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## Title: Exploring the Discursive Portrayal of Terrorism Reporting in Pakistani Print Media: A Critical Discourse-Pragmatic Analysis

### Abstract

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**Keywords:** Terrorism Discourse, Pakistani Media, Discourse Pragmatics, Framing Theory, Systemic Functional Linguistics

### Authors:

**Ailya Fatima:** M.Phil Scholar, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.

**Tazanfal Tehseem** : ([Corresponding Author](#)) Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan. (Email: [tazanfal.tehseem@uos.edu.pk](mailto:tazanfal.tehseem@uos.edu.pk))

**Asad Nazar** : PhD Scholar, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.

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## Exploring the Discursive Portrayal of Terrorism Reporting in Pakistani Print Media: A Critical Discourse-Pragmatic Analysis



Ailya Fatima<sup>1</sup>, Tazanfal Tehseem<sup>2</sup> (Corresponding Author), Asad Nazar<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M.Phil Scholar, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.  
(Email: [tazanfal.tehseem@uos.edu.pk](mailto:tazanfal.tehseem@uos.edu.pk))

<sup>3</sup> PhD Scholar, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.

### Abstract

This study observed that terrorism has been one of the most destabilizing aspects of history in Pakistan. Although much has been studied about terrorism in the political and security aspects, relatively less has been put on the discursive construction of terrorism in the Pakistani print media. This research examines the coverage of leading English-language newspapers in Pakistan (Dawn and The News) from 2009-2018. Based on an analytical model, the paper qualitatively examines a purposive sample of 99 newspaper articles. The results indicate that in both newspapers reporting on terrorism is typified with intense negative assessment of militant agencies, persistent use of us versus them identity building, and discursive justification of state counter-terrorism action. Placing such patterns of discourse into the context of socio-political life in Pakistan, the study proves that media texts are involved in the construction of national discourse and the formation of the collective consciousness.

**Keywords:** *Terrorism Discourse, Pakistani Media, Discourse Pragmatics, Framing Theory, Systemic Functional Linguistics*

### Introduction

Pakistan has been deeply affected by terrorism which has influenced the politics, social and security fronts over the last twenty years (Schmid, 2011). After the 9/11, Pakistan became a major frontline country in the world War on Terror, which put it into the risk of the constant militant violence, suicide bombings, assassinated people, and counter-terrorism campaigns (Qadir and Alasuutari, 2013). The period between 2009 and 2018 was the time when the country faced some of the most terrible terrorist attacks in the history as well as significant military campaigns like Operation Rah-e-Nijat and Operation Zarb-e-Azb (Paracha et al., 2012). The developments not only changed the internal security environment of Pakistan but also changed the discourse of the people in terms of militancy, nationalism and the state power (Siraj, 2010).

Here the role played by the media becomes particularly important. Newspapers are not only a channel that delivers news of violent events, they construct the manner in which such events are perceived, recalled and how they are individually judged in terms of morality (Fairclough, 1995). The media discourse creates meaning around terrorism, allocates blame, and shapes popular opinion about the state policies and militant organizations through the use of linguistic skills, frame composition, and editorial framing (van Dijk, 1998). Being one of the major information sources of



policymakers, urban elites, and overseas readers, the English-language newspapers in Pakistan find themselves in a rather privileged role of setting the outlines of the discourse of terrorism (Norris et al., 2003).

Although the media narratives are central, most of the available literature on terrorism in Pakistan has focused on political perspective of terrorism, security studies, or content analysis through quantitative research (Schmid, 2011). Although these methods are very informative, they do not take into consideration the discursive processes of meaning production and embedding of ideology within language (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006). In addition, much of the current research on terrorism and the media is still based on the Western world, where the socio-political environment, press ethics, and expectations in the audiences are quite different in Pakistan (Norris et al., 2003). This disproportion creates a significant gap in the knowledge of the way in which the linguistic and pragmatic representations of terrorism in non-western, conflict dominated societies are expressed.

The article will fill this gap by reviewing the issue of terrorism coverage in Dawn and The News, which are two of the most well-known English-language newspapers in Pakistan (Hussain and Munawar, 2017). The study examines how these newspapers create images of terrorism and state response to them through discourse by placing the emphasis on ten years of militant actions and changing counter-terrorism practices (Mahmood et al., 2014). The article does not assume the news texts as a neutral reflection of reality and as such, it treats the texts as socially situated practices, which reflect as well as construct ideological positions (Fairclough, 1995).

The paper also constructs an integrative approach to the analysis based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), discursive pragmatics, and the theory of framing (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; Entman, 1993) to understand the intricacy of the discourse of terrorism. SFL enables a fine analysis of grammatical and lexical decisions which depict actors and events, discursive pragmatics shows the workings of implicit meanings and communicative acts behind the text (Bhatia, 2009), and framing theory reveals the larger narrative patterns that organize media coverage (Entman, 1993). Collectively, these views allow conducting a multi-layered analysis that goes beyond the surface content in exploring how language produces power, legitimacy and national identity (van Dijk, 1998).

Three main research questions help to guide this article:

- 1) (1): What is the discursive presentation of terrorism and actors related to it in Pakistani newspapers written in English languages?
- 2) (2) What are the linguistic and pragmatic strategies that are used to express ideological positions toward terrorism and counter-terrorism?
- 3) (3) How is terrorism framed in the media narratives of terrorism in the selected period?

The study answers these questions in three ways, which make it significant to the field of media discourse studies and the study of terrorism. First, it offers a non-Western media based empirical account of the discussion on terrorism. Second, it shows the analytical usefulness of the combination of linguistic, pragmatic, and framing approaches (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Third, it provides information concerning how media discourses can justify certain policy responses and dismiss other points of view (Fairclough, 1995).

The rest of the article is organized in the following way. The following section identifies the theoretical and analytical framework that the study is based on. This is then followed by the description of the research methodology and data selection. The following part discusses and analyzes the main discursive patterns and frames outlined in the corpus. A conclusion is the last section that summarizes the findings, contributions of the study and the recommendations of future research.

## Literature Review

The paper is based on the integrated analytical approach involving Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), discursive pragmatics, and framing theory to explore the representation of terrorism in English-language print media in Pakistan (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; Entman, 1993). These methods of analysis can be combined to enable the operating of the analysis on many different levels of analysis: micro-level linguistic decisions and macro-level narrative patterns. These frameworks are not viewed as opposing points of view but should be used complementarily in the study to comprehend the complexity of the media discourses on terrorism (Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

There is no ideologically neutral media discourse. The coverage of terrorism and especially the act of terrorist reporting is entrenched in such aspects as political interests, cultural anxieties, and power relations (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006). The choice of words, grammatical use, and narrative focus are used by journalists to influence the interpretation of violence acts by readers, the cause of violence, and the effect of violent acts (Bhatia, 2009). In tension-ridden communities like Pakistan, where terrorism has directly affected the life of civilians and national security, the media talk is the foremost area where a shared meaning, morality and national identity is constructed (Qadir & Alasutari, 2013).

Critical theories on discourse accentuate that news texts cannot reflect the reality but rather they construct it via linguistic and discursive decisions (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998). Terrorism coverage, therefore, acts as a type of social practice: it recognizes the enemies, justifies the actions, and sets the limits of permissible political behavior (van Dijk, 2006). This paper develops this insight to analyse the linguistic and pragmatic constructions of terrorism, militants, victims, and state actors in wider ideological scaffolds through newspapers (Mahmood et al., 2014).

Halliday formulated the idea of Systemic Functional Linguistics, according to which, language is a tool to make meaning in social situations (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). As postulated by SFL, all clauses serve all metafunctions simultaneously and among the most related metafunctions to media discourse on terrorism, ideational and interpersonal metafunctions (Martin and White, 2005) are the most applicable.

The ideational metafunction makes reference to the way in which language depicts events, actions and the individuals involved. This is applied in the reporting of terrorism in the description of violent acts, presentation of who is to be held accountable and the distribution of agency. The use of transitivity, i.e. the decision between referring to militants as actors or passive constructions, is a key factor in finding blame or evading responsibility (Hampl, 2014). As an illustration, the statements that anticipate the militant actors (militants attacked civilians) are built in a clear causal accountability, but the agentless constructions (civilians were killed in a blast) redirect attention to the issue at hand (Mahmood et al., 2014). Such grammatical choices cannot be considered accidents in style; instead, they indicate some ideological stances and newswire norms (van Dijk, 1998).

The metafunction of interpersonal is concerned with how the writers place themselves vis-a-vis the reader and the topic. This is evaluative language, modality and stance in the discourse of terrorism. Moral judgment is also encoded in the use of adjectives as brutal, heinous, or cowardly, and encoded in modal expressions (must, should, cannot) (Martin and White, 2005). With these linguistic tools, the newspapers indicate their denunciation of violent militancy, support the state, or indicate the distrust in a specific account (Etaywe & Zappavigna, 2021). SFL therefore offers a methodical approach to the discovery of evaluational meaning and ideological congruence that are created through grammatical and lexical options in texts of news (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014).

Instead of studying grammar separately, this research study considers SFL features to reflect more general discursive patterns. Agency, evaluation and modality patterns are investigated throughout the corpus to make generalizations about the patterns of representational tendencies in terrorism news (Hampl, 2014).

Although SFL explains the encoding of meaning structurally, it does not exhaustively explain the way meaning is implied, assumed or even performed by the use of language within a context. This is why the paper puts into consideration a discursive pragmatics approach, which is interested in the way in which journalists can apply language to accomplish communicative acts and pass implicit meanings (Bhatia, 2009).

The approach of pragmatics is in regards to how meaning is produced based on context, common knowledge, and intentionality to communicate. In reporting on terrorism, ideological work is done sometimes not explicitly, but in an implicit way. Such presuppositions as the example of newspapers can enable newspapers to take some assumptions as its granted ones. Mentions of another terrorist attack imply the continuation of violence and support the fact that terrorism is a habitual state of the nation (Etaywe & Zappavigna, 2021). On the same note, by referring to groups as terrorists, one assumes illegitimacy and the moral status of condemnation, closing the possibility of other explanations of actions (Bhatia, 2009).

Implicatures work in a less obvious manner in which they imply meanings but do not articulate them. The presence or absence of certain voices, the order in which the official statements were presented or claims versus counterclaims can lead the reader towards certain interpretations and yet remain a journalistic objectivity (van Dijk, 2006). To illustrate, the high-profile publication of government denunciations of drone attacks can suggest an anti-interventionist position on the part of the newspaper, which may not be the paper's official position (Paracha et al., 2012).

The idea of speech acts is also predetermined by discursive pragmatics. Speech acts that are frequently covered by news texts are those of political leaders, military officials, militants, and victims. Condemnations, vows of retaliation, responsibility claims, and reassurances all have a social and political role that is not about information-sharing (Bhatia, 2009). Newspapers determine how acceptable and authoritative speakers appear by using verbs like claimed, warned, admitted or vowed to report these speech acts (van Dijk, 2006). It is in this context that this study considers such reporting decisions as part of the discursive construction of terrorism.

Through examining presuppositions, implicatures and speech acts, the paper uncovers the way newspapers convey ideological positions in an indirect manner moving up the way the readers conceive them, but maintaining a semblance of neutrality (Fairclough, 1995).

In a bid to supplement linguistic and pragmatic analysis, the research uses the theory of framing as put forward by Entman (1993). Framing is the process whereby the media choose specific parts of reality and bring them to the fore ground so as to present certain interpretations, judgments, and solutions (Entman, 1993). Frames in terrorism reporting make complex events to be coherent and make sense of violence and political response (Norris et al., 2003).

Entman outlines four common framing activities that include problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993). These functions offer a well-organized prism through which one can look at the process of narratization of terrorism in the press. As an example, terrorism can be perceived as existential threat to the nation, militants identified as the enemies of the society, blame put on the extremist ideology or foreign intervention, moral reproach expressed in the use of emotionally-charged language, and military intervention labelled as the answer to the problem (Hussain and Munawar, 2017).

Framing analysis is a macro-discursive analysis that finds common story patterns, which cross between articles. The frames, like national unity, victimhood, sovereignty, and justified retaliation

have been central in the discourse of terrorism in the Pakistani context (Qadir & Alasuutari, 2013; Siraj, 2010). The study determines prevailing frames by analyzing the headlines, leads, thematic focus, and metaphors used in Dawn and The News and compares their mobilization (Hussain and Munawar, 2017).

Notably, framing does not substitute linguistic analysis; it is a continuation of the same. The processes by which frames are actualized in text are language decisions and pragmatic indicators (Entman, 1993). The combination of the framing theory with the SFL and pragmatics enables the investigation to trace the way the micro-level usage of language leads to the macro-level narrative building (Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

The merit of the research is the fact that the SFL, discursive pragmatics and the framing theory are all combined into a single method of analysis. The analysis of SFL is based on visible linguistic patterns, discursive pragmatics is the means to understand how the meaning is hinted and achieved, and the framing theory puts the findings into a wider ideological context (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; Entman, 1993).

All these frameworks allow a holistic analysis of terrorism reporting as a discursive process that creates meaning, authorizes power, and defines how people think about it (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998). Using this combined method of studying print media in Pakistan, the paper provides a delicate insight into the representation of terrorism and the involvement of the media discourse in creating nationalities and policy agreement (Qadir and Alasuutari, 2013).

## Methodology

The research design of the present study is qualitative discourse-analytic research design, which will be used to analyze representation of terrorism in Pakistani English-language print media. Qualitative approach is specifically suitable given the fact that the study will aim at exploring meanings, representations and ideological positioning within the language as opposed to quantifying the variables. The discourse of terrorism has got built-in complex evaluative, pragmatic, and narrative components that cannot be sufficiently described with the help of frequency-based or statistical measures. Rather, an interpretive design allows a nearly direct study of the role of language in its socio-political setting.

The paper is a comparative one and examines texts of two large newspapers-Dawn and The News to determine similar discursive trends and areas of disagreement. Instead of stipulated hypotheses, the study adheres to the logic of exploration and interpretation, which is supported by existing theoretical frameworks but reacts to the trends that the data create. This structure can be used to understand the reporting of terror in a subtle manner as a socially constructed discursive process.

The corpus will include 99 newspaper articles written in English that were published between 2009 and 2018 which have been a decade of continuous militant violence and big counter-terrorism efforts in Pakistan. It is the time period of maximum terrorist activity and the changes in state response and media language that follow it. The data will consist of 50 articles of Dawn and 49 articles of The News, so there will be comparatively equal representation of the two newspapers.

The purposive sampling approach was used to select articles that contained rich information, and those that were directly related to the research topic. The digital catalog of the two newspapers was searched with the keywords terrorism, militancy, extremism, suicide bombing, Taliban, security operations, and war on terror, to draw articles. Both news reports, as well as editorials and opinion pieces, were selected so as to have a variety of journalistic genres and discursive styles.

Articles that had terrorism as the main thematic emphasis were only included. The texts, in which terrorism was mentioned only peripherally, were not included to achieve an analytical

coherence. The focus of the study is limited to English-language print media because the linguistic homogeneity is to be preserved, and it is also important to avoid the complexity of cross-linguistic analysis. Although this restricts generalization to other media and languages, the study is able to conduct an in-depth and focused study of elite print discourse.

The analysis of data was based on a hand-over, iterative, discourse-analytic process, guided by the combined framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics, discursive pragmatics and framing theory. It was initiated by the repetition of close readings of each of the articles in order to attain familiarization and the identification of repetitive themes, patterns of representation, and tendencies to evaluation.

As a result of familiarization, a coding scheme was formulated to be in line with the three dimensions of analysis of the study. Linguistic level involved coding on the patterns of transitivity, agency attribution, evaluative language and modality. At the pragmatic level, the acts of presupposition, implicature and reported speech were also identified with focus on how the characteristics also formed the implicit meaning and stance. Through the framing level, the analysis of the articles was conducted regarding problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation as suggested by Entman.

There was no linear coding but iterative coding. Articles were reviewed several times and every time they were analyzed at a different analytical layer. The method permits patterns determined at one level (e.g. linguistic agency) to be viewed in the context of patterns at another level (e.g. framing of state legitimacy). Instead of counting the number of times something happened, the analysis maximized qualitative richness and found the dominant tendencies, as well as illustrative examples, reflecting wider discursive patterns.

Comparative analysis was done through analyzing the similarity in the manner in which events or themes similar events were reported by Dawn and The News. This has made it possible to identify the variations in tone, emphasis and narrative direction as well as the points of ideological overlap.

The entire data utilized in this study are publicly available newspaper texts, thus, no concerns about confidentiality are present as well as informed consent. However, the rigor of ethics was attained by not altering the original texts and by not being selective on the quotation, which would misrepresent meaning. The analysis of the articles was done in the context of their entire full text such as the headlines and leads to have a proper interpretation.

Theoretical triangulation improved analytical rigor, which was attained by incorporating the linguistic, pragmatic, and framing views. This multi-layered method minimises the possibility of over-interpreting that comes with the single-method discourse studies. The fact that analytical processes are transparent and clearly associated between theory and data also enhances the authenticity of the conclusions.

Since it is a qualitative, purposely selected study, the results are not supposed to be statistically relevant to the entire Pakistani media. The priorities of the English-language newspapers also do not cover the Urdu-language and broadcast media, which might utilize alternative discursive strategies and be more generalized in their audience. Also, discourse interpretation is bound to include researcher judgment but this is alleviated by systematic analysis and working intensively on the data.

Irrespective of these limitations, the study methodology is appropriate to the aims of the study. It offers a solid ground on which the discursive construction of terrorism in the Pakistani print media can be studied by focusing on depth, context and informative insight.

## Analysis

This section provides a qualitative study of terrorism discursive construction in Pakistani print media in English language based on the corpus of Dawn and the News articles. The discussion combines a linguistic, pragmatic, and framing approach to show how the militant violence through use of media discourse is constructed, the national identity is constructed, and the state response legitimized (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006). Instead of discussing these dimensions independently, the discussion reveals their interaction to give consistent accounts of terrorism (Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

Militant actors are depicted in the corpus invariably as a subject of explicit negative assessment and moral disapproval (Mahmood et al., 2014). The linguistic way of accomplishing this is by way of transitivity, which puts militants in the spot as active agents of violence. The militants are often placed in clauses as grammatical subjects, who engage in material actions like attack, kill, slaughter or target (Hampl, 2014). These structures create definite causal liability and leave little uncertainties as far as culpability is concerned.

Besides agency assignment, evaluative lexis is also central in undermining militant actors. The use of adjectives like brutal, cowardly, inhuman, and barbaric is present throughout the reports and the editorials and it incorporates a moral judgment into the description of the events (Martin and White, 2005). This trend is part of a bigger trend in the coverage of terrorism, which is to present violence as an absolutist moral issue, diminishing the room of neutral interpretation (van Dijk, 1998). Such language use which is persistent makes militants not just criminals but existential enemies of the society (Schmid, 2011).

Pragmatically, this delegitimization is further supported by the presuppositions. Talks of another attack or a renewed militant violence assumes that there is a continuity of terrorism, which makes militancy a habitual and established threat (Bhatia, 2009). Such premises help develop a feeling of inevitability and urgency, as well as forming the views of the readers on terrorism as a national crisis that is unrelated to any particular events (Etaywe & Zappavigna, 2021).

Meanwhile, the victim of the terrorism and the perpetrator of the militant act are created within the frames of the innocence, victimization, and community loss. Patterns of language often prefigures victims with passive forms that emphasize violence and deemphasize the actual action (e.g., civilians were killed, children were martyred) (Hampl, 2014). This grammatical decision helps the reader to redirect their attention on the mechanics of violence to its human price (Mahmood et al., 2014).

Victimhood discourse has a direct relationship to the national identity building. The use of pronouns is a part of this process. The use of the inclusive first-person plural pronouns like we, our people, and our children are usually popular in the opinion piece and editorial writings, especially after high-profile attacks (Qadir and Alasutari, 2013). These pronouns erase the differences between victims, audiences and the country, and convert personal tragedies into the national ones.

To be more practical, this inclusive language is a speech act of solidarity (Bhatia, 2009). Newspapers help create a national identity with regard to combating terrorism by offering the readers into a common emotional and moral place (Siraj, 2010). Such discursive approach is particularly vivid across the post-attack phase on civilians when sorrow and anger are put into play to strengthen the sense of collective determination (Norris et al., 2003).

Unlike the display of militants, state and military actors are mainly manifested with positive judgement and legitimizing speech. Securitarianism Linguistically, the security forces are commonly placed as agent of protective or restorative measures and undertake actions such as respond, secure, eliminate threats or restore order (Hampl, 2014). These constructions put the state in a frame that is active, capable and morally justified (van Dijk, 1998).

This legitimacy is further enhanced by evaluative language. The state action is often perceived as successful and inevitable, putting words like decisive, successful, or necessary to illustrate some military actions (Siraj, 2010). These appraisals are especially visible when big operations are covered to counter-terrorism, when the discourse is about sacrifice, professionalism, and national obligation (Qadir & Alasuutari, 2013).

Pragmatically, the legitimization of official statements is very instrumental in the reporting of statements. Verbs that have authority and commitment are commonly used in reporting government condemnations and military pledges (vowed, reaffirmed, pledged) (Bhatia, 2009). These forms of speech are meant to reassure the masses and the state is placed in a responsive and determined position (van Dijk, 2006). The recurrent repetition of such phrases in articles adds to a more general discourse of institutional control and moral authority.

In addition to being explicitly evaluated, a great deal of the ideological work done in terrorism reporting is achieved by means of pragmatic strategies. Presuppositions legitimize the continuation of terrorism and portray it as a state of being that needs constant attention (Etaywe & Zappavigna, 2021). This normalization is an implicit justification of extraordinary security practices by putting them into a frame of normal requirements instead of the exceptional ones (Fairclough, 1995).

Implicatures are also major in terms of foreign involvement and sovereignty. Quite often, articles contain the statements that imply external influence or interference without direct accusations (Paracha et al., 2012). The use of terms like security officials did not eliminate foreign role permit newspapers to bring in the chances of external accountability but avoid being too jingoistic (van Dijk, 2006).

The way in which these statements are placed; usually after narrations of attacks or policy discussions leads the readers to certain interpretations without being explicitly supported by the editors (Bhatia, 2009). This indirectness allows newspapers to engage in ideological positioning in such a way that they still seem to be objective (Fairclough, 1995).

In the macro-discursive level, the analysis shows that there are a number of hegemonic frames that organize the coverage of terrorism. The first of such is existential threat frame that characterizes terrorism as an existence-threatening phenomenon (Entman, 1993). Here they introduce the militant violence not only as the form of crime but as the act of destruction of the national identity, values, and future (Norris et al., 2003).

Next to it is the national unity frame that focuses on the unity and resiliency of people in the battleground against violence (Siraj, 2010). The elements that support this frame are inclusive pronouns, emotive words, and stories of mutual sacrifice (Qadir and Alasuutari, 2013). These frames create a moral clarity and a collective purpose together (Entman, 1993).

The third notable frame is the justification frame that justifies the military and security responses as something they need and something they deserve (Hussain and Munawar, 2017). The rule in the frame in treatment recommendations is always to take decisive action, implement more rigorously, and reform the institution (Norris et al., 2003). Other viewpoints, e.g, dialogue, structural reform, or critical analysis of state policy, are given a moderate amount of attention (Fairclough, 1995).

As Dawn and The News display a wide ideological similarity in terms of denouncing terrorism and justifying state action, significant differences arise in tone and focus (Hussain and Munawar, 2017). Dawn has more of a restrained and institutional approach and focuses on the legal frameworks, the policy coherence, and long-term governance issues. Its evaluative language is even condemnatory of terrorism, but is in relatively moderate measure, and frequently based upon constitutional or procedural issues (Fairclough, 1995).

In its turn, The News uses emotive and patriotic rhetoric more often. It focuses more on national honor and shared indignation and moral panic (Siraj, 2010). This distinction is based on editorial approaches and not on ideological lines. The newspapers both end up sharing the same story that disenfranchises militancy and promotes vigorous counter-terrorism tactics (Qadir & Alasuutari, 2013).

All of this points to how the reporting of terrorism in Pakistani English-language print media is a discursive system that creates meaning by using an interrelated linguistic, pragmatic, and framing strategy (van Dijk, 1998). The militants are constantly othered and morally condemned, the victims are grouped into a national discourse of victimization, and the state actors are justified as defending the nation (Mahmood et al., 2014).

Combination of the micro level analysis of language and the macro level analysis of framing shows that media discourse does not just mirror the sentiment of the people; it creates it (Fairclough, 1995). Through normalization of some assumptions, foregrounding individual actors and privileging certain solutions, the newspapers play a role in the creation of a dominant story that advocates militarized responses and discounts the other worldviews (Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

## Conclusion

This paper aimed at looking at the discursive construction of terrorism in Pakistani English-language print media with the help of a combined analysis of language, pragmatics and framing. Based on the material of Dawn and The News articles published between 2009 and 2018, the analysis shows that the reporting of terrorism in Pakistan is hardly an impartial coverage of events. Rather, it is an effective discursive practice based on which meanings are created, identities are shaped and policy responses are justified.

On the linguistic level, it is found that militants are constantly portrayed as proactive agents of violence with transitivity patterns which predict culpable and moral responsibility in the foreground. This positioning is reinforced by evaluative lexis and modality which create terrorism in the form of something illegitimate, and morally unacceptable. Conversely, the terms that are predominantly used to describe state and military actors focus more on protection, determination and legitimacy. These patterns of representation establish a distinct moral polarization with very little discursive room to ambiguity.

Pragmatically, the results indicate that a lot of ideological work in the reporting of terrorism is achieved implicitly. Presuppositions make the continuation of violence normal and frame terrorism as a continuing state of affairs in the country, whereas implicatures sneakily present the themes of foreign intervention, sovereignty, and vulnerability in geopolitics. Speech acts are reported, especially an official speech, not necessarily an informational speech, but a performance speech that calms down the population and strengthens the authorities of the institution. These practical approaches lead the newspaper readers to specific ways of interpretation but uphold the rules of journalistic objectivity.

On the macro-discursive level, the analysis of framing emphasizes the prevalence of three interconnected frames namely: terrorism as an existential threat, the virtue of national unity in the confrontation of violence, and the defense of strong counter-terrorism actions. These frames arrange complicated events to logical stories that highlight moral clarity, social resolution, and the need to take radical action by the state. Although Dawn and The News have distinct tones and rhetoric approaches, with one having an institutional and policy-driven approach, and the other employing emotive and patriotic language, the two still agree on one ideological front, which legitimizes the illegitimacy of militancy and the necessity of strong security responses.

The research offers contribution to the current scholarship in some significant aspects. To begin with, it adds to the resource of terrorism and the media discourse research by giving a detailed analysis of the context that is context specific to the Pakistani print media, which is still underrepresented in literature based primarily on the West. Second, it represents the analytical usefulness of combining Systemic Functional Linguistics, discursive pragmatics, and framing theory, through the interaction of micro-level language selections and macro-level narrative format. Third, it highlights the significance of media discourse in influencing the comprehension of the populace and the legitimacy of policy in the society stricken with conflict.

The study has some limitations in spite of its contributions. Its interest in the English-based print media does not prevent Urdu-based newspapers and broadcast channels, which could use other discursive practices and cover a larger audience. Moreover, the results as a qualitative discourse analysis do not have a statistical generalizability. This study may be followed up by future research that would include multilingual corpora, print and digital press, or the reception of the terrorism discourse by the audience.

To sum up, this paper suggests that the Pakistani print media approach to reporting on terrorism is a highly ideological and socially significant activity. Newspapers have a role to play in constructions of national meanings of violence, responsibility, and legitimacy through the linguistic representation, pragmatic implication and narrative framing. It is critical to understand this discursive power by the scholars of media and terrorism as well as journalists, policymakers, and readers that want a more critical involvement with news about conflict and security.

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