

Positive Self-Representation and Negative Othering: A Critical Discourse Study of a Pakistani Political Press Briefing

Isra Irshad ^a Musarat Yasmin ^b

Abstract: Discourse serves as a powerful vehicle for the construction and dissemination of political ideologies, often reinforcing dominant perspectives through strategic linguistic choices. The present research aims to analyze how ideologies are constructed by the powerful through media discourse to legitimate their actions, and how this motivation becomes a guiding principle in terms of constructing negative other-representations and positive self-representations. To this end, one of the press conferences of the former Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Pakistan has been selected. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive Model has provided the theoretical framework, and CDA has been used as a methodology to analyze the data. The thorough analysis of the discourse structures reveals the usage of various discursive strategies by the Minister to associate the ideologies of Tahir-ul-Qadri with those of a dictator. Through strategies such as argumentation, lexical choices, presupposition, and irony, the discourse constructs a clear ideological contrast between democracy and dictatorship.

Keywords: Ideological Construction, Political Discourse, CDA, Socio-Cognitive Approach

Introduction

Ideologies are expressed in discourse and communication (Van Dijk, 1995). So, we can say that it is through language, in other words, through discourse that ideology finds expression. Ideology is expressed, developed, and reproduced through discourse. Discourse refers “to the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part” (Fairclough 1989, p. 24). If we analyze the discursive structure, we can find the ideologies in it. Van Dijk (2000, p. 9) explains that “much of our discourse expresses ideologically based opinions”.

Language is an influential tool in order to make certain ideologies and identities dominant in society (Safdar & Yasmin, 2021a; Akram & Yasmin, 2023; Yasmin et al. 2019). Scholars working in the field of critical discourse analysis (CDA) argue that the selection of language by a speaker reveals his ideologies and intentions (Saleem et al. 2021; Safdar & Yasmin, 2021b). Bayram (2010) talks about the importance of language in relation to political actions because these are constructed, accompanied, influenced, and played by language. While defining the definition of politics, he states that it is a struggle for power to put ideas, (e.g. political, social, and economic ideas) into practice. Politics can be defined as a social activity (Chilton 2004, 3). Matić (2012, p. 55) articulates that “political speech... carefully crafted by professional speechwriters, which leaves no room for improvisations on the part of the speaker”. When language has a relation with politics, then the relationship between ideology and politics cannot be denied as Johari (1982) expresses that there is always a connection between political systems and ideology. Political ideologies can be categorized in terms of their relationship with the political system as rightist, leftist, and reformist. He further argues that the purpose of ideology is to bring about change and to defend and justify the existing political systems. The powerful convey such ideologies with the help of discourse so that they can change the ideologies and actions of the people in their favor. Van Dijk (1998) calls this a process of persuasion. He states that it is a process in which people change their opinions about something under the influence of a particular discourse (ibid, p. 244). Presently, media is playing a very important role in propagating the ideologies of powerful people as Reath (1998) opines that media does not simply deliver the information,

^a Department of English, University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan.

^b Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan.

but it guides the ideological standpoint of the reader and listener (Bashir & Yasmin, 2024; Akram & Yasmin, 2025).

In the present research, the researchers have analyzed the press conference of the former Federal Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Qamar Zaman Kaira, which he called on 16th January as a result of the demands of Tahir-ul-Qadri, Chairman of Pakistan Awami Tehreek, in Long March January 2013 towards Islamabad. Tahir-ul-Qadri's claim was that he wanted four demands to be fulfilled that were related to the general elections of 2013. His four demands were "pre-poll electoral reforms based on Articles 62, 63 and 218 of the Constitution; revamp of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP); impartial and apolitical selection of a caretaker government to oversee the general election; and an immediate dissolution of the national and provincial assemblies" (Dawn, 2013, p.1). As a response to the above-mentioned demands, the Federal Minister called the press conference to offer the perspective of the Government for not fulfilling the demands of Qadri. The scenario of this issue was that Mr. Qadri, with a number of people from different cities of Pakistan, reached Islamabad on 14th January 2013, and asked the Government to accept their demands. They threatened that they would stay there otherwise until their demands were accepted by the Government. People remained there for three days, and on 17th January, the Government decided to accept some demands of Qadri. In the present study, the press Conference analyzes what the Federal Minister called on 16th January 2013 in which he claimed that Mr. Qadri's demands were against democracy, and could not be fulfilled at any cost. He established Qadri's association with a dictator and created a negative image of Mr. Qadri throughout his speech.

Research Questions

The present study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are some of the techniques used by the former Federal Minister to develop a positive image of Government?
2. How did the former Federal Minister use linguistic and extra-linguistic resources to portray a negative image of Qadri?

Literature Review

Since the last few decades, much interest has been aroused to investigate the ideologies, particularly political ideologies, in political discourses. Among different scholars, the name of Van Dijk is of great paramount. His scholarly works on ideology in relation to discourse (Van Dijk, 1984; 1993; 1997; 1998; 2000; 2005; 2009) are widely studied and acknowledged all over the world.

Min (1997) investigated linguistic structures used for spreading specific ideologies through which discourses of a U.S. newspaper constructed ideological representations of political events and situations in South Korea to the readers. Min (1997, 160) concluded that "an analysis of the news reports on the labor strikes in South Korea by capitalist mass media manifests capitalist ideologies that are pro-government and pro-corporation, and reveals the 'us vs. them' news framework in representing the events". Horváth (2009) analyzed the persuasive strategies used by President Obama in public speaking, and the hidden ideology presented in his inaugural speech. The result revealed that he had used biblical references in order to strengthen the brotherly love and unity among the numerous members of the diverse society of America. The overall use of 'we' depicted his inclusive perception of American society and so on. Matić (2012) analyzed the speeches of two American candidates that they made in the 2008 presidential election whose purpose was to have positive self-representation and negative other-representation.

Bilal et al. (2012a) analyzed certain talk shows telecasted on Pakistani private television channels with the purpose of revealing how ideologies were represented in the talk shows. The study revealed that "when viewed with a critical eye, these shows unravel the hidden agendas, incentives, motives, manipulations, and all such factors which are otherwise ignored and due to ignorance they are less viewed as critical talk shows" (p. 218). Bilal et al. (2012b) analyzed the speech of Obama to investigate how powerful forces show, maintain, and exercise their power with the help of powerful discourse, and which strategies they used to fulfill their personal interest. In the same way, Bilal et al. (2012c), in another research in the context of discourse and ideology, analyzed the construction of political ideologies with the help of language in two

Pakistani Newspapers. The study concluded that Dawn newspaper was not following any specific ideological stance, and was presenting the information in an objective way. There was no political bias, and it did not have a particular interest in a particular group. On the other hand, the second group, the Nawa-e-Waqt or The Nations, was propagating particular types of thought and was more critical towards the government of PPP. The study concluded that “these ideologies can be seen and observed only through the critical eye as the writer plays with words to manipulate their ideas and these editorials play an important part in constructing the opinion and ideology of their readers” (2012c, p. 753).

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Initially, Fairclough (1989) desires to investigate how we interact are constrained by the structures of those social institutions within which we live and interact. The purpose of CDA, Fairclough (1993) claims, is to systematically explore opaque relationships of causality and determination between events, texts, and discursive practice. It investigates how such events, texts, and discursive practice are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power. Wodak and Meyer (2009) maintain that CDA is fundamentally concerned with investigating and analyzing the vague as well as clear structural relationship of power, control, dominance, and discrimination as revealed in language. Van Dijk (2001, p.352) describes its purpose as to investigate how social inequality is communicated, constructed, and legitimated with the help of language and discourse. It studies the way how social power is abused, and dominance and inequality are enacted with the help of discourse in political and social settings. It actually studies the relationship between social power and discourse (Van Dijk, 1996). It unravels injustice and inequality (Heberman, 1973). According to Luke (1997), it focuses on what ways knowledge, identities, and social relations are constructed with the help of discourse, written and spoken texts in different institutions, for example, media, schools, and different political platforms. Puurtinen (2000) argues that the purpose of CDA is to reveal how ideologies influence the linguistic choices used by a language user, and how ideologies are maintained, reinforced, and challenged with the help of language. So, whatever the linguistic choices the discourse producers make, they have certainly some ideological stance. So, with the help of CDA, a critical discourse analyst discovers the ideological content of the speakers. He identifies what linguistic and extra-linguistics strategies the speaker has used in order to construct the positive image of self and negative images of others. CDA practitioners see how discourse produces or reproduces social domination, how one group abuses power over the other group.

Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach has provided a theoretical background to this research, and CDA has been used as a methodology to analyze the data. In the socio-cognitive approach, Van Dijk links the discourse and society through cognition. According to him, the cognitive phenomenon is related to social structure and discourse structure, and both the production and reception of texts rest on cognitive models and schemata. The cognitive schemata are the missing link between discourse structures and social structures. These structures are always mediated through the interface of personal and social cognition. Some expressions of ideology in discourse discussed by Dijk (2006, p. 125-126) are as follows:

Context

Speaker speaks as a member of a social group; and/or addresses recipient as group member; ideologically biased context models.

Text, discourse, conversation:

Overall strategy: positive presentation/action of Us, negative presentation/action of Them

Emphasize Our good things, and their bad things, and

De-emphasize Our bad things, and their good things

Meaning

Topics (semantic macrostructures)

Select/Change positive/negative topics about Us/Them.

Local meanings and coherence

Positive/Negative Meanings for Us/Them are

Manifestation: Explicit versus Implicit

Precision: Precise versus Vague
Granularity: Detailed/fine versus Broad, rough
Level: General versus Specific, detailed
Modality: We/They Must/Should...
Evidentiality: We have the truth versus
They are misguided
Local coherence: based on biased models
Disclaimers (denying Our bad things): 'We are not racists, but...'
O Lexicon: Select Positive/Negative terms for Us/Them
(e.g. 'terrorist' versus 'freedom fighter')

Form

Syntax: (De)emphasize Positive/Negative Agency of Us/Them
Cleft versus non-cleft sentences ('It is X who...')
Active versus Passives ('USA invades Iraq' versus 'Iraq invaded by USA')
Full clauses/propositions versus nominalizations (The invasion of Iraq').
Sound structures: Intonation, etc., (de)emphasizing Our/Their Good/Bad things
Format (schema, superstructure: overall form)
Positive/Negative meanings for Us/Them in
First, dominant categories (e.g. Headlines, Titles, Summaries, Conclusions) versus last, non-dominant categories.
Argumentation structures, topoi (stereotypical arguments, e.g. 'For their own good')
Fallacies that falsely conclude Our/Their Good/Bad things, e.g. overgeneralizations, authority, etc.
Rhetorical structures
Emphasizing or de-emphasizing Our/Their Good/Bad things
by
Forms: Repetition
Meanings: Comparisons, metaphors, metonymies, irony; euphemisms, hyperboles, number games, etc.

Action

Speech acts, communicative acts, and interaction
Speech acts that presuppose Our/Their Good/Bad things: promises, accusations, etc.
Interaction strategies that imply Our/Their Good/Bad things: Cooperation, agreement

Data Collection

The first author recorded the speech of the former Federal Minister and transcribed it. It was rechecked by the second author for mistakes if there were any. After data transcription, the researchers made the best possible translations of the expressions in order to facilitate the international audience. In order to answer the above-mentioned research questions, i.e. to identify which discursive strategies the former Federal Minister has used for positive self-representation and negative other-representation, the data has been interpreted and discussed in detail in the following section.

Data analysis and Interpretation

The Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Pakistan, has used the following linguistics and extra-linguistic strategies for portraying positive image of Government and negative image of Tahir-ul-Qadri (other):

Argumentations: Ideological Contrast between Democracy and Dictatorship

To construct the ideological contrast between democracy and dictatorship in a discursive practice (Van Dijk, 2006), particularly in political speech, is a very vital aspect. This aspect is present in the political speech of the Federal Minister. The present analysis depicts how, in order to not accept the demands of Tahir-ul-Qadri, the Federal Minister has made the well-known contrast between democracy and dictatorship. Expressions and arguments that he has used depict that he clearly associates the ideologies of Tahir-ul-Qadri with the ideologies of a dictator. He states that Tahir-ul-Qadri's ideologies match with Zia-ul-Haq, a dictator. He wants to demolish and make amendments to the constitution of Pakistan. The Federal Minister has used the arguments in the expressions, for example, "demolish the assemblies, demolish the parliament, demolish the government then what will we do, how the new things can be formed", which conveys the impression that Tahir-ul-Qadri is demanding something that is beyond the limits of the constitution, his only demand is to demolish the constitution, and it is also presupposed that he has ideologies that match with the dictator. The Federal Minister continuously associates the ideologies of Tahir-ul-Qadri with the ideologies of Zia-ul-Haq to emphasize that he has a worldview of that of the dictator. Some expressions "this is the same thinking of Zia-ul-Haq", and "this is same slogan of Zia-ul-Haq" clearly illustrate this thing. The analysis shows how he has used the discursive strategies of argumentation for persuasion (Van Dijk, 1998).

The expression "*wo mari muthi may hai kya*" is basically an intertextual expression used in one of the commercials that was advertised in the past. He is relating this expression to the dictatorship which is also not a present-day political system. It is like *Nan Pan Masala* (commercial) which is not present today. It is the talk of the past. This is the age of democracy and the constitution now. So, the Federal Minister is asking him to open his palm. So, the nation comes to know what *masala* (mixture of different eatables) he has concealed, or in other words, what dictatorship thoughts he has in his mind. The words "again and again" in the expression "there is no way to revolt again and again against the constitution in the name of the constitution" are used to presuppose the concept that the activity of demolishing the constitution in the name of the constitution has happened in the past, but he emphasizes that this would not happen now. On the other hand, we see how the Federal Minister creates his association with democracy. He discusses the sacrifices of his party, for example, in the expression, "because we have sacrificed our generations to fight against the dictatorship and dictator-like thoughts" that shows that they have sacrificed their generations to fight against the dictatorship or in other words Qadri has a dictator like thinking and "we" are the follower of democracy. So, the Federal Minister has used strong arguments to construct his association with democracy, and Qadri's with that of dictatorship.

Selection of Lexical Items for Negative Others Representation and for Positive Self-Representation

Positive/Negative lexical items for Us/Them are important strategies that depict the expression of ideology (Van Dijk, 2006). Here, critical Analysis of the speech by keeping in mind the selection of lexical items presents the picture that the Federal Minister has selected the positive expressions for the positive portrayal of self and Government and negative expressions for the negative portrayal of "others", Tahir-ul-Qadri. The Federal Minister has used the word "request" almost twenty-one times and three times the word "For God's sake", and four times the word "appeal" for positive representation of self and government. It depicts that the government is continuously requesting Qadri who is oppressing innocent people. For instance, by using the adjective "innocent" repeatedly in his speech, e.g. "do kind/favor to these innocent children, to our sisters and daughters", and "don't oppress innocent children and women", the Federal Minister is trying to raise the anger of the nation against Qadri by negatively representing Qadri's action and at the same time by establishing the association and affiliation of the Federal Minister and government with the "daughter" and "sisters" of the nation, as the word "our" offers the sense of ownership and relatedness. The selection of the words "trouble", "shield", and "injustice" in the expressions, for example, "we want them to be set free from this trouble", "don't use the innocent children and women as a shield", "don't do injustice to our innocent children and women" are also constructing the negative portrayal of Qadri who has gathered the people by force, and has put them in trouble. The vital and interesting thing to attract attention is that he does not use the word Dr. for him, not even once,

in his whole speech. On the other hand, he has used the words *Molvi sahab*, *Mulana*, *Hazoor-e-wala*, *Mosoof*, and *Hazoor* to address Tahir-ul-Qadri. These words are usually used with negative connotations in Pakistani society. A person who is a liar, rigid, and tries to impose his order on others is called a *Molvi sahab*, *Mulana*, etc. These are used ironically and possess negative implications. So, repeatedly using these expressions portrays the image of Qadri as a person who has adopted a rigid attitude in order to force the government to accept his demands. The Federal Minister has selected verbs like *frama rahain*, *frmain*, and *frmaty* for calling Tahir-ul-Qadri. These words are used to give respect to someone in Pakistani society, but these words are used by the Federal Minister with ironic tones, which decreases the respect of Tahir-ul-Qadri. Thus, the analysis depicts how the selection of lexical items matters a lot in the discourse as it assists in the ideological construction of the people in a particular way.

Presuppositions

The presupposition is used to presuppose some truth when it is not established. The Federal Minister has used the strategy of presupposition in various places in order to portray the positive image of self and the present Government. He uses the word “now” in the expression “now things have become structured”, which gives the impression that due to the present Government and democracy things have become structured *now*. In other words, things were unstructured in the past. The historical scenario of Pakistan regarding governance tells that there had been a dominant rule of dictatorship in Pakistan. The Federal Minister is making an indirect comparison of democracy (in which things are structured now) and dictatorship (things in an unstructured form). He is making his position positive, and the same expression implies that Mr. Qadri is demanding unstructured things, or in other words, he is in favor of dictatorship. In the same way, in another expression, he says, “how your demands can be accepted while keeping in the limits of the constitution” presupposes the thing that he is demanding something that is beyond the limits of the constitution. He is asking for something that can only be fulfilled while violating the limits of the Constitution. So, the critical analysis depicts how the strategy of presupposition is used to present certain beliefs as unquestionable and to avoid giving any explicit justification for something (Van Dijk, 2006).

Stress on Words

Stress on different lexical items to give a positive self-image and negative other-representation is present in a lot of expressions throughout the speech. For instance, the stress on the word “what” in the expression “there are three demands which exist from the very first day, and they are still present today, and what these three demands are” is depicting that a nonsense and irritating demand made by Qadri. In the same way, the stress on the word “he” in the expression “caretaker government should be established, the way he instructs, the way he instructs” is putting the ironical remark on the identity of Qadri, it is depicting him as a person who has no right to take part in the process of formation of caretaker Government, but also portraying the image of rigid and so-called authoritative personality. On the other hand, the Federal Minister made a positive image of his party by the stress on the very word “generations” in the expression “because we have sacrificed the generations to fight against every dictatorship and dictator-like thoughts”. It illustrates that he and his party have sacrificed a lot to fight against the dictatorship because of being strong supporters of democracy. The emphasis on the word “how” in the expression “then how the constitution would be demolished? How election commission would be demolished?” is depicting again the illogical demands or the demands that are crossing the limits of the constitution or against it, and there is no way of accepting it while keeping in the limits of the constitution. So, the critical analysis of the data depicts how the powerful use the strategy of stress in the process of persuasion to change the ideologies and actions of the people in their favor (Van Dijk, 1998).

Repetitions

The words “*tor*”, “*khtm*” (to discontinue, to demolish, to end) have been used many times throughout the speech of the Federal Minister in order to discuss the demands asked by Qadri. The expressions include “*Hakoomat tor di jay*” (Government should be demolished), “*Assemblan tor di Jain*” (assemblies should be demolished), “*election commission tor dya jay*” (Election commission should be demolished), “*sirf ya mutalba hai k tor dya jay*” (it is just a demand to demolish everything). Also, we can witness the use of work *khtm* in the following phrases”: “*Assemblan khtm kr do*, *parliman khtm kr do*, *hakoomat khtm kr do*, *Election*

commission khtm kr do, phr krain gay kya? (demolish the assemblies, demolish the parliament, demolish the government, demolish election commission, then what will we do, how the new things can be formed). Whereas, Tahir-ul-Qadri has used the word “*tahleel*” (dissolve) in connection with the assemblies. Using the words *tor*, *khtm* repeatedly in his speech portray the negative image of the Tahir-ul-Qadri as a person who wants to end everything, and does not demand the re-establishment of “*hakoomat*”, “*Assemblan*”, “election commission”, “*parliman*”. Frequently using the words “*khtm*”, “*tor*” depicts the image of the Tahirul-ul-Qadri as a rigid, and person who has ideologies of dictators.

Hyperbole (Rhetoric)

It is a semantic rhetorical device used to enhance and exaggerate meanings. The speaker can use certain metaphors to express positive and negative actions of self and others respectively in hyperbolic terms. The word “shield” in the expression “using these innocent children and females as a shield” is used by the speaker to enhance the negative representation of Qadri. The hyperbolic word “shield” is used to exaggerate the negative feelings about Qadri among the common citizens of Pakistan. It depicts that he is very unkind because he has gathered the people, especially children, the “innocent” children and women by force, has protected his position, and has tried to come into power by using these innocent people as a shield. So, the critical analysis confirms Dijk’s description of the strategy of hyperbole as by using metaphors, especially in the strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, we may expect that good or bad actions of the self or other be expressed in hyperbolic terms (Van Dijk, 1997).

Irony (Rhetoric)

The expression for example “the day he came, he said to us that we are no more, we are people of past, now he is demanding from us again today” portrays the mocking and ridiculous character of Qadri. He is a person who is not trustworthy because the day he came to Islamabad he said that the Government and its officials were the people of the past and the government was no more. And now, he is again putting his demands on the Government. In the same way, the parody of Tahir-ul-Qadri is made ironically by the Federal Minister. He says, for example: During the press conversation, someone told him that the cable was off, and he (Qadri) said, “camera-man, I give you five minutes”. Then someone informed him that the electricity supply had cut off. He (Qadri) said, “Give the electricity supply back within two minutes”. It is reducing the intensity of Tahir-ul-Qadri’s demand as the Federal Minister was talking (before making Qadri’s parody) about the matters related to the selection of candidates in the election according to articles 62, and 63 of the constitution of Pakistan. Then, he made an ironic parody of Qadri that presented Qadri as a very emotional and rigid person. So, the CDA of the press conference depicts how ideologies influence the linguistic choices of the speaker (Puurtinen, 2000)

Vagueness

Speakers sometimes use expressions that are ambiguous and unclear. They do not give enough information. In other words, they don’t say directly what they mean. In the expression, “because those Masalas have no more now, their ages have gone. Now, it is the age of constitution”, the Federal Minister is indirectly making his (Tahir-ul-Qadri) comparison with dictators, and this is done by creating vagueness in the expression. So, the analysis of the data confirms to Dijk (1997) that speakers at times use expressions that are unclear because they do not give enough information or they do not say exactly what they mean.

Discussion and Conclusion

To sum up, we can say that in order not to accept the demands of others and to legitimate their actions, the people in power use different discursive strategies to portray positive self-representation and negative other-representation. They sometimes also make the ideological contrast between democracy and dictatorship. The present study also reveals the same matter regarding the role of ideology in order to construct the positive image of the self and negative image of others and particularly, to place the self and others in the ideological contrast between democracy and dictatorship. It reveals that language plays a vital role in expressing, changing, and specifically reproducing ideologies. Language tends to reflect and construct ideology. As Rahimi and Riasati (2011, 111) conclude that we need to analyze their discursive

manifestations if we want to understand what ideologies are, and how they are created, how they work. As the discursive practices are embedded in social structures which are constructed through discourse.

By analyzing the press conference of the Federal Minister, we have come to know that the speaker has used various discursive strategies e.g. lexical, hyperbole, irony, argumentation, stress on a particular word, repetition, vagueness in arguments, presupposition, etc. by associating ideologies of Tahir-ul-Qadri with that of a dictator, and by presenting him as an emotional, selfish, rigid, liar, unkind and a doubtful person. The study suggests that listeners and readers should develop the critical ability to deconstruct hidden ideologies and decide their particular actions by understanding the hidden agendas of the powerful.

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