



RESEARCH PAPER

The Power of an 'Absolutely Not' by the Pakistani PM Imran Khan: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

People use language for different social practices, for different purposes and in different contexts. Discourse analysis is a vast and deep field of study which examines these social practices to understand the hidden meanings behind the text. The objective of this paper was to analyze a simple but very strong and amazing phrase 'absolutely not' by the Pakistani PM in a particular context. The PM used this phrase during an interview with Jonathan Swan on HBO on Saturday, June 19, 2021 when he was asked a question about giving military bases to the US in Pakistan for targeted operations in Afghanistan. The worldwide print and electronic media discussed and interpreted this amazing phrase 'absolutely not' focusing on the past Pak-US relationships and its impacts on future politics in the region, but this article tried to clarify and highlight some precise meanings attached to this amazing term. This 'absolutely not' also takes on symbolic meanings. It shows the PM's moral standpoint against anti-peace-keeping policies in the region, shows its power and impact on the present and future policies to establish regional peace, and it shows the PM's love for peace in the region and also the possible consequences as stated in the research questions. Fairclough's model in CDA has been used to analyze this amazing 'absolutely not' and contribute to existing knowledge by filling a research gap. The present economic and political ground realities are a true picture of this critical analysis, and more research of this 'absolutely not' should be conducted in the future according to the upcoming ground realities in the region.

KEYWORDS Absolutely Not, CDA, Pakistani PM's Interview, The US-Afghan War

Introduction

CDA is a deep and vast field that focuses on using language practically in different contexts and perspectives. According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997), it focuses on the social practice of language that is linked with specific contexts, situational social demands and functions for different purposes. "A shared assumption is that discourse can be taken as a multimodal social practice" (Rogers, 2011). Texts, language and communication should always be considered in their social context including various features of cohesion and coherence, discourse markers and paralinguistic features, conventions and ways of taking turns. The study of everyday events, organizational decisions, politics, power and ideologies has become a prominent new focus of it, and discourse analysts critically examine different linguistic features for this purpose. Discourse is always meaningful, so it helps to construct or expose realities and fill a gap. The precise, hidden, symbolic and different other layers of meanings and interpretations of different words, phrases and sentences are discovered according to the relevant contexts of language use, world knowledge, event sequence and schemata.

Among various areas of discourse analysis, no area of study can be more important for human beings on the earth than war and terrorism because they are directly related to human life and world peace. Thus, there is a crying need of time that the intellectual community should play its mind-making role in exposing and constructing realities for people so that they can build pressure on the governments worldwide to avoid wars at all levels as well as state-sponsored terrorist activities as we can see in different parts of the world particularly in Afghanistan where the UN peace-keeping force is playing its destructive role in the name of war against terrorism. This so-called war against terrorism is spreading terrorism in the world because thousands of innocent people including their children, women and parents have been killed, and those who are left behind have no other option than fight against the killers. Because of this background, as reported by worldwide media, the war in Afghanistan carried on for more than 20 years, and after this long destructive war, the UN and the US forces have left the country after a crushing and admitted defeat, but still the US wants to keep some military bases in Pakistan to keep an eye on Afghan situation as the US falsely claims, but it is just to keep an eagle and secret eye on China and Pakistan as the international media rightly claims. The present situation in Afghanistan – treating the enemies with high moral standard and forgiveness for everyone – destroyed the years-long US propaganda against Taliban’s brutal treatment to mislead the international community. During an interview with Jonathan Swan on HBO on Saturday, June 19, 2021, the PM used the phrase ‘absolutely not’ when he was asked a question about giving military bases to the US in Pakistan. This ‘absolutely not’ was given much importance and a big space on the front page headlines in national and international newspapers. The international print and electronic media discussed and interpreted this phrase ‘absolutely not’ almost in the same way focusing on the past Pak-US military relationships in the region. This amazing phrase ‘absolutely not’ was taken from the PM’s interview for discourse analysis focusing on the past, present and future political scenario and interests of countries in the region.

Pakistani MP’s interview on HBO with Jonathan Swan on Saturday, June 19, 2021 about being an active partner in every peace-keeping process and effort, and not being a part of a blind military alliance in Afghan-US war was appreciated by the worldwide peace-loving community except Indian and the US governments. The PM used this amazing phrase ‘absolutely not’ to convey a meaningful message to the international players who are afraid of the growing power and prosperity of China, Pakistan and other countries in the region. The use of this persuasive phrase is very significant to assure the world that Pakistan will cooperate with the world and peacekeeping communities with all its military and economic capacity to establish peace and eradicate terrorist activities in the region. In fact, it is a loud and clear message to the individual and state-sponsored terrorist groups in the region that Pakistan will not be a part of Afghan-US war. This analysis tried to expose the symbolic and hidden meanings of the amazing ‘absolutely not’ in the light of the US demands and regional politics. Also, the study can motivate the research community to investigate and highlight such international issue on peace-keeping efforts to inform and convince people on the earth about the anti-peace-keeping forces in the world so that they can build pressure on their leaders and governments to be a part of the peace-keeping process and efforts.

Literature Review

The term discourse "integrates the whole palettes of meanings" (Titscher et al., 2000). CDA analyzes written and spoken texts to unfold the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias as stated by Van Dijk (1998). Fairclough (1989, 1995) model of CDA consists of three inter-linked process of analysis, and these three dimensions are: the object of analysis that requires description, the process that requires interpretation and

the socio-historical conditions that requires explanation. In this way, CDA makes the people understand different hidden things which they might not be able to understand themselves, for the language uses function in different structures and not in isolation.

CDA of social, ideological and political speeches is a focus of the language researchers to reach an understanding. Intellectual efforts have been made to contribute towards CDA including the analysis of texts in literature, news headlines as well as speeches on present politics and economic problems and their solutions. Many political speeches of world leaders have been critically analyzed such as Amjad, M. (2019) analyzed Canadian PM's speech after the Christchurch Mosque in Australia, but there is no CDA of this amazing 'absolutely not' by Pakistani PM Imran Khan. This study will encourage the researchers by bridging the gap and contributing to the existing knowledge on the subject.

We are living in a materialistic world in which 'yes' is the default to make people happy, but we must realize the power of 'no' and train ourselves to say 'no' when it is required. No, not and absolutely not can be used to convey different meanings in different contexts. To be able to say 'no' can empower you, help you establish healthy boundaries and enable others to have clarity about what they can expect from you. According to Bohns as quoted by Leith (2018), we fear that the other person will feel rejected if we say 'no' because it stirs up intensely negative emotions - embarrassment and guilt." According to Sills (2013, 2016), *No* shows its value saying who I am; what I value; what I will and will not do and how I will choose to act. It often takes courage to say; it is hard to receive. According to Chowdhury, B. R. (2020), "The art of leadership is saying no, not saying yes. It is very easy to say yes." This quote of Tony Blair, the former British Prime minister, has been rightly stated and has been held with great conviction by the Times Magazine. The idea has also been shared by famous personalities like the super-investor Warren Buffet and the tech-lord Steve Jobs; the PM Imran Khan said, this amazing 'absolutely not' instead of a simple 'no.' It is said that the difference between successful people and very successful people is that very successful people know the priceless value of 'No.' They cannot compromise for a 'YES', but can hold on to a 'NO' whenever allowed to do so, and the PM Imran Khan did the same. We must always remember that our country, respect, lives and interests are on the top, so there is no need to prove anything to anyone or be in an insulting cage of saying 'YES.' It always helps us in making ourselves the extraordinary individuals, assists us in realizing who we are, and makes us extremely efficient and productive.

Material and Methods

The data of Pakistani MP's interview conducted by Jonathan Swan on Saturday, June 19, 2021 (updated on Sunday, June 20, 2021) has been taken from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIHPEgE3fjk> and different national and international newspapers. The qualitative paradigm has only been used to unfold the precise, hidden and symbolic meanings behind this amazing phrase 'absolutely not,' his intonation and stress patterns as well as his body language to answer the research questions in the light of regional politics. For the analysis of this amazing phrase, Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse analysis has been chosen.

Results and Discussion

The data analysis has been done in four sections focusing on the '*absolutely not*' by Pakistani PM Imran Khan, and this amazing 'absolutely not' is the main idea in the research questions.

- a) *Analysis of the PM's 'absolutely not' with his moral standpoint against anti-peace keeping policies in the region:* The interpretations and analysis of this 'absolutely not' show their links with moral standpoint of the PM against anti-peace keeping political activities and policies in the region, and this 'absolutely not' was in response to the question by Jonathan Swan: "Would you allow the American government to have CIA here in Pakistan to conduct cross-border counterterrorism missions against Al Qaeda, ISIS or the Taliban?"

Pakistan's Inter-Service-Intelligence (ISI) agency was Washington's only gateway to Afghanistan for decades before the US invasion in October 2001, providing an avenue by which the US could funnel financial and materiel support to Afghan tribesmen fighting the socialist Afghan government and its Soviet allies in the 1980s, including those that later became the Taliban, and then to groups resisting the Taliban government that came to power after the socialist government collapsed in 1996. While the US and Taliban reached a peace deal in February 2020 for the US to end its 20-year occupation of the country and remove its remaining soldiers, according to the New York Times, the US is once again searching for proxies in Afghanistan to support after the last US forces leave on September 11 because the US would like to keep a small "quick response force (QRF)" on-call in the region to neutralize any threat, and Islamabad will not cooperate with the US any longer. CIA Director William Burns and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin have both visited Pakistan in recent months to discuss continued cooperation. With this background of cooperation from Pakistan, Jonathan Swan asked this question, and the PM categorically stated 'absolutely not' that means the PM swatted down CIA request to use Pakistani soil for any sort of action inside Afghanistan. Pakistan would 'absolutely not' permit any of its bases or use of its territory to the US for any kind of action inside Afghanistan. On the contrary, some US officials were misleading the world by lying about a possible deal on the table to have military bases in Pakistan; Pakistan strongly condemned such false rumors by CIA officials. This moral standpoint of the PM to say 'absolutely not' was the cry of the time to establish peace in the region because the hateful, self-assertive and selfish military and political policies were destroying the regional peace. After 20-year war, the present US defeat in Afghanistan proves that the Pakistani stance of a political solution in the region was the only solution, and the world has accepted it now after the thousands of people's deaths; it was all because of the anti-peace-keeping policies in the region. This 'absolutely not' will save the lives of innocent people, discourage the regional terrorist activities and avoid further collateral damage, so this 'absolutely not' is, in fact, a blessing in disguise. That is why, the decision was welcomed and appreciated, and according to Taliban's spokesperson, "The demand by US forces for having bases in Pakistan is unjustified, and Pakistan responded rightly." These important points do support the PM's long-standing stance of peaceful solution of Afghan-US war, so saying '*absolutely not*' has a moral standpoint against anti-peace keeping policies of some international and regional players in the region as stated in the first research question.

- b) *Analysis of the PM's 'absolutely not' with its power and impact on regional and international politics:* Our analysis and interpretations of this 'absolutely not' prove the power of this simple phrase and show its impacts on regional and international politics.

It was really a very strong and clear-cut response using 'absolutely not' that was surprising and stunning for the interviewer, so he had to interrupt the PM asking 'seriously' to reconfirm his unbelievably strong words. According to Sills (2013, 2016), *No* tells people who you are, what is your value, what you will or will not do. *No* is an instrument of integrity and a reliable shield against unnecessary exploitation. It often takes courage to say; it is hard to receive. *No* can also make people respect you and your time

because when you can say *No*, people are careful to come to you with only meaningful requests. *No* can make your *Yes* more meaningful and reliable. It tests the health and equity of your closest relationships. If you feel you cannot say *No*, at least to some things, some of the time, then you are not being loved and respected – you are being controlled. Keeping in mind all these important points about the importance and power of saying ‘no’ to someone, the PM’s ‘absolutely not’ was an absolutely right phrase at the right time to say ‘no’ to establish peace in the region. Its power changed the directions of regional and international politics; it changed the lexical and grammatical choices by the officials of India, the US and many others; it changed their tone, body language and demands of doing more to protect their interests in the region. Those who used to talk in an authoritative mode, mood and tone have learnt some polite, humble and requesting manners after this ‘absolutely not.’ It is rightly said that no one will respect you if you do not respect yourself. It was the power and impact of saying ‘no’ that have brought so many revolutionary changes in the regional politics. According to Sills (2013, 2016), personal integrity requires the power of saying *No*. The ability to say *No* is an essential element of your moral authority, and without it, we are merely agreeable pleasers. Whatever the cost or quake involved when you deliver a *No*, backbone is defined by your ability to say it. These important points do support the PM’s long-standing stance of peaceful solution of Afghan-US war, and saying ‘*absolutely not*’ has proved its power and impact on regional and international politics as stated in the second research question.

- c) *Analysis of the PM’s ‘absolutely not’ that means love for peace:* Our analysis and interpretations of this amazing ‘absolutely not’ prove that the phrase also means love for peace in the region.

In the region, the root causes of insecurity and war are the foreign forces, and this is what the PM believes, so he has been talking about a peaceful solution of Afghan-US war for a long time. If there are no foreign forces and other foreign elements in the region, there will be long-term peace in the region. The UN and the US officials know this reality and condition of establishing peace in the region, but they are not actually interested in peace in the region; they want to control the region because of their personal interests. As stated by an Afghan spokesperson, they urge neighbouring countries not to allow foreign forces to stay in the region...“The people of Afghanistan will not remain silent in the face of such a provocative act. They will fulfill their religious and historical responsibilities in the same way as they have done throughout history.” As we know, a peace deal was signed with the US in February 2020 in Qatar, the Taliban have committed that they have repeatedly assured others that their soil will not be used against anyone’s security. At the same time, they also urge others not to let their soil and airspace be used against Afghanistan. According to Hutchings K. J. (2019), saying no doesn’t stop you from being a nice and considerate person. Sometimes, the kindest thing you can do is to say ‘no’ to someone including yourself. Thus, the PM’s ‘absolutely not’ was absolutely right in this situation, and the current statements of the US officials, and the recent speech of the US president Joe Biden, in which he has defended his decision to withdraw military forces from Afghanistan, are the concrete proofs of it.

- d) *Analysis of the PM’s ‘absolutely not’ with its abrupt or possible consequences on regional and international politics:* Our analysis and interpretations of this ‘absolutely not’ prove the power of this simple phrase and show its consequences on regional and international politics.

This ‘absolutely not’ on a live TV interview by a PM of a third-world country was unacceptable for some of the world leaders because it was against their economic and political interests in different regions of the world. After this ‘absolutely not’ in a live TV

interview, many of the analysts and reporters claimed that it would not be possible for the PM to hold his office anymore, and the recorded history up to now proves it true. Whatsoever the reasons of the consequences which the PM faced, we can see the active roles of different private and government institutions, national and international print, electronic and social media to try their best to build-up a ready-made public opinion in a specific direction, but they failed to do so. The ground realities are totally different from this planned campaign of falsely build-up opinions. Despite all that, the patriotism of any institution cannot be questioned.

Pakistan and the US have the same interest in that long-suffering country: a political settlement, stability, economic development and the denial of any haven for terrorists. We oppose any military takeover of Afghanistan that will lead only to decades of civil war. In the past, Pakistan made a mistake, but we have learnt from that experience. Pakistan has suffered so much from the wars in Afghanistan – more than 70,000 Pakistanis and in KPK province alone 500 Pakistani policemen have been killed and losses to the Pakistani economy have exceeded \$150 billion while the US provided \$20 billion in aid. Tourism and investment dried up because after joining the U.S. efforts, Pakistan was targeted as a collaborator. There are more than 3 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan, and there will be many more refugees if there is a civil war instead of a political settlement. If Pakistan were to agree to host the U.S. bases for bombing in Afghanistan, there will be an Afghan civil war, Pakistan will be targeted again for revenge by terrorists, and Pakistan simply cannot afford this; we have already paid too heavy a price. If the US, with the most powerful military machine in history, couldn't win the war from inside Afghanistan after 20 years, how would the US do it from the bases in Pakistan? Now the readers can better understand that the meaning of 'absolutely not' by the PM is 'love for peace' because this 'absolutely not' is helping to establish peace in the region. It means, if there is not an 'absolutely not' by the PM, if there are military and air bases for foreign forces, if there is no honor for the peace deal, there will be a destructive war and terrorist activities in the region. Pakistan is ready to be a partner for peace in Afghanistan with the United States, but as U.S. troops withdraw, we will avoid risking further conflict because we love peace in the region, and this peace is coming through an 'absolutely not.' Helping those in genuine need, if you are able, is always a good thing. However, you can't help everyone, but you can help yourself, and everyone who wants to say 'no' should know the limits of saying 'yes and no.' These important points do support the PM's long-lasting stance of peaceful solution of the Afghan-US war and saying '*absolutely not*' means love for peace because it helps to establish peace in the region as stated in the third research question. The last important point is face the consequences because of this '*absolutely not*' because it goes against the interests of world powers. Despite all that, there are some internal and external issues which can urge to ask an important question. The question is: Can the current economic and political situations of the country and the defence related issues of the region force the PM change his 'absolutely not' into 'absolutely yes?'

Findings

- a) To convey his viewpoint, the PM chose very simple and impressive lexical choices and linguistic expressions against anti-peace-keeping activities and policies in the region. Many scholars and researchers support the idea of saying 'no' because it brings respect, stability, peace, and it is a prominent sign of great leaders. The PM is also one of the active supporters of saying 'no' whenever it is required. That's why, his 'absolutely not' is honored, appreciated and discussed in every corner of the world.

- b) It is believed that the PM's 'absolutely not' was absolutely right at that time because the whole region is on fire due to not saying a 'no' to the foreign forces based in Afghanistan. The US military bases are a root cause of anti-peace-keeping activities in the region that should not at all be supported. This moral standpoint of the PM to say 'absolutely not' was the crying need of the time to establish peace in the region because the hateful, self-assertive and selfish military and political policies were destroying the regional peace. After 20-year war, the present US defeat in Afghanistan proves that the Pakistani stance on a political solution of Afghan-US war was the only solution, and the world has accepted it now after the thousands of people's deaths; the loss of lives was because of the anti-peace-keeping policies in the region that have been changed after an 'absolutely not.'
- c) It was really a very strong and clear-cut response using 'absolutely not' that was surprising and stunning for the interviewer. This 'absolutely not' is very powerful and has long-lasting impacts on the international and regional politics to establish peace. It forced the US officials to review and change their policies according to the regional demands and stop building pressures on Pakistan by saying 'do more.' The power of 'absolutely not' also changed the direction of regional and international politics; it changed the linguistic choices of India and the US officials. Those who used to talk in an authoritative mode, mood and tone have learnt some polite, humble and requesting manners. The PM's 'absolutely not' gave another important meaning that is love for peace because this 'absolutely not' helped to bring peace in the region and forced the foreign forces to review and change their policies according to the regional demands. Pakistan is ready to be a partner for peace in Afghanistan with the United States, but as U.S. troops withdraw, we will avoid risking further conflict because we love peace in the region, the PM added, and this peace is coming to many countries in the region through an 'absolutely not' that was 'absolutely right.' The current statements of the US officials, and the recent speech of the US president Joe Biden, in which he has defended his decision to withdraw military forces from Afghanistan, are the concrete proofs of it.
- d) A clear-cut '*absolutely not*' by a PM was unacceptable because it was against the economic and political interests of the world powers. That was why, the PM faced the consequences of this '*absolutely not*' and could not hold his office anymore. Despite all that, the opinion making campaign are totally different from the ground realities.

Conclusion

CDA is a vast and deep field that focuses on the practical use of language. This practical use of language is called a social practice in different forms and is linked to some specific contexts, functions and social situations. This study focused on exploring the power of saying an 'absolutely not' that was absolutely right and was at the right time. Pakistani PM's 'absolutely not' helped to review and change the anti-peace-keeping policies in this region after 20 years of war, after the US defeat, after billions of dollars loss and after the deaths of thousands of people. This simple, strong and clear-cut response changed the direction of regional and international politics, changed the mode, mood, tone and body language of Indian and the US officials, and it helped to eradicate the root cause of war and terrorism in the region that is the presence of foreign forces. This 'absolutely not' was, in fact, an impassioned declamation of love for peace that is bringing peace according to regional demands. It supported Pakistani stance of no war solution of the Afghan-US war. Pakistan loves peace and is ready to be a partner for peace in Afghanistan with the US, and this peace is coming to every country in the region through an 'absolutely

not' by Pakistani PM Imran Khan. The current US official statements and the recent speech of the US president Joe Biden, in which he has defended his decision to withdraw military forces from Afghanistan, are the concrete proofs of it, but this 'absolutely not' might be changed into 'absolutely yes' because of the present economic and political situations in the country as well as the defence related issues of the region.

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