ANALYSIS OF LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTION OF CLIMATE CHANGE DISCOURSE IN PAKISTANI PRINT MEDIA

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Article Details

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ABSTRACT

In Pakistan print media Climate change discourse encompasses multifaceted aspects centered on numerous purposes. i.e. raising public awareness, formulating policy guidelines and seeking global support. As a country Pakistan has found itself in a precarious situation due to climate change related challenges as its sufferings outnumber the country's very little contribution evident from the fact that it contributes merely 01 percent to greenhouse gas emissions. In this context narratives produced by media play very pivotal role and linguistic analysis of such narratives and underlying discourse is also imperative due to the importance of language use in framing the climate crisis. This study based on qualitative research analyzed the articles published in the leading national English Newspaper namely Dawn; hence the said newspaper was used as an instrument of Data Collection .Using purposive sampling, the four articles published at different intervals of time i.e. 2022, 2024, and 2025 related to climate change on the basis of their relevance to climate change in general as well as their specific focus on 2022 devastating floods in terms of climate change were selected from the Dawn website. This study explored dominant linguistic features and strategies used in linguistic construction of the climate change discourse i.e used two linguistic theoretical constructs .i.e. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1994) This study explored linguistic construction of climate change discourse in Pakistani print media using to explore the lexical choices used I constructing such a discourse. For analyzing data three dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis and Systemic Functional linguistics construct were used. Findings of the study revealed that various lexical choices and linguistic features used in the discourse. For instance Metaphors were used for conveying urgency, showing certainty. Modality, on the other hand, was used to indicate not only certainty but also expressed the demand for action. Nominalization and passivization, however, stood for obscurity and agentless construction and certain lexical choices for example Words like 'justice,' 'victims,' and 'Global South' suggested ideological framing and call for international responsibility.

Introduction

In modern times the dimensions of climate change have expanded beyond its scientific orientation and have spread across to make it emerge as a socio-political crisis of the contemporary world. Particularly in the twenty first century (IPCC, 2022). In its various manifestations for instance rising temperatures, shifting precipitation patterns, and intensifying extreme weather events, the phenomenon of climate change has caused numerous challenges for life on the globe particularly human societies, ecosystems, and economies. Such impacts in Pakistan are also acute and evident in the form of melting glaciers and rise in sea levels that has badly affected the country's socioeconomic life by causing water scarcity, flash flooding and creating existential challenges to life and eco system in Indus delta and coastal populations. In the year of 2022, Pakistan suffered terrible monsoon floods submerging one-third of its land area, displacing over 33 million people, and causing economic losses estimated at US$30 billion (UN ESCAP, 2023). The severity and scale of these events produced pivotal and immense media coverage both domestically and internationally. This study undertakes to investigates the linguistic ways and patterns of constructing climate change discourse in leading English Newspaper of Pakistan i.e. Dawn.

The study seeks to explore the linguistic choices and strategies employed in the media discourse on climate change alongside exploring the emergence of thematic frames. Using the theoretical frameworks of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), this study attempts to explore the ways and means through which lexicogrammatical strategies enact ideology, shape public perception, and influence policy dialogue.

Problem Statement

Since the most of existing discourse on environmental issues including climate change predominantly focuses Global North contexts (Boykoff, 2008; Carvalho, 2007) therefore it is pertinent for South Asia with its unique colonial legacies, linguistic hybridity, and political structures ought to employ distinctive rhetorical strategies for not only creating their own and indigenous climate change discourse but also make contribution to linguistic construction of such discourse. In this regard Pakistan's 2022 floods, one of the world's most severe climate disasters of the decade, provide a critical case for examining localized discourse. This study attempts to fill such a gap by qualitatively analyzing the Dawn's coverage to reveal how language constructs crisis, responsibility, and justice in a climate-vulnerable Global South nation. It is not denying the fact that global studies on this particular issue somehow exist but there is little work on linguistic construction in Pakistani media and even the little work accomplished exclusively focuses on representation or journalism, not language as a constructive tool

Justification of the Study

For its justification this his research offers three key contributions i.e. theoretical advancement, practical implications and policy relevance. In terms of theoretical advancement an integration of integrating CDA (Fairclough, 1995) and SFL (Halliday, 1994), brings the refined or sophisticated methodological tools for analyzing the climate change discourse in non-Western contexts to demonstrate their applicability to multilingual and postcolonial linguistic spaces on print media. So far as the practical implications of the study are concerned, the findings are expected to inform and educate journalists, editors, and communication strategists on capitalizing linguistic strategies to promote accurate, responsible climate reporting. On account of policy relevance this study aims at building an understanding of how media frames responsibility to guide policymakers and advocacy groups in framing climate change discourse and its functions.

Research Questions

The present study seeks to answer the following questions:

    I.   What dominant linguistic features are used in Dawn to construct climate change discourse?

II.   How do these linguistic choices reflect ideological positioning on climate responsibility and vulnerability?

Literature Review

The climate change discourse in Pakistan is quite complex for the reason that it is interwoven around the lines of scientific information, policy narratives and media representations and all these are mediated through language. Existing literature related to the domain of present study covers certain dimensions such as: climate change representation in media, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Eco linguistics and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and various overlapping and indigenous conceptual layers around these terms.

This literature review covers the linguistic dimensions of climate change discourse particularly prevalent in Pakistan in order to survey the existing literature on academic and research highlighting pivotal themes, theoretical frameworks and prominent linguistic features**.** Since most the linguistics research on climate change discourse in Pakistan is based on Critical Discourse Analysis or CDA Fairclough (1995) with quite a little focus on Eco linguistics aspect and Systemic Functional Linguistics; therefore the discourse often takes into account the ideological as well as power relations dimensions and leaving Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective least explored.   For instance Hussain, Iftikhar, and Khalid (2025) while researching on newspaper headlines pertaining to climate change used adopted Fairclough's CDA model to understand patterns governing definition, framing and presentation of the issue in the media and its defined, framed, and presented in the media and its effect on public opinion. Similarly for identifying and analyzing the prominent themes from the news related to environment in the print media, Nazeer, Alam, Rehman, and Yasir (2024) have also employed the Critical Discourse Analysis CDA and aimed at pinpointing the linguistic structures for instance metaphors and that conveyed both urgency and responsibility. While undertaking the research on public views on climate change Sarwar, Umber, Haroon, and Latif (2024) also used content analysis that reflects the researchers' intention of studying climate change discourse beyond its literal meaning. From Eco-linguistics perspective some studies for example Arran Stibbe (2015) examined the role of language in influencing human relationship with nature. This study takes into account the narratives related to human experiences built around their experiencing environmental realities. So far as Pakistan is concerned there are also certain studies which have employed Stibbe's framework. For instance Nasir, Habib, and Yousaf (2022) employed in a study making a multimodal discourse analysis of the advertisements reflecting "Clean Green Pakistan Policy" and their findings revealed that for making discourse influential, appealing and persuasive. Another more remarkable study i.e. Amjad, Binth e Zia, and Masood (2022) have explored the eco-linguistics related elements in English text books used in teaching at secondary level and their study concluded that the books were deficient in effective and useful content required for understanding of environmental issues. Apart from this, Abbas, Tahir, and Fatima (2024) also revealed the existence of certain linguistic and semiotic techniques used in Children's literature that convey the message related to green environment. From the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) Halliday, 1994) language is a systematically organized and socially structured and its therefore a system of conveying meanings and carrying out particular social functions. This construct identifies three metafunctions of a language and those are: ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction and textual metafunction. This framework is very useful in analyzing the discourse related to climate change as it helps to understand how climate change is represented as far as the ideational metafunction is concerned; how the climate change discourse is used in interaction thereby showing interpersonal metafunction and how the entire discourse is organized using linguistic resources that relates to textual metafunction. Systemic Functional Linguistics as a framework often strengthens both Critical Discourse Analysis CDA and Eco-linguistics by providing them with the tools to analyze grammatical choices responsible for revealing the underlying ideologies in a discourse. Such tools may include transitivity analysis theme types and taxis, for instance,

Media discourse is shaped by linguistic choices editorial policies and ideological constructs; hence it is not to an impartial representation of certain events (Fairclough, 1995).Apart from this, media plays a prominent role in framing the causes, effects, and responsibilities of environmental degradation. Carvalho (2007) argues that reflective of and affected by national priorities, cultural assumptions and ideological stances media generates discourse on climate science and political responses; hence such a discourse is elective rather than being exclusive one. Boykoff and Boykoff (2008) is critical of the usage of certain journalistic norms such as balance and objectivity for creating what they balance as bias at the expense of scientific consensus. South Asian media discourse on environmental issues, however, struggles between advocacy and objectivity; as Khan (2015) points out that Pakistani English newspapers while excluding grassroots narratives for targeting international readers frequently provide space for an elite viewpoint. On the other hand Ahmed (2021) observes that the nature of Pakistani press discourse on climate change is reactive, episodic and proactive due to the fact that it is often prompted by climate change stories and there is often insufficient attention given to long-term planning or adaptation strategies.

The three-dimensional model of CDA, analyzing language at the textual, discursive, and social practice levels developed by Fairclough (1995) allows to study how language use (e.g., grammatical choices, metaphorical frames) and broader institutional power structures and ideologies are interlinked. Apart from this, Halliday's (1994) SFL further enhances the linguistic perspective of discourse analysis especially in understanding the ways and methods by which certain modalities like degrees of certainty, transitivity and nominalization are expressed by language in a discourse. From

theoretical perspective of using and analyzing metaphor in discourse Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor

theory has been widely applied to climate discourse. From theoretical perspective of using and analyzing metaphor in discourse Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory has been widely applied to climate discourse. Semino (2008) highlights that certain that metaphors for instance "ticking time bomb" and "fighting climate change" are employed in the discourse so that the it creates not only understanding but also realization of urgency and nature of the issue. Further, (Stibbe, 2015) holds that in the Global South discourse metaphors mostly function as ways and means to emphasize disaster, helplessness, and moral outrage— particularly when appealing to international audiences for aid. A study of linguistic structures used in the discourse is very supportive in understanding how responsibility is both distributed and attributed in climate change discourse. For instance Passive voice structures obscure human agency: "emissions increased" avoids naming the emitters. Olausson (2009) in this connection shows that Swedish newspapers have a tendency to emphasize collective responsibility, while US newspapers frame climate change as an individual problem. In Pakistan, little research exists on how responsibility is framed discursively, though Rahman (2011) noted similar patterns in political discourse.

Research Methodology

Research methodology stands for a systematic and rational procedure to carry out a research study. Swarooprani (2022) holds that it is not only the scientific study of ways and means of conducting a research study which is called as Research methodology; it does include a systematic explanation of research problem and employing numerous ways and procedures to such effect. Murthy and Bhojanna (2009) hold state that in its essence a research methodology is the plan of a research. Since the major concern of the present study is focused upon understanding language in social context as well analyzing power structures and ideologies; therefore qualitative discourse analysis is used as a methodology for this research. The major reliance for using this methodology is placed on Discourse Analyzer Toolkit (2024) and Creswell (1997) Van Mannen (1998)

Data Collection

Oxford Reference refers to data collection as "compilation of relevant information". Data for the present study is collected in a manner that the data source is four articles on climate change discourse published in Dawn, the leading English mews paper of Pakistan at different intervals in 2022, 2024, and 2025 respectively. The selection criteria for the data is its relevance to climate-related floods and environmental narratives. By adopting the purposive sampling technique only the articles explicitly addressing climate change and 2022 floods are included. In order to collect the data the researcher in first instance selects the nature and source of the target text or discourse and a leading English newspaper of Pakistan namely Dawn is selected for the said purpose. In the next phase selecting the discourse text require a uniform criterion and for that purpose the discourses relevance to climate related floods and environmental narratives was chosen as a criterion for the selected discourse piece or newspaper article to have been published in 2022, 2024, and 2025.

Briefly following four discourse pieces were selected:

I. *Climate Change and Health"* published on November 4, 2022
II. *"Impact on Economy"* published on December 17, 2024
III. *"Climate Change — Why Action is Imperative Now"* published on February 10, 2025
IV. *Breaking the Climate Silos"* published on February 13, 2025

Data Analysis

Mohaiminul Islam (2020) defines data analysis as a process under which the coillected data is rationally and logically examined and interpreted. For this study, the researcher uses Fairclough's well-known three dimensional model popularly known as Critical Discourse Analysis. The three dimensions of this procedure include Textual Analysis, Discursive Practice and Social Practice. The textual analysis pertains to analyzing lexical choices for instance metaphors and modality; discursive practice relates to context of production and consumption of discourse and the social practice stands for understanding of ideological implications. Due to the nature of research questions and scope of the study, the data analysis takes place on textual analysis and social practice levels. Besides the study also utilizes Systemic Functional Linguistics SFL model of language analysis (Halliday 1994) to analyze lexical structure of the discourse by

considering language as in interconnected framework of different functional elements.

Upon its analysis the data revealed the climate change discourse in Pakistani English print media is constructed using various lexical choices and aimed at numerous functions . Amongst such lexical choices the dominant ones are metaphors, modality, passivization and nominalization. These very sophisticatedly lay the make up of linguistic construction of climate change discourse. So far as function of these elements is concerned, metaphors like Climate catastrophe,' 'apocalyptic flooding,' 'wake-up call' convey urgency of the matter. Similarly the modality in the discourse evident from the structures like 'must act now' and 'will devastate' indicate not only certainty but also urges action. The other equally significant lexical elements like nominalization & Passivization are used to show agentless for agentless constructions as well as they also show obscure accountability as evident from the given language constructions for instance 'floods caused displacement'. Besides, some other lexical elements and choices Lexical vivid from the words like 'justice,' 'victims,' and 'Global South' not only suggest ideological framing but also call for international responsibility. The table given below shows a clear quick description of the linguistic features used in constructing climate change discourse in English language print media of Pakistan.

Lexical Choice	Description	Example
Metaphors	Climate change shown as war, illness, or	"Fighting climate change"

	crisis	
Modality	Extent of certainty and/ or commitment	"may cause", "will lead to"
Passive Voice	Obscuring agency and/ or responsibility	"Emissions were released"
Nominalization	Converting actions into abstract nouns	"The rise in emissions"
Evaluative Language	Expressive of judgment or stance	"devastating effects"

Table 01 Lexical Choices in Climate Change Discourse

Findings and Discussion

This part of the paper includes the following broader themes

Metaphorical Framing

Modality and Obligation

Agency and Responsibility

One of the most dominant features reflected in the selected newspaper articles for the study is metaphorical framing. From the perspective discourse analysis in particular and linguistics in general, the term metaphorical framing stands for systematic understanding and representation of a target domain through a target domain. In simple words it is understanding and representation of a complex or abstract idea or by using a more tangible or concrete concept and concept. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) hold that it is not just a linguistic expression rater it is central to the human thought process and procedure. As far as the significance of metaphorical framing is concerned it is value lies in being a device used to make certain parts of target concept to tone down or moderate the other ones (Entman, 1993).This peculiar emphasization exerts notable influence upon the way an issue is defined alongside interpretation of its causes and implications. Most recently certain studies for instance Boeynaems, (2017)**,** Semino, Demjén, and Demmen (2018**)**, and Komatsubara (2024)**,** further highlight that specially in such a discourse that has political or public orientation there metaphorical framing is responsible for structuring perception and cognition in the way that it not only determines the focus but it also creates a an attitudinal effect in the matters of complex nature. In the articles selected for this study it is examined that those articles employ such metaphors that create an emotional impact to convey urgency of the situation. Such an outlook of the discourse is evident from the use of certain terms for instance "climate catastrophe," "wake-up call," and "ticking time bomb" dominate the lead paragraphs. Functionally these metaphors in the discourse frame or construct climate change as an immediate existential threat rather than a long-term issue. This type of framing is not only consistent with global trends but also contribute towards contextualizing the issue vis a vis Pakistan and in this way such metaphors also function as appeals to the global world. Highlighting the significance of metaphors Semino (2008) and Stibbe (2015) argue that metaphors are beyond rhetorical devices as they construct cognition as well. While enacting such function metaphors here In this case, crisis metaphors emphasize Pakistan as a victim of others' actions.

The next significant lexical choice employed in the discourse is use of high-modality verbs such as "must," "should," and "cannot ignore" and these appear exclusively and dominantly throughout all four articles. The choices of this sort communicate and convey both urgency and inevitability explicit from the lexical choices like "we must demand compensation" and "the world cannot look away". This phenomenon also aligns with Hyland's (1998) findings wherein he argues the possibility of modality as a powerful persuasive tool in editorial writing. However, modality in *Dawn*'s coverage is often directed outward—toward international bodies and developed countries—rather than inward, toward domestic policymakers. This rhetorical pattern both constructs Pakistan's position in the global climate hierarchy and potentially limits local accountability.

Another leading lexical choice within the said discourse appears to be the use of passive voice. Statements such as "*millions were displaced*" or "*crops were destroyed*" completely disassociate or remove responsibility. The active constructions, however, also appear but only on the instances where any referencing is made to the

international actors, such as "*the UN has pledged support.*" The frequent use of nominalizations, e.g., "*displacement*," "*devastation,*" also makes a contribution in abstracting the agency. These also align with Halliday (1994) wherein he notes that notes that such structures are capable of depersonalizing events and shifting focus away from agents. This on one hand allows the discourse to maintain an impersonal tone while emphasizing consequences but it also blurs lines of causality and accountability so as to make making it difficult to assess who failed to act or could have acted differently.

Conclusion

This study reveals how Pakistani print media in English through its leading newspaper *Dawn* has constructed a climate change discourse using a combination of crisis metaphors, high-modality demands, passive constructions, and thematic frames emphasizing victimhood and justice. On one hand such discourse effectively mobilizes sympathy and highlights global inequities but on the other hand it also threatens to sideline discussions of local agency and adaptation.

On the final note this study has various appeals and opportunities for both journalists as well as policy makers distinct to their professional roles. While for journalists, it emphasizes the need for creating a rational balance between urgency and inclusive narrative recognizing the responses from both community and national perspectives. On the other hand, for policy makers consuming this type of discourse the findings warn of solely relying on external justice frames that threatens to obscure the internal reform process. The future research, however, may explore could explore further this issue by analyzing the linguistic construction of climate change discourse appearing in other text sources i.e. newspapers, magazines and journals published in English as well as indigenous languages to compare framing patterns and audience impacts.

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