommended in not only Murad Saeed's parliamentary speeches but also of other politicians.

KEYWORDS Political Discourse, Resistance, Ideology, Evidentiality, Persuasion, Speech

Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis deals with language beyond the sentence and combines verbal and non-verbal communication. CDA addresses various aspects such as connection between discourse, power, language, and social relations (Fairclough, 1989). CDA considers language as a social construct used by politicians to convey their ideological intentions or political motives. Thomas and Wareing (2004) states that individual words carry power and have the ability to influence the attitudes and perceptions of other people. Language is a tool that is used not only for steering people's thoughts and emotions but also for controlling their thoughts, emotions, and beliefs. Political discourse includes a wide range of communication forms like speeches, debates, social media posts, and political advertisements. Discourse producers frequently employ rhetorical strategies, such as discursive ideological tactics that positively portray themselves and negatively depict others. Their language is deliberately crafted to persuade or manipulate listeners into believing that resisting an unjust government is a moral duty for those concerned with human rights.

Murad Saeed, a prominent political figure in Pakistan, served as Federal Minister for Communication and for Postal Services. His political discourse often contrasts the

performance of PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) with that of the PPP (Pakistan People's Party) and PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League-N). By analyzing his lexical choices, persuasive strategies, and syntactic structures, the study aims to gain an understanding of how the speaker crafts a positive self-image while enhancing or highlighting the negative image of others. Examining these strategies and techniques provides an understanding of how political actors communicate their ideologies and shape public perception.

Literature Review

In qualitative research, discourse analysis is used as a method to analyze a piece of text, oral or written, in relation to its social context. Discourse analysis seeks to investigate the underlying strategies and techniques, and the effect of those strategies on discourse consumers.

According to Klein (1989), the vocabulary people use in everyday language is inherently different from the lexical choices they make when producing or crafting a political discourse, such as speeches, letters, and interviews. Furthermore, ideological vocabulary is a minor share of political-opinion language for not all political debates insinuate ideology. He classifies demarcation vocabulary, a subclass of political lexicon, into sigma and flag words. Flag words are employed by speakers in their language to enhance a positive self-image, whereas stigma words are employed to highlight negative image of out-group members.

Facts are intended to influence a broader audience (Lunsford, 1999). Haider (2014) analyzed Malala Yusafzai's speech about women rights and tried to examine the effect of persuasive strategies on audience's minds. It was concluded from the textual analysis that Malala cited facts and figures to make her arguments more logical and credible. Likewise, Mshvenieradze's (2013) analysis of campaign speeches delivered by Nicolas Sarkozy and Jacques Chirac, revealed the logical and ideological structures underlying the speeches, and the speakers' use of ethical appeals to construct a positive public image.

Building on similar analytical frameworks, Abbas (2024) analysed Kamala Harris concession speech using Van Dijk's Socio Cognitive Model and examined the linguistic strategies of positive self-representation to convey the message of optimism even in the times of electoral defeat. The analysis revealed that several discursive strategies were prominent in the speech, including lexicalization, repetition, self-glorification, norm expression, presupposition, metaphor, and actor description. Kamala Harris relied heavily on positive word choices for self-representation such as freedom, courage, hope, and justice. Through such strategies the speaker projects their image of strength, moral, integrity, forward looking, and Resilient.

Similarly, Saida (2021) analyzed Donald Trump's anti-immigration tweets. The findings of the research revealed that the discourse constructed a binary opposition between the Self (Americans) and the Other (Muslims and Mexican immigrants). Using Van Dijk's ideological square model, the speaker highlighted positive traits of the in-group and negative attributes of the outgroup. Through various discursive strategies such as, hyperbole, metaphor, actor description, and evidentiality, speakers portray themselves as rational, protective, and patriotic while the others are highlighted as dangerous, corrupt, criminal, violent, and inferior.

In a related context, Fritz (2019) analyzed discursive strategies used by Donald Trump in his presidential campaign speech to construct and deny racism. The analysis revealed that construction of racism was attributed to other immigrant groups through

negative comments. Trump utilized negative attributes to highlight and justify the building of the USA Mexico-border wall denying that he is a racist. Such positive references of the in-group people help them to manipulate people into thinking that they are rational, moral, and trustworthy.

Lafta and Mustafa (2022) applied Van Dijk's (2000) model of ideological polarization to reveal the discursive strategies used by American organisation such as American think tanks. Such institutes consistently utilise discursive strategies and techniques for positive self-representation (US) and negative other-representation (Muslims, Palestinians, and Russians) to reinforce political dominance and shape public opinion. Euphemism, hyperbole, and metaphors were used to manipulate people that Americans and its allies are rational and moral and others are irrational and dangerous.

In another relevant study, Sajjad (2015) states that political discourse analysis seeks to reveal the hidden agendas of political actors. Discourse producers articulate their ideas in a way that manipulates their listeners (discourse consumers) into thinking as they want, without taking some serious steps for addressing their real problems. Language is an instrumental tool through which political dominance is achieved. Political actors use speech as a tool to gain power and establish supremacy, which ultimately paves the way for the exploitation of the people. Bayram (2010) concluded that the formation of individual identities and social groups is based on the way we experience, perceive, and interpret a language. Different factors like desire for social status, power, and cultural influence acts as the basis for originating a particular type of discourse.

The analysis is based on Van Dijk's (1998) Ideological Square Model which focuses on how politicians create positive images of themselves and negative images of others. The Self, in this model, refers to the in-group or the people who are depicted in a favorable manner. The Other refers to the out-group or the people who are depicted in a negative manner.

Text is an ideological representation of the positive self or in-group members and the negative others or out-group members (Dijk, 2007). Discourse (spoken or written) is a social phenomenon and is often influenced by ideologies. The theoretical framework is multidisciplinary by nature that combines society and discourse. While communicating, people not only share information but also express their beliefs by either challenging or supporting a particular ideology.

Van Dijk (1998) introduced the theoretical concept of the "Ideological Square," that includes strategies for positive in-group presentation and negative out-group presentation. He states that the ideological square basically works to polarize two groups in order to present the "Self" positively and the "Others" negatively i.e. "We" are good and "They" are bad. He identified two levels of discourse analysis: macro-level analysis and micro-level analysis. Macro analysis of the text includes four basic strategies:

- Emphasize positive things about the in-group members, while de-emphasizing positive things about the out-group members.
- Emphasize negative things about the out-group members, while de-emphasizing negative things about the in-group members.

Micro analysis of the model includes twenty-five discursive strategies, such as actor description, authority, burden, categorization, comparison, consensus, counterfactuals, disclaimer, euphemism, evidentiality, number game, illustration, generalization,

hyperbole, implication, irony, lexicalization, metaphor, national self-glorification, norm expression, polarization, populism, presupposition, vagueness, and victimization.

Critical discourse analysis is employed as a framework because it is considered as the most appropriate framework for analyzing communication in relation to power and ideology (Fairclough, 2013). The researchers have selected the following indicators for the analysis of the speeches delivered by Murad Saeed:

Evidentiality and the use of numerical data as discursive tools function as vehicles of persuasion. Discourse producers use factual data to make their stance more objective. Through statistics and reports, speakers or writers make their claims legitimate and represent themselves as reasonable, knowledgeable, and truthful, and, thereby, create a positive image of themselves. Concurrently, the same strategies can be applied in a pretentious way to disapprove others since selective or overblown numbers may reflect the out-group as ineffective, threatening, and unsophisticated. Therefore, ideological bias is concealed by the notions of evidentiality and numbers.

Comparison as a discursive strategy reveals how one concept or group of people is preferable to another. In Dijk's (1998) model, two entities are often compared by mentioning similarities and differences between them. The speaker creates his credibility and trustworthiness by juxtaposing the good things of the in-group (we) and the bad things of the out-group (they). An example of this is the implicit moral hierarchy constructed by political actors saying that what we have is a system of peace and what they have is a system of conflict. These are contrasts in which the in-group appears civilized, democratic or just and the out-group appears backward, corrupt, or violent. It is a type of framing that causes the dominance of the self to be a natural and the other one to be invalid, causing an ideological division and justifying social or political behavior.

Dijk (1998) defines hyperbole as a semantic rhetorical device employed for the augmentation of meaning. Hyperbole is the intentional exaggeration, which is frequently employed in political and ideological speeches to increase the perception of the reality. When applied to the accomplishments or the virtues of the in-group, hyperbolic phrases such as the "greatest nation" or "unprecedented success" create a romanticized self-view. On the other hand, in cases where the faults or corrupt activities of the out-group are overstated (i.e., by calling the adversaries a real threat or a serious danger), hyperbole increases fear and anger. This hyperbolic reduction of complex problems to emotionally-laden dualisms, highlights the sense of solidarity with the self, and enhances hatred of the other.

Material and Methods

The research is purely qualitative and deductive which means that the researchers have used theoretical arguments without relying on numerical values and interpretations.

For sample selection, the researchers adopted purposive sampling, a non-random sampling technique. In purposive sampling, the researcher(s) purposely select participants with an intention to secure valuable and apposite information (Denscombe, 1998). For this study, the researchers have selected two speeches delivered by former Federal Minister Murad Saeed in the National Assembly. The speeches are available on YouTube in Urdu. The rationale behind selecting a limited number of speeches is focused and an in-depth analysis because such speeches require close reading which is more manageable and meaningful with a smaller and well-curated sample.

Concerning the analysis of the texts, the researchers applied Van Dijk's model, namely, Ideological Square. The current study examined Van Dijk's concept of discursive polarization between the "Self" and the "Other." Employing Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis, the researchers identified and analyzed the relevant sections of the speeches on the following strategies employed for polarization: (1) evidentiality, (2) number game, (3) comparison, and (4) hyperbole.

Results and Discussion

In order to support the stance, the speaker provides evidence to influence his audience, a rhetorical method discussed by Van Dijk (1998) as the "number game." Murad Saeed, in his speeches, provided many references in the form of numbers and factual data to shape the minds and psyche of the audience. For instance, he stated: *"In the first three years of PML-N government they built roads that comprised an area of 947 kilometers, while in the government of Imran Khan, just in two years, they built roads that comprised an area of 2032 kilometers"* (Saeed, 2020, 19:13). The statement is used to argue that the economic performance of Imran Khan's government was superior to that of previous governments, namely PPP and PML-N.

The speaker further claimed: *"All the organization including PTA, Pakistan post, Pakistan steel mills, Pakistan railways, they left all of these institutions in deficit"* (Saeed, 2020, 21:37). He also highlighted the situation in Thar, referencing the health department report: *"Health department ki report k mutabiq Thar ke andar, 2019 me, 250 bachy ghizayi qillat ki waja se moat ka shikar bany, 2018 me 550 bachy, 2017 me 450 bachy, 2016 me 480 bachy, 2015 me 399 bachy mar gay"* (Saeed, 2019, 17:20). He further questioned the use of government funds, asking: *"104 arab rupy jo unho ne pani ki qilat khatam krny k liye badget me se liye the wo kahan gaye?"* (Saeed, 2020, 17:30).

In further support of his position, the speaker remarked on industrial revival: *"Imran Khan ke dor me 100 k qarib textiles mills, jo in ki hakoomat me band hogye thy, Imran Khan k dor me dubara bahal hony lagy ha"* (Seed, 2020, 21:10). He also highlighted improvements in public health services: *"Taqribn 57 lakh khandano ko hum ne sehat card de diya ha jisme me aik mareez 7 lakh 20 hazar tak muft or behtareen elaj kar sakta ha"* (Saeed, 2020, 14:13). In these statements, the speaker is describing his government with positive references, while portraying previous governments in negative manner. In order to legitimize his political stance, the speaker has foregrounded the issues faced by the people of 'Thar' such as poverty, hunger, and water scarcity. He emphasized that the previous governments had allocated substantial budgetary funds to address all these problems; however, the situation remained unchanged.

In contrast, he highlighted the achievements of Imran Khan's government, pointing to the revival of textile industries. Positive language such as *efforts*, *revival* and the use of numerical figures like *"the availability of Sehat card to 5.7 million people"* were used to describe the current government's performance in a favorable light. Furthermore, the speaker mentioned another accomplishment by stating: *"Today after fifty years, Pakistan railway became the first money making department."* Murad Saeed, in his speeches, made it clear that the label of corruption is valid to apply to the PML-N government, and he ironically stated that comparing Imran Khan's government to the PML-N would be a shameful act.

The speaker portrays the previous governments in a highly negative way by stating that they had left the economy in a critical condition (ICU). He states: *"Ye log mayishat ko ICU me chorr kar gay thy. Or Besharmi ki intiha dekhiye speaker sahb, lakho ton gandum jab sindh"*

k godamo se ghayib hota ha awr Jab NAb ka chapa parrrta ha to ye plea bargaining kar lety ha awr ye taslim kar lety ha k hum ne daka dala ha" (Saeed, 2020, 12:56). By comparing the positive achievements of the current government with the shortcomings of the previous one, it is indirectly implied that the former government was unsuccessful and incompetent. Lexicalization or word choice like "ICU" is employed when referring to the actions or outcomes associated with the previous government, thus presenting them in a less favorable manner.

The speaker is deliberately mentioning certain figures such as, "*Opposition k qarzy hum wapis kr rahy hai, 24% mehengayi apke dor me thi jo ke aaj 14% ha,*" to highlight both moral outrage and a direct accusation of corruption against former governments (Saeed, 2020, 12:14). He enhances the image of Imran khan's government by saying that, "*Prime Minister Imran Khan aj bhi apny ghar me reh raha hai or apke apky qarzy utha raha hai,*" manipulating people to view the decrease in inflation as a sign of successful economic management, implying that this economic stability will impact various aspects of people's lives (Saeed, 2019,10:6).

Table 1
Numerical Evidence from Murad Saeed's speeches

No.	Topic	Figure(s) Stated	Purpose	Target
1	Construction of Roads	PML-N: 947 km (3 years)	To highlight Imran Khan's government superior infrastructure performance	PTI: Positive
		PTI: 2032 km (2 years)		PML-N: Negative
2	Child Deaths in Thar	2019: 250 2018: 550, 2017: 450 2016:480 , 2015:399	To highlight neglect under past governments	PPP and PML-N: Negative
3	Water Scarcity Budget	RS. 104 Billion allocated	Questioned where funds were spent	PML-N and PPP: Negative
4	Textile Mills Revival	100 Mills reopened under PTI government	To show economic recovery under Imran Khan's era	PTI: Positive
5	Sehat Card Distribution	5.7 million families, Up to RS. 720,000 per patient	To show improvement in healthcare	PTI: Positive
6	Economy Criticism	Left economy in ICU (wheat theft in Sindh)	Strong metaphor and corruption claims	PML-N and PPP: Negative
7	Inflation Comparison	Opposition govt: 24%	To highlight inflation control	PTI: Positive
		PTI govt: 14%		PPP and PML-N: Negative

Table 1 demonstrates the logical reasoning employed by the speaker in presenting statistical data, such as facts and figures, to make his arguments more credible and legitimate. The analysis aligns with the view of Haider (2014) that discourse producers often utilize facts and figures to make their argument more credible. By blending facts with assertions, the speaker leaves the audience with the impression that he has a genuine concern for their well-being.

Comparison is an act of examining and evaluating similarities and differences between two concepts, statements, individuals, groups or situations. In his speeches, Murad Saeed constructs a clear dichotomy between Imran khan and his government as the "Self," and the PML-N and PPP governments as the "Other." He explained the difference in approach between Imran khan and Nawaz Sharif by stating that: "*Aqwam-e-mutahida k aiwano se jab islam k khilaf zeher ugla jata tha or propaganda hota tha wahan Imran khan ne awaz buland ki or pehli bar khatm-e- nabuwat ka muqadma larra, jahan se muaslamano ki dil azari hoti*

thi.” (Saeed, 2020, 17:7) When Pakistan and Islam were negatively portrayed at international forums, Imran Khan was the one who defended Islam, Pakistan and interests of Muslims. Phrases like “*Awaz buland ki*” and “*muqadma larrra*” highlights him as someone who is committed and speaks for the rights and values of Muslims. He also foregrounded the issue of Kashmir, for which Imran Khan took active steps at the international level to address it. This further enhances the image of Imran Khan who advocates for human rights.

In the statement, “*Me mehroom tabqy se taluq rakhta hun. Jitna meri rago me khoon ka akhri qatra hoga me in k haq ke liye larrunga,*” the speaker describes himself as a member of the middle and deprived class and expresses his dedication to fighting for the rights of the common people. This reference correlates with the view of Abbas (2024) who stated that positive word choices such as, freedom, courage, hope, and Justice help speakers to project their image of strength, moral, integrity, forward looking, and Resilient. All these elements portray the leaders of the previous governments as working against the interests of the people and involved in corruption for their own benefit.

While speaking, a speaker deliberately exaggerates different facts and figures to heighten the effect of his speech. Murad Saeed gives an example by reading statements from various books in order to exaggerate their negative image. He states that on Nov 12, 2008, Mike Hayden and his deputy, Stephen Capps, visited Zardari, who was elected two months ago, to check his reaction to the drone strikes that sparked protests across Pakistan. CIA Director Michael Hayden reported to President Zardari on several cases involving the killings of Westerners, including American officials who were present at the Kam Sham training camp in the tribal area of North Waziristan. Murad Saeed (Saeed, 2019, 6:46), in the National Assembly, mentioned that Zardari is quoted (in Obama’s Wars) to have said:

“Kill the seniors,” argued Zardari. He added further that collateral damage does not trouble him though it may agitate Americans. Zardari thereby just offered the CIA his consent (Woodward, 2010)

To understand the statement of Asif Ali Zardari, written in Obama’s wars, its context must be taken into consideration. During the meeting with American officials, he made this statement while talking about drone strikes in Pakistan. The phrase “collateral damage” suggests that they are of secondary concern which minimizes thousands of civilian casualties. Zardari indirectly gives an approval for drone strikes in Pakistan. The tone is dismissive, showing lack of care and empathy for the people of Waziristan. The assertion made by Mike Hayden that Zardari’s statement gave the CIA and approval or “green light” for drone strikes further highlights Zardari’s Prioritization for security interests over humanitarian concerns.

Murad Saeed exaggerates the former Prime Minister Asif Ali Zardari’s indifferent attitude toward the nation and its people by saying: “*Ap dron karty jaye, hum parliament me Ihtijaj karty jayengy, ghar chaly jayengy, chai pee jayengy or so jayengy*” (Saeed, 2019, 7:37). The statement “*Ap dron karty jayen*” symbolizes Zardari’s negligent attitude. He is portrayed as a leader who prioritizes his own interest over the well-being of his citizens and does not care how many people of the nation die. Even if the act is condemned by them, it is only on a superficial level.

In contrast, Murad Saeed exaggerates the role of Imran Khan as a Prime Minister by showing his concern and empathy for the people of Waziristan. In this statement, “*or ye us waqt ki bat hai jab Imran Khan waziristan walo kr liye awaz utha raha tha, ihtijaj kar raha tha, hum ne wahan long march kia kiun ke is dehshat gardi ki waja se waziristan k gharo se janazy nikal rahy thy,*” he highlights and arguably exaggerates the difference in approach between Khan and

other previous political leaders regarding military operations and drone strikes in Waziristan (Saeed, 2019, 6:56). Other political leaders, including Asif Ali Zardari, were not as vocal as Imran Khan. He raised his voice and protested on behalf of the people of Waziristan. The use of the phrase "*Hamari Awam*" suggests a sense of unity and shared identity with the people. The analysis supports the view of Saida (2021) who concluded that through various discursive strategies such as, pronouns, hyperbole, metaphor, actor description, and evidentiality, speakers portray themselves as rational, protective, and patriotic and the others as dangerous, corrupt, criminal, violent, and inferior.

The analysis demonstrates that Murad Saeed used his speeches as ideological instruments to legitimize his political affiliation and delegitimize his opponents. Using the model designed by Van Dijk, it could be seen that the language used by Saeed constructs a polarized Self versus Other narrative. Murad Saeed, while speaking in National Assembly, expressed his views regarding previous governments of Pakistan (PPP and PML-N) and talked about their poor performance while at the same time highlighted the strengths of Imran Khan's government. He states that corruption done by previous governments left the country in critical condition which will have a far lasting impact on country's economy. He further highlighted the issues of hunger, poverty, inflation, and water scarcity in different parts of the country for which previous government didn't take any serious steps, although they allocated a major part of the budget for solving these problems.

Language adorned with ethical statements suits best the themes, namely, justice, morality, and virtue. Replete with emotive diction and descriptions, his language provokes feelings of hope, fear, and anger. Furthermore, the use of personal pronouns and shared narratives fortifies the speakers' relatability. The use of 'we,' 'our,' and 'us' in the speeches shape the approach of language as inclusive rather than individualistic. Figurative language, such as metaphors and repetition enhance this emotional impact. Such finding resonates with the view of Lafta and Mustafa (2022) who concluded that metaphors, hyperbole, and euphemism are used to represent the ingroup members as rational and moral. Lastly, statistics, historical references, and questions characterize his language with rationality and credibility.

Murad Saeed relies on evidentiality and number game as tools for establishing political credibility reflecting Lunsford (1999) claim that facts significantly influence audiences. As much as he provides figures and institutional data which seem objective, these facts are primarily persuasive, rather than analytical. The selective use of evidence, what Van Dijk (1998) labels as strategic maneuvering, gives an illusion of accountability and transparency. The comparison of numbers between PTI and previous governments, the speaker depicts economic achievements and national development as a partisan consideration. Such framing is a demonstration of the concept of ideological common sense presented by Fairclough (2013), in which he explains that the dominant political discourses are internalized as truths through repetitive linguistic validation.

The comparative strategy, likewise, builds up an ideological gap between Imran Khan and the former leaders. With religious, national, and humanitarian values, Saeed transforms the political criticism into the moral narrative of righteousness. He emphasizes the way in which Khan defends Islam and the oppressed, and describes the opposition as indifferent. This is a manifestation of what Bayram (2010) terms as discursive populism, that is, the speaker poses himself or herself as the real voice of the people.

The discussion indicates that the language of political discourse is performative. Repetition of certain phrases and aggressive tone indicates that the speaker is trying to create social hierarchies. The moral dualism, corrupt/honest, traitorous/patriotic, is used

again and again that transforms complicated socio-economic problems into emotionally charged oppositions, a phenomenon also highlighted by Klein (1989) in his discussion of flag and stigma words.

Conclusion

People use language, play with words, and encode their thoughts and ideologies with a purpose in mind. They inject their ideologies into discourse consumers' minds through language. The current study has explored how Van Dijk's model of the "Self" and the "Other" helps us identify the traces of corruption and unjust government in Murad Saeed's speeches. The speaker has successfully portrayed his point of view, beliefs, and ideology through language. All of these techniques contribute to the "Us" versus "Them" polarizing strategy, in which PML-N and PPP are explicitly portrayed as the out-group members

Recommendations

The researchers have taken only four indicators from Van Dijk's model for the analysis. Therefore, the researchers recommend exploring additional indicators of his "Us" versus "Them" model in future studies.

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