Analysis of Political Discourse in Pakistani Party Manifestos

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Abstract

Political discourse is inarguably deemed an essential tool, impercetably influencing people's perception within a socio-political zone. The present research revolve around the critical discourse analysis of manifestos of Pakistani political parties, pertaining to the general election of 2013. The theoretical framework for the study triangulates VanDijk's (1998) Socio-Cognitive Model, along with the support of Turner and Tajfel's (1979) Social identity approach and Budge and Farlie's Salience theory (1983). The research revealed that all the political parties under study used the discursive strategies in their party manifestos in order to enhance the positive self-image of party to in-group people, by focusing the negative aspects of the out-group, thereby (re)constructing people's political identities and ideologies and achieving the desired hegemony for itself.

Key Words
Political manifesto,
Political Discourse,
Identity and Ideology

Introduction

The interdependence of language and politics has opened avenues for research in different disciplines including linguistics. Language remains crucial in the manifestation of power struggle, achieving hegemony and influencing political actions (Chilton, 2004). Keeping this insight the politicians practice rhetoric in order to exercise power, which is witnessed both in spoken discourse during election campaigns and in written discourse in their political party manifestoes.

The political participation, which is based on voters' turnout, has remained low in Pakistan. The Election Commission of Pakistan (2008) reported a continuous decline in voters' turnout falling from 61.45% in the 1970 elections to 45% in 2008 election. This is reflective of less awareness about the significance of election system among the citizens (Sheikh, Bokhari, & Naseer, 2012). Moreover, the voting decisions are influenced by many factors such as demographic, socioeconomic, racial and ethnic. Shawar and Asim (2012) opine that along with political loyalty racial ties form a dominant consideration in voting decision in Pakistan. Research in Political Science helps researchers find answers to the questions that are essential to national interest. Political Science concentrates on the theory and practice regarding politics and government at local, national and international level. There is a deep relationship between the trajectory of political science, politics and critical-political discourse analysis. A great deal of research has been conducted in Pakistani political context, through the lens of Political Science yet little attention is paid to the linguistic dimension. The present study is an attempt to fill in the above mentioned gap by linguistically and thematically analyzing political discourse focusing on variables such as politics, discourse, ideology, and identity.

Literature Review

Ideologies influence power while language plays an important role in constructing and deconstructing ideologies. Ideology is a term developed in the Marxist tradition that describes how cultures are structured in ways that enable the group holding power to have the maximum control with the minimum of conflict (Lye, 2007). It can be defined as a set of beliefs, perceptions, assumptions, and values that provide members of a group with an understanding and explanation of their world (Beard, 2005). Ideologies involve communication of ideas and therefore, language

plays a central role in constructing and maintaining discrimination and oppression. In fact, it must be emphasized that language can never be "neutral" as it bridges our personal and social worlds (van Dijk, 1998). A person's ideology is disclosed through his/her use of language. At times, leaders propagate their own ideologies. They normally have certain beliefs that they think must be propagated and transmitted to their constituents. Politicians often socially reconstruct reality on the basis of professional and personal ideologies. Their political messages carry powerful but coded meanings and messages and these messages reinforce individual beliefs and behaviors and collective ideologies which inevitably affect the formation of public policies and organizational practices; these coded meanings and messages are evaluated through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Critical Discourse Analysis investigates language to find out how language is used to establish power and dominance and create inequalities. "Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context." (van Dijk, 2001, p. 352). Critical Discourse Analysis highlights the facts when viewed with a micro-eye. These facts are a key to unravel the dominating powers which either are in the forms of organizations or are found on an individual level. The CDA magnifies the manipulations of language which are used otherwise in the political scenario; these manipulations are helpful in figuring out the social power of a group over the society or another group. According to van Dijk (1996), one of the major tasks of CDA is to trace the relationships between discourse and social power. One important and most related concept to ideology is that of power. Social power refers to the hold of one group, be it an organization or an institution, over another. Our utterances carry hidden knowledge and meanings (van Dijk, 2000). McGregor (2004) in his paper states that "our words are never neutral". Our words have meanings that serve different purposes. Critical Discourse Analysis observations are conducted as to how different meanings in a society are conveyed through a text. The CDA according to Fairclough (1998) aims at helping the analyst to decode the hidden meanings and the ideologies which are prevalent in the society and have maintained their own school of thought. Thus the objective of CDA is to uncover the ideologies or assumptions that are hidden behind the words of our written texts or oral speech.

One important dimension of CDA is politics. "CDA sees itself as politically involved research" (Titscher et al., 2000, p.147). The political dimension of CDA entails Political Discourse Analysis (PDA).The PDA is the field of study that aims at analyzing the 'political discourse'. The PDA does not only deal with the analysis of the political discourse but it also is a critical enterprise. In simpler terms, critical-political discourse analysis focuses on the (re)production of political power, abuse of power through political discourse along with the different types of resistance against this dominance. Particularly, the PDA deals with the socio-political inequalities and domination that lead to certain discursive conditions and consequences of socio-political inequality (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 1993b).

In Pakistani political context, only very few studies have been done on the genre of manifestos. These studies are either not extensive in their scope or they do not fall under the domain of linguistics. Two major studies are conducted by Nadeem et al., (2014) and Sarvat (2015); these studies are not extensive in their scope, in terms of the theoretical, methodological and analytical ground and in terms of the objectives of the study. Nadeem et al., (2014) study is a quantitative research focusing more on the political agenda than linguistic. Whereas, Sarvat(2015) only studied the manifesto of one political party, focusing on the use of conflict between that particular party and other parties in the establishment of party ideology. Two other studies conducted on the manifesto as a genre of political discourse, do not fall under the domain of linguistics. A paper was prepared by Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development (PILDAT, 2012), examining Election manifestos of three political parties of Pakistan. This paper falls within the domain of Political Science and it lacks the inclusion of any type of linguistic analysis to achieve the research objectives, although there was a huge scope for the researcher to achieve the same objectives through the linguistic analysis of the selected manifestos. There is yet another research on Pakistani political parties' manifestos conducted by Pakistan Institute of Development Economics-PIDE prepared by Siddique, Kemal, Musleh ud Din, and Khalid (2013). This research falls under the domain of Economics and Political Science and the objective of the research was to help the political parties improve their political vision to deal with the issues related to the economy of the country. Thus it can be claimed that the present study is a pioneering research on manifestos as a genre of political discourse in Pakistani Political Context.

Keeping in view the important relationship between the trajectory of political science, politics and critical-political discourse analysis and the gap identified above, the present study investigates the discourse in the manifestos of Pakistani political parties through critical discourse analysis using theoretical triangulation; adopting theories from CDA, Psychology and Political Science with specific reference to the contribution made by van Dijk(2006), Tajfel & Turner(2010)and by Budge and Farlie (1983a), in the mentioned realms. This mixed method research is conducted to evaluate the role of discursive strategies and linguistic devices used in the political discourse, in influencing the identities and ideologies of the people.

Research Objective

To explore the use of discursive strategies in (re)constructing ideologies and identities through the political discourse at micro and macro level.

Research Question

How are, identities and ideologies (re)constructed through discursive strategies in political discourse?

Delimitation

The study is delimited to political discourse in official party manifestos for the year 2013. Five Pakistani political parties whose manifestos are critically analyzed were selected on the basis of mean of IRI, (International Republican Institute) surveys conducted in August 2012, and in November 2012 and Gallup, (2013) survey conducted in February 2013, regarding the popularity of Pakistani political parties.

Methodology

The research is based on the triangulation theories, leading to the development of an analytical framework, to suit the requirements of the study.

The analysis focused on Micro and Macro Qualitative analysis (Textual). At the textual level micro qualitative analysis was done focusing on Propositional Structures: (Modality: Hedging and Vagueness:), and Formal Structures/Discourse Forms and Sentence Syntax:(Choice of Pronouns: Activisation and Passivisation: Use of Adjectives, and Adverbs).

The study is based on theoretical triangulation drawing theories from CDA i.e. Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model(1998), Tajfel's and Terner's (2010) theory of Social Psychology (Theory of Social Identity tradition/approach) and Salience theory Budge and Farlie (1983a, 1983b), of Political Science.

Micro and Macro Qualitative Analysis (Textual)

To analyze the text at micro and macro level quantitatively, van Dijk(1998) proposed broad categories namely Propositional Structures and Formal Structures/Discourse Forms/Syntax Structures.

Propositional Structures

Following three groups are analyzed under the broad category of propositional structures:

i.   Modality

Modalities may modify the propositions. The addition of modalities changes the way the events and the world are represented. It would be analyzed how the world representation is altered by adding modalities.

ii.   Hedging and Vagueness

Managing clarity and vagueness serve as a powerful ideological and political tool. Hedging and vagueness are analyzed in the discourse in order to trace the political reasons behind the use of such hedging and vagueness.

Formal Structures/Discourse Forms/Syntax Structures

Formal structures and discourse forms e.g. forms of a sentence or clause, order of the sentences, position of the sentences etc. are influenced by the underlying ideologies. Therefore, the formal structures and discourse forms would be analyzed in order to determine how through these structures meanings are emphasized or de-emphasized with reference to the ideological square. Under the broad category of sentence syntax the following subcategories are analyzed:

i.   Choice of Pronouns

The type of pronouns selected in the discourse signifies the underlying ideology of the speaker. The types of pronouns used can marginalize individuals or groups as outsiders. They may help in positioning people as members of in- group or outgroup. In the data inclusive (us, our, we, etc.) and exclusive (They, Them, Their, She, He, You, It, Yours etc.) pronouns are analyzed to trace the power relations inscribed through these pronouns.

ii.   Activisation and Passivisation

The use of different sentence forms and the word order can be used to emphasize or de-emphasize different fact transitivity choices. This is analyzed in order to see the influence of transitivity choices on the agency of a subject in making it more or less prominent and influence of changing a verb into a noun in making the agent completely implicit.

iii.   Use of Adjectives and Adverbs

Using loaded & dramatic adjectives, nouns and adverbs do not always have a natural function rather it may be political or ideological. The use of such forms may arouse responses that are judgmental. Use of strong, loaded and positive adjectives, nouns, and adverbs may be used to emphasize positive elements about "US" whereas strong, loaded negative adjectives, nouns, and verbs may reflect a negative image of "THEM".

Analysis

i.   Hedging and Vagueness

The analyses of the given manifestoes exhibit statements that are shrouded in ambiguity, equivocality, and obtrusiveness. The common trend witnessed in all the manifestoes was the critique of the opponents through which they strived to project a positive picture of their own party. The statements are mostly brief, precise and details are avoided, the parties make use of rhetoric and state things which are not pragmatic or practical. The party that enjoys majority at provincial level such as, MQM, BNP and ANP mostly targeted the provincial issues relating to Sindh, Balochistan, and KPK, in order to gain favor of the target population and further strengthen their position in the respective provinces. Albeit, the aims, and objectives they intend to seek are enveloped in doubt and lack functionality or practicability. All the parties followed a similar pattern of targeting the opponent's explicitly on most of instances and implicitly in some of the illustrations.

Words like "improving", "special support "secret" "ensuring independence "breaking political clutches" "expedite" tend to depict negativity, inefficiency, disorganization and corrupt shenanigans of the rivals. On the other hand, through the usage of such terms, the parties concerned demonstrate great resolve to correct the wrongs done to the masses and improve their existing condition. The manifestoes vaguely and subtly censure the opponents but at the same time also prove their hegemony. The parties have endeavored to construct an ideology of justice, equality, reformation, change, and disinterestedness for themselves and that of corruption, inefficiency nepotism, partisanship and discrimination for their adversaries.

Through the analyses of the manifestoes, it is concluded that this type of discourse can play a very significant part in changing ideologies, specifically before the elections. Through Vagueness and hedging political parties achieve their goal of establishing hegemony, they can both construct and transform fully established ideologies in their favor and against their opponents through the usage of these discursive strategies. The elusiveness of a statement gives them the advantage of hiding details and clarity of the ideas, on the other hand, is used as a tool to unveil the weak areas of the opponents.

ii.   Use of Pronouns

The current study disclosed that pronouns are used in the political discourse of parties to attain support of the people by transforming their ideology in party's favor and ultimately achieving hegemony over the people. Almost all the parties have decorated their discourse with pronouns to strengthen the image of the party in front of the common masses so that they can support them. The suitable use of pronouns signifies the underlying ideology of the speaker. The pronouns inscribed also serve to construct new identities like we, us, our, etc are used for addressing people which shows that the party considers them as their own part. For example, "We will ensure that ample credit is available to the private sector, interest rates are conducive borrowing and there is steady supply of energy to the industrial hubs."(PML-N, p.11). Moreover, these are also used in the discourse to transform the negative ideology that people usually possess about the political parties into a positive one. The pronouns are used to categorize people as the members of in-group or out-group.

In line with the theoretical framework presented by van Dijk(1998), the pronouns are used to represent the dichotomy between the in-group and outgroup. The analysis confirmed the four fundamental principles presented by van Dijk(1998) with reference to the use of pronouns that pronouns are used to emphasize positive aspects of the party and negative aspects of others. Also, they are used to de-emphasize negative aspects of the party and positive aspects of others.

iii.   Activization and Passivation

The research has found out that all political parties under study have brought into use the discursive strategy of activization and passivation of sentences in order to project a positive self-image by either emphasizing good aspects or by deemphasizing the negative aspects of their own party; and to picture a negative image of the other parties by either emphasizing bad aspects or deemphasizing good things of the other party. Each party in its own way tried to hide their shortcomings and at the same time they very ingeniously highlighted the flaws of the other parties or the government or tried to hide the achievements of the other parties and flaws of their own. For, example, the following sentence is in passive form and is used to make PML (N) as the party that strives to make Pakistan strong economically."This is being aimed at, to make Pakistan emerge as one of the top ten economies of the world in the 21st century" (p.11). Hence, activisation and passivization are used to construct a flawless picture of one's own party and to identify and bring forth the shortcomings of the other parties.

iv.   Use of Adjectives and Adverbs, Presuppositions and Implications

Political parties under study have used loaded & dramatic adjectives and adverbs which do not serve a natural function rather they have political or ideological motives. The use of such forms may arouse responses that are judgmental.

Strong, loaded and positive adjectives and adverbs are used by the political parties in their manifestos to emphasize positive elements about "US" whereas strong, loaded negative adjectives and verbs reflect a negative image of "THEM". for example, "The unproductive expenditure which has exhibited continual rise has got to be curtailed" (MQM, p. 23)

All the political parties under study have brought into use the strategy of creating a positive self-image and negative other image by using strong and loaded adjectives and adverbs. In addition adjectives and adverbs are also used by the political parties to enhance the effect of impositions and presuppositions in order to establish a positive self-image and a negative other image. Selection of adjectives and adverbs is an important linguistic choice made by the political parties to project positive self-image and negative other image. Thus linguistic choices are manipulated by the political actors in order to bring about the desired political effect of portraying positive self-image and negative other image

Thus the key findings of the research are that the discursive strategies play a crucial role in political discourse of party manifestos, to achieve ideological goals. These strategies are manifested through text, inter-text, and context, by making salient issues in order to in group people through us vs. them dichotomy. By the use of the discursive strategies in the political text, ideologies are presented in a way that they target certain salient issues in a manner that project the positive image of the party and negative image of the other parties. The presentation of text in this way (re)construct the existing ideologies and also helps in the (re)construction of identities. Additionally, it was also found out that the use of discursive strategies in the manifesto help the party gain hegemony by cognitively in-grouping people.

v.   Modalities

Modalities modify the propositions. The political parties under study have added modalities to change the way the political events and the world are represented. The present research focused on only three modal verbs that are will, can and should. It was found out that the world representation is altered or certain ideologies are enhanced by their addition in the political discourse. Mostly the modal verb "will" is used by the party to picture a negative image of the other party or to project a positive self-image. In addition, the strategy of presupposition is also brought into use by the addition of modal verbs. This strategy helped the party to influence people cognitively by creating a positive self-image or a negative image of the other party. The modal verb "should" is mostly used to project the negative image of the other parties by highlighting their weaknesses through presupposition. For example, "Our future generations should not have to live in the shadow of militancy and terror." (PPPP, p. 2)

The addition of the modal verb "can" is used by the political parties mostly to project party's ability regarding a certain matter. Thus the parties have used the discursive strategy of modalities to show their political will and ability to deal with different political and ideological matters related to the interest of public. In addition through the addition of modalities such as 'should' the negative image of the other parties is projected by pointing the other party's failure or inability of doing something in the interest of the public, which it should have done. The choice of modal verbs used in the political discourse is also an example of the linguistic choice opted by the political parties in the manifestoes of Pakistani political parties, that in case of the present research served the purpose of transforming ideologies, constructing identities and achieving hegemony.

Findings and Conclusion

The present study dealt with an extensive analysis of the party manifestos of Pakistani political parties. The data was analyzed on the bases of Van Dijk Socio-Cognitive Model(1998) along with the strong theoretical footing of Van Dijk's(2006) Ideological Square and intertextuality, Psychological theory of self-identification by Turner and Tajfel(1979). After the analysis of the data, it was concluded that all the political parties under study, brought into use the discursive strategies in their party manifestos, in order to create a positive self-image and the negative other image on the bases of ideological representation of the political events and facts. The results of the study proved to be in parallel with Van Dijk's Ideological Square which says that the ideological discourse is not always neutral and it serves the purpose of presenting the facts in a manner that a positive self-image is projected whereas, negative other image is pictured. In addition it was also concluded on the bases of the findings that political parties are well aware of the Socio-psychological factors involved in IN GROUPING of the people, therefore, the discursive strategies were used by all political parties that focused on strategies such as enhancing the self-image of the group members, by hunting for the negative aspects of the out-group, and while doing so political parties exaggerated the similarities of the in-group members and the differences between groups. These findings affirm the theory of Social Identity presented by Tajfel and Turner(1979) which assert that in order to achieve ideological and political goals, the politicians utilize discursive strategies. These discursive strategies include the exploitation of the duality of in-group and out-group.

Furthermore, the research findings were consistent with Tajfel's and Turner's Self-Categorization theory (1979) and it was concluded that the working of cognitive process involved in categorization, when linked to oneself, generates a sense of identification with the social group or category and leads to a certain set of behaviors that are associated with group membership: stereotyping, conformity, ethnocentrism etc. One important finding of the research is that through the use of discursive strategies hegemony can be achieved by cognitively influencing people's ideology in party's favor. Thus it is concluded that the political parties used the discursive strategies in order to have a cognitive influence on the general public to transform people's ideologies, construct identities and achieve hegemony. This aim is achieved by the ideological representation of the political events and facts in a way that similarities between the political party and the public are exaggerated and differences between the people and the other party are highlighted. In addition events, situation, circumstances, and facts are highlighted by political party in which general public identify that party as its own. Thus the findings asserted that reshaping the reality involves transformation of the facts in order to achieve the political goals and targets. To persuade and influence the masses the political actors bring into use the discursive practices applied through discourse.

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