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## Political Language Use against Corona Virus Spread in Pakistan during Covid-19 Pandemic

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**Key Words:** Language, Politicians, Corona Virus, Pandemic, COVID-19

**Abstract:** This research assessed the Language use of Political Leaders of Pakistan during COVID-19 against the corona virus spread. It further investigated the effect of political leaders' language on common people. Politicians issued numerous political statements regarding the prevention of the CORONA virus spread and these statements got good space in leading National and International English language newspapers. The people of Pakistan wanted to listen to the voice of public representatives on this important issue that badly hit their lives. A qualitative phenomenological research design was used. Data were analyzed through observation. Data collection source was 'The DAWN, The Diplomat, Al-Jazeera and The Tribune newspapers. Results were compiled, generating themes. Six themes developed from narratives regarding the prevention of the COVID virus disease. Results suggest that political leaders of Pakistan should follow the 'one vision & one voice' slogan to fight the CORONA virus.

### Introduction

Language plays a prominent role in politics, sports, commerce, and cricket. This research reviews politicians' language use to a standstill the spread of the CORONA virus. Pakistan needs a safe and secure environment to protect the precious lives of poor people dwelling in urban and rural regions of the country. It is the responsibility of various bodies i.e., government, civic agencies, and political leaders, to play a due role in protecting the wellbeing of common people. Political leaders' statements painted a poor picture of precautionary measures against the spread of CORONA and they blamed the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan for not taking concrete measures against this disease. These leaders showed sympathy for the common man through media using political statements on a day-to-day basis. This research explores the use of political statements of political leaders of Pakistan regarding protective measures taken against the spread of the CORONA virus in Pakistan. Political leaders' statements regarding COVID-19 got good space in print, electronic and social media, for instance, Facebook,

Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp groups. Corona disease first appeared in China and, within days spread like wild fire around the world. It affected every business industry and limited people to their homes. Moreover, it created fear and panic among people since national and international media reported hundreds of deaths. Corona virus is named COVID-19, and it appeared in 2019. The fourth layer of COVID-19 is termed as a co-variant of the COVID-19 virus, DELTA. The developing countries of the world took tangible measures to overcome this deadly disease. They included the use of vaccination, social distancing, wearing face masks, use of hand wash and sanitizers. COVID-19 is a quickly spreading disease (Wu et al., 2020) and it got birth in the Wuhan state of China. Since then, it has taken the entire world under attack. It is known throughout the world due to its nomenclature. Initials of COVID are defined as 'CO'- Corona, 'VI'-virus and 'D'- Disease. Earlier, it was denoted with the initials "2019-nCoV". Hence, it was referred to as '2019 novel Corona Virus'. This virus is linked with the virus family that causes Cold and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

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## **Literature Survey**

### **The Feigned Antidotes Against COVID-19 with Duality of 'Prayer-Prayer' Concept**

The common actions with the practice of language concerning COVID-19 were perceived in 'religious prayers. Alvarez (2018) claims that there is a relation of language with prayer. This perception has been taken as a bio-lingual phenomenon linked with the fear-sense of microscopic organisms that are the causes of COVID-19 in Pakistan. Ryan (2017) mentioned language of microscopic organisms as non-verbal and non-alphabetic. If Ryan's statement is perceived as truth, then again, there is an ideological conflict that exists for a bio-language. It is an ambiguous concept that has been proven in one of the works by Alvarez (2019). The case of bio language in Pakistan is fuzzy, where the notion of 'pray' is conceptualized as an antidote against 'COVID-19'. The artificial notion of these two potential opposite concepts needs scholarly vision in Pakistan, either revise false concepts or avoid it. Alvarez (2018) stated the rationale behind the model of duality and stated that the fabricated lexicalization of 'Prayer-prayer' theory has established the 'model of duality' to use words with the same alphabets. It needs proper lingual search to find studies that go beyond conventionalized fear perceptions within the public in Pakistan.

### **Political Insincere Dialogues against COVID-19**

The PTI led government failed to resolve political agitation and economic issues (Siddiqui, 2020). There are multiple reasons for the Corona Virus outbreak in Pakistan, but poor strategy and decisions are the reasons alike. The inflamed political leaders' speeches full of accusations aggravated the situation. Unfortunately, federation and provinces were not seen on the same page to address the problem of common people (Siddiqui, 2020). Provincial governments formulated different policies to combat this catastrophe. Ministries created differences regarding SOPs set by the federal government. These SOPs allowed the common man to work and earn bread and butter for families. Deplorably, strong strategy and political will were missing, resultantly, it increased the miseries of poor masses. Lockdowns were imposed, people were restricted to homes and businesses remained closed. People came to streets protesting against government policies. People cried that if this strategy continued more, they shall die due to hunger and starvation instead of CORONA. SOPs enforcement was sternly seen in metropolitan cities

like Karachi and Hyderabad two big cities of Sindh province. On the other hand, small towns located in rural regions completely ignored such set SOPs. Once CORONA cases augmented in small cities, the government-imposed lockdown policy there also. Sadly, due to illiteracy, people of rural areas considered CORONA disease a government drama to get foreign funding from World Bank and other donor agencies.

### **Medical Fraternity and Public against COVID-19**

The medical community perceived that COVID-19 disease transmission is caused due to SARS-CoV-2 virus. Doctors easily decipher particular coded 'language' of virus transmission (Wu et al., 2020). Doctors globally could find suitable ways to prevent the spread of the corona virus, learning the virus anti-digits language to remove it. Psychological fear of corona virus created havoc among the public. If any family member got light fever with cough symptoms, it was assumed that it was CORONA disease. As a result, the whole family goes into depression. In such a state, psycholinguists should come forward and play a role through research of mind and language. They can use the words 'pray' and 'SARS-CoV-2' to find the relation among them. Before research on the mind and language paradigm, society is asked to find realistic answers on how one can relate the virus 'SARS-CoV-2' with the idea of prayer. Society needs rational belief rather hypothetical connection of micro-organisms with the metaphysical world. This can be sensed in the logical derivation of language in organisms (Bognon-Küss et al., 2018). Organisms normally speak in the case of indirect logical derivate (Bognon-Küss et al., 2018). Thus, micro-organisms need to be perceived more than mere particles and any other physical entity. This study addresses this research question.

### **Research Question**

**R.Q:** What is the impact of Political Leaders' Language use towards the deterrence of the CORONA virus spread in Pakistan?

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

A phenomenological research design was used for this study. The qualitative method has been employed to examine the narratives of the political leaders of Pakistan.

## Data Collection and Analysis

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Narratives in terms of political statements of political leaders were selected from well-known Newspapers e.g., 'DAWN, The Diplomat, Al-Jazeera and The Tribune'. Thematic Discourse Analysis technique was used for data analysis purposes.

## Findings and Discussion

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### Semantic Misinterpretation between (Lockdown and Curfew)

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#### Prime Minister Mr. Imran Khan's statement on lockdown

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*"If we are to shut the entire state down, and the cities [...] we all can save the entire nation from the spread of corona disease at one end. However, the majority of people will die soon from hunger but not from the spread of COVID-19. He further stated that around 39% of the people live below the poverty line" (The Diplomat, April 15, 2020)*

Prime Minister Mr. Imran Khan openly opposed the imposition of lockdown. He presented a stern argument saying that imposing a lockdown can save people from the corona virus, but people shall die due to starvation and hunger. The major population of Pakistan earns bread and butter on a daily wage base. Before the imposition of lockdown, we have to make arrangements for their food. He warned that, like Europe and the Western world, Pakistan is never in a position to provide food or money to people due to the poor economy of the country. Unfortunately, provincial governments undermined the argument of Mr. Imran Khan and imposed their own policies. His speech was caught within semantic misinterpretation and meaning of the words '*lockdown and curfew*'. People assumed the word 'lockdown' as a curfew. The dynamics of curfew are different from lockdown. During curfew, no one is allowed to come outside of their homes and carry normal business. In true sense, Mr. Imran Khan wanted to convey that lockdown would create problems for laborers and small business owners whose sole source of earning is on daily wage basis. Later, a new word 'smart lockdown' was introduced. People semantically perceived that no complete lockdown like curfew, but 'smart lockdown' means the closure of business in areas where Corona cases increase. Provincial ministers blamed the federal government for this semantic misinterpretation of these words.

### Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Chairman of Pakistan People's Party

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*"The major cause of hurdle towards the lack of national consensus is because of the ego of Prime Minister" (The Diplomat, April 15, 2020)*

Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's statement speaks about how political leaders of Pakistan are divided on the CORONA virus issue. It is a national issue; therefore, all political leaders should be on the same to combat this hazardous disease. Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari went a step ahead and blamed Mr. Imran Khan, that Nation is suffering because of his ego of Mr. Imran Khan.

## The frivolity of Political Leaders

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### Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari Frivolous Statement

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*"There is no doubt a definite false perception of safety that has been observed since the beginning of this crisis...the responsibility lies with the central government to develop a conjoined consensus on this national issue. However, it drastically failed with its performance to raise the issue of pandemic Corona like the Kashmir case..." (Tribune, April 13, 2020)*

Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that a false strategy had been adopted on the corona virus issue since the start. The accountability lies with the federal government to form a consensus among all parties on this national issue. Unfortunately, the federal government has completely failed to control CORONA issues like the dispute of Kashmir.

The frivolous situation between Federal and Provincial governments worsened due to the exchange of political dialogues based on accusations. Regrettably, due to personal grudges, politicians criticized each other and were involved in point scoring. Treasury and opposition benches kept busy fighting on this important issue at various forums. They completely forgot how to help poor people in this national disaster. Corona disease affected common people, whereas; politicians remained safe and secure due to better resources and facilities of life. They had no worry about how to earn bread and butter for the family since they come from rich families. The speeches of political leaders could never mitigate the miseries of common people. It would have been much better if all politicians had established communal financial funds for poor people. They played a game and fielded their partymen to blame each other through political speeches and press conferences on television channels. However, practically, they

failed to control corona virus and mitigate the glooms of common people.

### **Mr. Shahbaz Sharif, Leader of the Opposition**

*"The state is currently in a deal with a great pandemic that has hit the entire state of Pakistan which has never ever been a part of its history. What is the level of seriousness to fight COVID-19 by the federal government? ... I can't continue further..."* (Dawn, March 26, 2020)

Mr. Shahbaz Sharif, Leader of the opposition in the National Assembly, said that Pakistan is badly suffering from this disease which has never passed in the past. It has pretty much made lives of poor people miserable. Further, he questioned the sincerity of the federal government of Mr. Imran Khan to combat this deadly disease. Furthermore, he excused commenting on this issue. It indicates that political speeches of political leaders show a lack of consensus on the Corona virus issue. Resultantly, the common man suffered because of personal grudges and differences between politicians.

### **Mian Iftikhar Hussain (Awami National Party)**

*"The present government must stop criticism against their political rivals. It is a time that we all must face this national crisis together"* (Tribune, March 25, 2020)

The statement of Mian Iftikhar Hussain speaks about the sensitivity and gravity of the CORONA virus issue. He urges all political leadership of Pakistan to be together and find a way how to combat with this tragedy to mitigate the miseries of subjugated people.

### **Religious Inflexibility (Islamic Republic Versus Islamist Republic)**

#### **Prime Minister Mr. Imran Khan on Closure of Religious Practicing Institutions**

*"Pakistan, which cultivated within its citizens the religiosity for many decades, now is afraid to issue any decree that could go against congregational prayers, even this issue has been under the influence of powerful Muslim religious scholars (Ulema). They refused to take any action to the closure of Masjids (Mosques) in Pakistan. Although many other Muslim states have taken measures to practice communal based prayers at home, even the central religious state, Saudi Arabia has cancelled Umrah and religious pilgrimage in their earlier pretext..."* (Al-Jazeera, May 6, 2020)

Religious dogmatism persists in many shapes. Such an example has been discussed in the 'Prayer-Prayer' theory. People in the form of sects have cultivated strong religious dogmas. Therefore, any step or decree against set principles, dogmas and ideologies against religious rituals has even raised the separate course of divisions among the general public based on a panel of religion. Even the Prime Minister of Pakistan is helpless to issue any decree against the wishes of Muslim religious scholars. The matter of the lives of citizens is not seriously taken on the supreme verdict. It has become the choice of religious scholars (Ulema) to tackle the situation as they consider synchronizing to their set ideologies that have been in practice for decades. The actual cause of the spread of COVID-19 and the ways to stop its transmission is found missing in speeches made on media by religious scholars. One reason for the spread of the virus was the assembly of people in one place. The government found it difficult to pass an order against communal based prayers but the decision had to be made based on the value of human lives. This decree led to divisions in religious groups based on observance of communal based prayers e.g. 'Jummah, Taraweh, and Eid prayers.

Ahsan Butt, a political scientist at George Mason University (Virginia) on the divisions formed on the religious panel, claimed the unique situation in Pakistan as under:

*"The case defines that the state of Pakistan is unique and built on Muslim Nationalism; therefore, the concept of Islam and identity of a Muslim is significant in the state with a wider concept in relation to the collective selves. However, this state is not strictly established as an Islamist state, as Saudi Arab and Iran..."* He further stated that "... the religious scholars and the institutions have a great influence and power, this usually leads to the dichotomy that Islam is considered central to being Pakistan's perceptions" (Al-Jazeera, May 6, 2020).

### **Limited Political Visions (Ghabraana Nahi Hai)**

#### **Prime Minister Mr. Imran Khan Addressing to Public**

*"Ghabraana Nabin Hai" [Do not try to create Panic], by time, I will assure you all, how to stop it"* (Tribune, March 18, 2020).

'Ghabraana Nabin Hai' means 'Do not worry'. This assertiveness of the Prime Minister of Pakistan was against the raising questions of citizens on the drastic impact of COVID-19 on economic and business failure. Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Imran Khan, stated on March 17, 2020, while addressing the public

as his first address about Corona virus. It was a motivational speech by the head of the state of Pakistan, Mr. Imran Khan. He talked clearly about lockdown imposition in the country. This statement encouraged daily wage workers and ordinary people to avoid any panic. However, his failure realizes and conveys the seriousness of the matter. He adopted the style of ethos to convince the public to overcome daily wagers' problems.

### **Prime Minister Mr. Imran Khan Further Added**

*"We, all as a whole nation, need to fight against this. The states of the USA, England and Italy reacted quite new against the pandemic Virus. However, Pakistan is still not in a condition to give proper response to COVID-19, like other European countries due to the weak condition of the economy" (Tribune, March 18, 2020).*

It shows a limited vision of the leader of Pakistan. The leader, who tried to satisfy the nation with his ethos, says that Pakistan's economy is never like the USA, England and Italy. We are weak. Thus, we fight with this deadly virus. The other countries of the world have rich resources; therefore, they deal with this disease entirely in a different way.

### **False Reporting of COVID-19 Cases**

False reporting impacted psychological fear or artificial satisfaction in the minds of common people. The medical staff even wished to accomplish their needs without proper consideration for the good of the general public.

### **Dr. Khan Reported**

*"The administrations in hospitals usually give their inaccurate cases in reports to the ministers of health, they, without any form of fact finding in information, then pass on to the ultimate central government -It is because they just want that everything can look proper on paper and they want their jobs saved" (The Diplomat, April 15, 2020).*

It shows a non-serious attitude of medical staff towards the fight against COVID-19. They pass an inaccurate number of cases to health ministries without any concrete information. They do all this that everything should be all right on the paper and they save their jobs. The medical profession is a noble profession. Thus, doctors should serve humanity with all sincerity, love and care, especially in the difficult days of COVID.

### **Practices that Can Benefit in Shape of United Efforts to Fight Against COVID-19 in Pakistan**

- (i) The government should build confidence among common citizens of Pakistan through appropriate measures.
- (ii) Political parties should unite to work together to benefit the poor public of the country.
- (iii) Federal Government should take Provincial governments into confidence before taking any step against this disease.
- (iv) World Health Organization (WHO) has cautioned that by mid-July situation in Pakistan can worsen. Thus, government, opposition, and the public should find a way to deal with this deadly disease.  
Language plays a significant role in COVID-like situations. Speech should be made for the welfare of the public and cross levelling of allegations should be avoided.
- (v) The public should adhere to the suggestion given by the government in terms of vaccination, social distancing, wearing face masks and avoiding visiting shopping markets without any reason.

### **Conclusion**

This study studied political leaders' language use against the COVID-19 virus spread in Pakistan. Language is the strong medium of communication in this modern age of the internet and communication technology. Politicians are elected representatives of the people thus; their every word has importance to the public. Therefore, they should be a very careful while issuing political statements. Their narratives should not hurt anyone and mitigate the miseries of the common man. The effective leadership of any country leads nations stronger on political, economic, social, moral, ethical, and prosperous fronts. A discourse analysis of political leaders' statements against corona virus spread was made. Unfortunately, Political leaders refrain from leveling allegations against each other instead of framing a consensus to fight against this deadly disease. In this perspective, political leaders should refrain from political point scoring by leveling allegations in difficult times for the nation. Political point scoring damages national integrity and increases the miseries of common people. Political leaders should console people in this catastrophic situation. They should pull out people from this crisis with all political sagacity and wisdom. They should help deprived people morally, ethically

and financially. Because COVID lockdowns have adversely affected their lives. The educated and civilized nations of the world follow the excellent principle '*United we stand, divided we fall*'. Federal and provincial governments should be on the same page,

setting aside political differences. They should focus on motivating people to be vaccinated. In this way, things shall come to a normal position and people shall get relief on a large scale.

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