

"GENDERED LANGUAGE AND POWER: A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF IMRAN KHAN AND MARYAM NAWAZ'S SPEECHES"

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Abstract

This research investigates how gendered language constructs and reflects political power through a comparative analysis of Imran Khan's two speeches as Prime Minister of Pakistan (2018) and Maryam Nawaz's political addresses as the first female Chief Minister of Punjab (2023). Grounded in Sara Mills' stylistic analysis framework, which emphasizes how language shapes power relations through gendered discourse, this study explores how two influential figures deploy rhetorical strategies to construct leadership identities in a patriarchal political context. The findings illustrate that gendered language is not only a reflection of societal norms but also a performative tool through which political figures navigate and contest power structures. The study contributes to feminist stylistics and discourse analysis by highlighting the intersection of gender, language, and power in political communication.

Key words

Gendered language, stylistic analysis, power, political context

Introduction

Background

In global political arenas, language serves not merely as a conduit for communication but as a strategic instrument through which authority, identity, and legitimacy are constructed (Fairclough, 1995). This dynamic is particularly visible in patriarchal societies like Pakistan, where discourse is embedded in gendered power structures that shape not just speech, but how leaders are perceived.

This study focuses on four landmark speeches in Pakistan's recent political history: Imran Khan's inaugural address as Prime Minister on 18th August 2018 and 19th August 2018, his first address to his nation as Prime Minister, and Maryam Nawaz's maiden speech as the first female Chief Minister of Punjab in 2024 and another speech in August 2024 on World Humanitarian Day. A detailed critical discourse analysis of Imran Khan's populist rhetoric explores how ideology and authority are framed through language (Rehman, Khan & Muazzam, 2023). Meanwhile, Maryam Nawaz's election in February 2024 was heralded as a breakthrough for female political leadership in Pakistan's most populous province. Scholars note that her rhetoric during the speech blends familial metaphors with calls for unity and development in a way that is both relatable and symbolically powerful (Hussain, Jahan & Sheikh, 2025).

Problem Statement

Despite growing interest in political discourse and gender, limited research has examined how gender is constructed, challenged, or reinforced through the stylistic choices of male and female politicians in Pakistan. As noted in one study, political discourses are never neutral and are used very tactfully to represent 'us' positively and others negatively (Saria Saeed et al., 2024),

illustrating how gender may influence rhetorical strategies. Another research emphasizes context: Mills' feminist model of text... permits a study of a greater complexity than the conventional models," highlighting how extra-textual analysis—such as gender context—is crucial in interpreting stylistics (Yasmin, M., Masso, I. C., Bukhari, N. H., & Aboubakar, M., 2019). Together, these findings underscore the dearth of nuanced, gender-aware stylistic analyses within Pakistani political discourse.

This study addresses that gap by applying Sara Mills' framework of feminist stylistics to analyze the linguistic and stylistic elements in the speeches of Imran Khan and Maryam Nawaz. It builds upon findings that "Imran Khan's linguistic strategies... construct his political identity" through rhetorical devices like metaphors and emotional (Nokhaiz Zahra et al., 2024), while another study reveals how Maryam Nawaz, in her oath-taking speech, uses "strategical use of language to express her emotions" through processes like verbal, mental, and relational actions (Memoona Mohsan et al., 2024). By drawing on these works, the present study enables an in-depth understanding of how power is linguistically performed and perceived differently depending on the speaker's gender.

Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the stylistic features of Imran Khan's and Maryam Nawaz's speeches using Sara Mills' framework.
2. To compare how gender influences the construction of political identity and authority.
3. To examine how linguistic choices reflect or challenge patriarchal norms within Pakistani political discourse.

Research Questions

1. How do Imran Khan and Maryam Nawaz utilize gendered language in their speeches?
2. What stylistic strategies do they employ to construct authority and leadership?
3. How does the gender of the speaker influence the use and reception of political language in Pakistan?

Significance of the Study

This research contributes to critical discourse studies, feminist stylistics, and South Asian political analysis by offering a nuanced examination of the gendered dimensions of political speech. Feminist critical discourse analysis, as Lazar (2007) observes, "decodes how discursive practices perpetuate or challenge gender hierarchies in society," a process particularly salient in contexts where political communication reflects entrenched patriarchal norms. By focusing on two of Pakistan's most influential contemporary leaders, this study examines how rhetorical strategies both align with and resist cultural expectations of leadership. As Siddiqui (2014) demonstrates, everyday discourse, such as proverbs, "becomes part of the folk wisdom... that gives legitimacy to certain notions, beliefs, and stereotypes," illustrating how deeply cultural narratives shape perceptions of gender and authority.

Extending this to the political domain, feminist rhetorical scholarship emphasizes that democratic power lies in challenging systems that are not just, engaging citizens of global communities (Glenn, 1997). This study therefore not only extends the application of Sara Mills' feminist stylistics to South Asian contexts but also provides a foundation for comparative research into gendered language in other patriarchal political cultures.

Literature Review

Gender and Language

The study of gender and language has progressed from early deficit-oriented models to more nuanced, contextual approaches. Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place* (1975) argued that women's speech—characterized by hedges, tag questions, and politeness—reflects their marginalized status. Tannen (1990) extended this by highlighting gendered conversational styles. Moving beyond essentialism, Mills (2008) views gender as discursively constructed, with stylistic choices—tone, metaphor, modality, and pronouns—shaping identity in interaction. Her feminist stylistics framework (Mills, 1995, 2008) interrogates how texts reproduce or resist gender ideologies, particularly in political contexts where authority and gender are negotiated.

Political Discourse and Power

Political language not only conveys ideology but actively legitimizes authority, shaping public consent and obscuring power inequalities (Pesic, M.2023). Van Dijk (1997) underscores its cognitive influence, showing how metaphors and emotion-laden devices construct social realities and reinforce ideological conformity (Koller, V.,2005c). Importantly, these rhetorical tools are gendered: assertive, abstract, and hierarchical communication tends to align with masculinity, while empathetic, affiliative styles are perceived as feminine (Case et al., 2014).

Gender and Leadership Discourse

Leadership rhetoric is shaped by gendered expectations, with women often adopting relational, collaborative styles and men favoring direct, transactional communication (Holmes, 2006). Baxter's (2010) concept of double-voicing explains how women blend masculine and feminine discourses to assert authority while meeting gender norms. Role congruity theory further shows that such strategies help female leaders navigate bias that penalizes assertiveness in women (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

South Asian Political Discourse

In Pakistan, political rhetoric often intertwines with religious identity and postcolonial narratives, reflecting a long-standing use of Islam to legitimize political power (Zubair, Raza, & Islam, 2022). Female politicians often face heightened scrutiny around their tone and demeanor due to enduring gendered expectations. Benazir Bhutto, for instance, blended metaphors of strength with empathetic appeals, illustrating how women leaders navigate patriarchal norms (Basit, A., Imran, A., & Syed, T.,2024)

Theoretical Framework: Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics

Sara Mills' work on feminist stylistics offers a powerful tool for critically analyzing the gendered nature of language, particularly in literary and political texts. In her foundational book *Language and Sexism* (2008), Mills argues that language is a social practice through which power is exercised and identities are constructed. She critiques traditional stylistic

approaches for assuming a neutral or objective stance toward language, noting instead that all language is “inflected with ideological positions,” particularly regarding gender (Mills, 2008).

Language, Power, and Gender

According to Mills, stylistic analysis should move beyond simple textual features to examine how those features relate to broader ideological concerns. In *Feminist Stylistics* (1995), she emphasizes that the stylistic choices a speaker or writer makes are often embedded within societal expectations about gender roles. Mills writes, “Stylistics needs to be seen not merely as a linguistic toolkit, but as a means of unpacking the relationship between discourse and power, especially in texts where women’s and men’s language is differently evaluated” (Mills, 1995).

This insight is particularly relevant in political discourse, where male and female leaders must navigate a public domain historically structured around masculine ideals of authority, rationality, and assertiveness. The way a politician uses speech acts, metaphors, and modality can therefore signal alignment with—or resistance to—these gendered expectations.

Key Components of Mills’ Framework

Mills’ feminist stylistics incorporates several core analytical tools that this study uses to examine the speeches of Imran Khan and Maryam Nawaz. These include:

A. Pronoun Use and Address Terms

Pronouns play a prime role in determining the power relations and group membership. According to Mills (1995), pronouns of the first-person plural form (we, our, etc.) can indicate inclusivity, but also mask inequities of power by concealing the position of authority possessed by the speaker in the group. In Pakistan, Mah-e-Rab and Tahir (2025) discovered that corpus analysis showed the same trends: the first-person plural pronoun we is prevalent, and governmental actions are discussed as collective actions when speaking of the nation, whereas I is more common and used in more personal or creative contexts. This shows that the use of pronouns is strategic and not accidental. The more comprehensive cross-national study of diplomatic speeches by Pokhrel (2022) also showed that worldwide leaders tended to use the expression we, rather than I, and applied it to foster inclusivity or implicitly emphasize the importance of political unity, depending on the circumstances.

B. Speech Acts

Speech acts refer to the roles that language plays- to command, promise, assert or thank. Mills (2008) observes that speech acts of a political nature are highly gendered where male politicians tend to be direct and assertive whereas female politicians are assessed negatively by the same act. This two-sided standardization causes certain changes in the speech patterns when women may use hedges or politeness strategies to curb the perceived aggression.

C. Modality

According to Mills (1995), the key to the construction of authority is modality, manifestations of necessity, certainty or obligation. Such words as must, should, will, and others have different degrees of commitment and power. The high level of modality, as common in the speeches of male leaders, conveys confidence and assertiveness. The modal auxiliary, like must, should, and will, indicates the degree of commitment of a speaker and projected power. High modality is a characteristic that is commonly attributed to male political speech and is characterized by confidence and assertion, which solidifies the existing ideas of leadership and decisiveness (Fairclough, 2015; Kranert, 2020). The female leaders, on the contrary, might use more medium or low modality to sound approachable or empathetic which is in line with socially accepted femininity rules.

D. Metaphors and Figurative Language

Sara Mills stresses the ideological role of metaphor in shaping how power is conceptualized, arguing that metaphor choice can foreground or marginalize particular identities (Mills, 2008). Empirical work on political language shows that militarized metaphors (war, battle, fight) are frequently used to frame leadership as combative and dominant—associations that map onto culturally masculine models of authority—while care, family, and journey metaphors are more likely to evoke communal or nurturing relations often coded as feminine (corpus studies; Zeng & Ahrens, 2023; leadership-in-crisis analysis, 2022). Large-scale computational and corpus studies also confirm that metaphor use in political speeches is systematic and consequential: metaphoric framing increases engagement and helps leaders frame problems in gendered ways (Prabhakaran et al., 2021; Johnson & Williams, 2020).

Application to Political Discourse

While Sara Mills' feminist stylistics was initially developed for literary texts, recent scholarship has demonstrated its value in analyzing political speech. Holmes (2010) discusses how women leaders adopt double-voicing—the strategic blending of masculine and feminine discourses—to manage authority in male-dominated environments, a concept that builds on Baxter's earlier work and remains influential in current studies. The language of female leadership. This strategy is particularly applicable to Maryam Nawaz, whose rhetoric must simultaneously project political competence and align with cultural norms of modesty and relationality. Recent comparative research across 24 democracies shows that female politicians adapt their communicative style to either “blend in” with dominant norms or “stand out” through gender-distinct rhetoric, depending on political opportunity structures (Krook & O'Brien, 2023).

Moreover, Ruiloba-Núñez and Ruiz de Zuazu (2024) argue that political language remains inherently performative, with leaders required to enact both competence and credibility within gendered constraints. Applying Mills' framework to the speeches of Imran Khan and Maryam Nawaz therefore allows this study to examine how each constructs political identity—Khan through assertive, populist rhetoric and Nawaz through hybrid discourse that both reinforces and challenges patriarchal expectations in Pakistani politics.

Methodology

The study is based on a qualitative discourse-analytical methodology and explores the ways in which gendered language is used to construct political power in speeches of Imran Khan and Maryam Nawaz. The methodology is based on the structure of feminist stylistics developed by Sara Mills, which focuses on a close, contextualized approach to the interpretation of textual and linguistic materials, especially those that help to establish gendered identities and power.

Research Design

It is a comparative, interpretive paper that will look at four major texts: Imran Khan maiden speech as Prime Minister of Pakistan delivered in August 2018 and his first address to nation as a prime minister and the maiden speech of the first woman Chief Minister of Punjab delivered in February 2023 and his speech on World Humanitarian Day on 19th August 2024. The choice of these texts was based on their symbolic and political value as an announcement of the leadership to people at the start of a formal tenure in the office. Both speeches are fertile grounds of stylistic and ideological criticism.

Using Sara Mills' stylistic analysis model (1995, 2008), the study focuses on the following categories:

Pronouns and Address Terms (to analyze inclusion/exclusion and identity construction)

Speech Acts (to understand how authority and relationships are established)

Modality (to evaluate degrees of certainty and obligation)

Metaphors and Figurative Language (to explore symbolic representations of power and gender)

The analysis pays special attention to how these stylistic features function in relation to gendered expectations of leadership in Pakistan's patriarchal sociopolitical context.

Data Collection and Sources

The primary data are **transcripts** of the speeches, sourced from reputable public broadcasters and newspapers, including The News International (for Imran Khan's 2018 speeches) and Dawn News (for Maryam Nawaz's 2023 address) and The Express Tribune (for Maryam Nawaz's 2024 speech on World Humanitarian Day). Video recordings were also reviewed to consider non-verbal elements such as intonation, pauses, and emphasis—although the focus remains predominantly on textual features.

Secondary sources include:

- Academic books and journal articles on gender, language, and political discourse (e.g., Mills, Fairclough, Cameron).
- News articles and commentary to understand the socio-political reception and context of each speech.

Limitations

While this study offers in-depth stylistic analysis, it does have limitations. First, it analyzes only four speeches, which may not fully represent the rhetorical strategies of the politicians across contexts or over time. Secondly, the study is focused on textual content; while some non-verbal cues are acknowledged, the analysis remains primarily linguistic. Lastly, interpretations are shaped by the researcher's own positionality and knowledge of cultural and political dynamics, which may introduce bias.

Ethical Considerations

The speeches analyzed are public domain texts. However, care has been taken to represent the subjects fairly, with critical distance and academic rigor. The study avoids personal or defamatory commentary and centers the analysis strictly on public discourse and stylistic choices.

Textual Analysis

Imran Khan's Speeches (2018): Language, Masculinity, and Authority

Imran Khan's first national address as Prime Minister of Pakistan, delivered on August 19, 2018, marked a pivotal moment in the country's political history. As a newly elected leader with a populist mandate, Khan used the platform to articulate a vision of accountability, justice, and national rejuvenation. His stylistic and rhetorical choices reveal a performance of political authority that is deeply embedded in masculine-coded language, consistent with Sara Mills' (2008) observations that power in patriarchal societies is linguistically tied to assertiveness, certainty, and hierarchical positioning.

A. Pronouns and Political Identity

One of the most striking features of Khan's speech is his strategic use of first-person plural pronouns ("we," "our," "us"), which serve to align him with the collective identity of the nation. For example:

"This is the time that we decide to change our destiny."

This inclusive pronoun use builds a sense of unity and shared mission. However, as Mills (1995) cautions, the use of "we" can also obscure asymmetrical power relationships between speaker and audience (p. 32). Khan's rhetoric implies solidarity, but as the new head of state, his role is one of command, not companionship. This subtle discursive manipulation reflects how male leaders often use collectivist language to mask individual authority, reinforcing leadership without overtly appearing authoritarian.

B. Speech Acts and Performative Power

Khan's speech is densely packed with assertive and commissive speech acts, as defined by Austin (1962) and later extended by Mills (2008). For instance:

"I will keep only two people with me out of the [prime minister's staff of] 524. I want you to understand that the money we lavish on ourselves could be spent on those who our state has left behind."

Statements like these are promissory in nature, used to construct credibility and ethical leadership. They serve a dual function: reassuring the public and projecting moral superiority over political opponents. This form of speech act reinforces Khan's masculine persona—a disciplined, upright figure who takes decisive action, a trope often associated with hegemonic masculinity in political contexts (Connell, 1995).

C. Modality and Authoritative Stance

The speech is rich in high-modality expressions that project absolute certainty and resolve:

"I will bring the looted money and take each and every one responsible accountable."

Words such as "must" and "will" express strong obligation and inevitability, aligning with Mills' (1995) argument that modality is used to construct speaker authority. High modality is a hallmark of masculine political discourse, where showing doubt is often equated with weakness (Cameron, 1995). Khan's lack of hedging or tentative language reinforces his image as a strong, uncompromising leader.

Notably, the speech lacks softeners or mitigators—linguistic devices typically associated with female speech styles (Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1990). The absence of these features contributes to a tone of unambiguous command, which may be persuasive but also exclusionary, especially to marginalized voices.

D. Metaphors and Militarized Nationalism

Khan's speech frequently invokes battle metaphors and images of struggle, which serve to dramatize the stakes of his leadership:

"On one hand we don't have money to spend on our people, and on the other we have people living like our colonial masters used to live?"

Imran Khan casts the ruling elite as foreign oppressors, drawing from postcolonial memory. It positions Khan as the anti-colonial liberator, aligning with nationalist discourse.

Such metaphors are consistent with what Mills (2008) identifies as gendered figurative language, where war and combat are coded as masculine endeavors (p. 97). By positioning himself as a warrior-leader, Khan taps into cultural narratives of heroism and sacrifice, thereby legitimizing his authority not just politically but morally.

"We will save this country or these corrupt people will save themselves."

A binary choice between "us" (nation/reformers) and "them" (corrupt elites), rallying citizens to defend the nation as if in battle.

E. Moral Superiority and Masculine Ethos

Throughout the speech, Khan contrasts himself with the corruption of previous governments, implicitly constructing a moral binary between himself (the incorruptible male savior) and others (the immoral, ineffectual elite).

"I stepped into politics not to pursue it as a career... but to set Pakistan on the path envisioned by Jinnah and Iqbal."

This frames political ambition as a selfless, sacred mission, not a careerist goal. This rhetorical strategy relies heavily on ideological polarization, which, as Mills (1995) explains, is a common feature of patriarchal discourses that rely on dichotomies to simplify complex social realities (p. 112). Speakers construct themselves and others in a text in ways which correspond with broader ideologies. A speaker can claim moral legitimacy not by logic, but by aligning themselves with moral norms (Mills, 2004).

The implicit masculinity of Khan's discourse is also evident in his references to austerity, discipline, and sacrifice—traits often associated with male authority figures in South Asian culture. His promise to reduce personal luxuries and live modestly is not just an economic statement but a performance of moral masculinity, evoking the image of a pious, self-restrained patriarch.

"I will not ask other countries for loans; I will be ashamed to beg for money."

Discourses tend to privilege a particular type of subject position—rational, authoritative, distanced—which corresponds to the masculine subject." (Mills, 2004, p. 90)

Maryam Nawaz's Maiden Speech (2023): Gendered Language, Emotional Appeals, and Negotiating Authority

Maryam Nawaz's maiden speech as the first female Chief Minister of Punjab, delivered in February 2023, provides a compelling contrast to Imran Khan's masculine-coded rhetoric. As a prominent female political figure in Pakistan's patriarchal society, Maryam's discourse strategically negotiates the tensions between asserting political authority and conforming to gendered expectations of femininity. Applying Sara Mills' feminist stylistics (1995, 2008), this section explores how Maryam's linguistic choices construct a distinct feminine political identity while wielding power.

A. Pronoun Use: Building Relational Identity

Maryam's speech features frequent use of first-person plural pronouns ("we," "our") to foster a collective identity, similar to Khan's use. However, her pronoun usage also emphasizes relational connectedness and loyalty. For instance:

"We have also faced difficult times when every tide was against us, and cruelty and brutality were inflicted on us."

"We will leave no stone unturned"

Mills (1995) notes that female speakers often use pronouns to create solidarity and reduce hierarchical distance (p. 41). Maryam's deployment of "we" functions not only to unite her audience but also to soften the assertion of individual power by positioning herself within a communal framework. This aligns with Baxter's (2003) concept of "relational leadership", where women leaders construct authority through connection rather than command.

B. Speech Acts: Expressing Commitment Through Service

Unlike Khan's direct promises and commands, Maryam's speech contains a higher proportion of expressive and commissive speech acts that emphasize service and sacrifice:

"Serving humanity is not just a duty; it is a form of worship,"

Such pledges perform the dual function of committing to action while invoking humility—a trait culturally coded as feminine (Mills, 2008, p. 59). By framing her authority as service to the people, Maryam negotiates power in a way that challenges patriarchal notions of leadership as domination.

This strategic softening of power may be viewed as a response to the double standards faced by women in politics, who risk being labeled overly aggressive if they adopt traditionally masculine assertiveness (Cameron, 1995).

C. Modality: Balancing Certainty and Inclusivity

Maryam's speech displays a nuanced use of modality. While she employs modal verbs expressing obligation and determination, such as "must" and "will," she often tempers them with hedges and mitigators:

"And today I announce, InshaAllah, that we will provide a comprehensive school transport system in Punjab".

Religious interjections, such as Insha Allah (God willing) mellow the modality and add tentativeness and humility to the modality. According to Mills (1995), these modal mitigators are common in the patterns of female discourse, which are used to prevent the sense of being arrogant or authoritarian.

This dynamic between high and low modality enables Maryam to exercise power without seeming too aggressive since she can be approachable and deferential to both concepts necessary to Pakistani culture or demeanor.

D. Metaphors: Familial and Nurturing Imagery

A key feature of Maryam's rhetoric is her frequent use of familial metaphors:

"As a mother, I understand how women worry about their children, especially when they are young. I will try to ensure that every workplace has a daycare center."

"I am also the Chief Minister, the daughter, and the sister of those who did not vote for me."

In this, she appeals to metaphors of kinship: daughter, mother and sister that have strong echoes in Pakistani social conventions. Mills (2008) argues that political speech usually employs familial metaphors which are often used to humanize and feminize leadership as opposed to the militarized metaphors commonly used by male politicians.

The references to care, nurturing, and loyalty by Maryam present her leadership as protecting and serving people instead of dominating them, a political adaptation to the gender restrictions of political leadership.

E. Emotional Appeals and Moral Positioning

Maryam's speech employs pathos extensively, appealing to shared values, hardships, and aspirations:

"It is my dream that not a single child in Punjab is deprived of education due to a lack of resources."

Such emotional pleas do not only create a feeling of togetherness but also a kind of moral positioning of being a caring leader who is sensitive to the plight of the people. Mills (1995) also points out that in political speech, women tend to project emotionality as a source of power

in advance, which is problematic in that the idea of emotion is believed to be the opposite of power (p. 92).

Maryam builds a feminine ethic of leadership based on empathy and not authority by focusing on the concept of resilience and hope.

F. Negotiating Gendered Expectations

The speech of Maryam is marked by a tight rope walk in terms of demonstrating power and following the culturally approved femininity. Women leaders, as Baxter (2010) explains, often enforce the tactic, known as double-voicing, when assuming masculine qualities such as being decisive, but at the same time, they employ feminine discursive practice to ensure that they are not attacked by their opponents.

For example, Maryam confidently states:

"This honor today — this historic day — even if you take me out of the equation, is the honor of every daughter of Pakistan, every sister, every mother."

"For the first time, a woman stands as Chief Minister of Pakistan."

Makes a direct appeal to the gender milestone where she is the one standing against a male domination political history.

However, this statement is frequently diluted with the use of inclusive pronouns and religious phrases, which are part of an artful act of gendered authority.

Discussion

The comparative study of the speeches of Imran Khan and Maryam Nawaz based on the feminist stylistic framework created by Sara Mills allows discerning subtle details on the interplay of the three areas, gender, language, and political power in the socio-political setting in Pakistan. The results demonstrate how the rhetorical strategies of each leader reproduce and challenge gendered norms of leadership and power based on the demands of culture and politics.

Gendered Styles of Political Authority

The speech of Imran Khan represents a masculine-coded discourse with assertiveness, high modality and militarized metaphors, which is consistent with the statement Mills (2008) made that the language used by political leaders, who are men, tends to be characterized by dominance, certainty, and control. Direct speech acts and unmitigated modality give the impression of a decisive and powerful personality, which is a culturally exalted quality in male leadership (Connell, 1995; Cameron, 1995).

Conversely, the negotiation of power in the speech by Maryam Nawaz presents a gendered negotiation of power, in which authority is created as the relational pronouns, emotional appeals, and family metaphors. This is in line with Mills (1995) argument that female speakers tend to use linguistic devices that focus on connection, care and humility to dominate leadership under patriarchal restrictions. The combinations of modal mitigators and religious interjections

tone down Maryam, enabling her to manage the so-called moral dilemma as posed by Baxter (2003), in which female leaders have to juggle the masculine and feminine discourses to be legitimate enough and at the same time not to face backlash.

Language and Power: The Masking and Performing of Authority

The manner by which both leaders perform power is different and employ language in a strategic way, based on the gender expectations. The high modality and confrontational metaphors used by Khan are a kind of attempt to conceal the vulnerability and demonstrate the unequivocal authority, which Mills (2008) notes is usually done by masculine political language by being more assertive and conclusive.

On the other hand, power is more visible as relational and negotiated in Maryam. Her use of speech acts and metaphorical language places her not as some long distance, bossing, figure but as an understanding, service based leader. This is indicative of the notion by Cameron (1995) that woman political talk tends to integrate emotion and humility as a strategic asset as opposed to the idea that they are a weakness of authority.

The political gendering of language is further supported by the different ways in which the two speeches use metaphor. The militarized metaphors of Khan and the domestic metaphors of Maryam contrast domination and protection, as the former is a concept that is inherently masculine, whereas the latter calls on the power of nurturance and collective care, which are traditionally feminine (Mills, 2008; Baxter, 2010). This dichotomy exposes the fact that metaphor does not only depict but also creates gender and power social realities (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The study is also constrained by the fact that it presents the results of just four speeches and might not represent the complexity of the speech of each politician in various contexts and periods. Further studies would be able to increase the corpus, incorporate visual and paralinguistic information, and use mixed methods to gain a more profound insight.

Also, the study of reception by audiences and media coverage of these speeches would help clarify the role of gendered language in influencing the opinion of people and political effectiveness.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to examine how gendered language determines political power within the speeches of two Pakistani politicians Imran Khan (2018) and Maryam Nawaz (2023). Within the framework of the feminist stylistic model developed by Sara Mills, the study analyzed the linguistic and rhetorical means each of these leaders applied in exercising authority and leadership in a highly patriarchal political dynamics in Pakistan.

This analysis showed that there was a stark difference between the speeches. The high-modality, militarized metaphors, and the use of direct speech acts included in the rhetoric of Imran Khan were typical of a traditional and masculine conception of political power based on strength, decisiveness, and moral superiority. His discussion is in line with the concept of the hegemonic

masculinity put forward by Connell (1995) and the articulation of male speech as unquestioning and dominant as put forward by Lakoff (1975).

Instead, the speech by Maryam Nawaz was characterized by a gendered negotiation of power and rhetorical appeals, relational pronouns, emotional appeals, family comparisons, and moderated modality to balance power with the femininity normative to the culture. This is in accordance with the idea of gendered linguistic strategies that Mills (1995) outlines, in which women in leadership positions need to negotiate expectations cautiously in order to project a sense of legitimacy, yet not to seem aggressive. The religious expression and humility of Maryam is a strategic conformity to societal expectations, which is similar to Baxter (2003) concept of a women politician being a dual-voicer in relation to her speech.

These findings taken together highlight the degree to which the political discourse in Pakistan is highly gendered, and language is an influential instrument in both supporting and disrupting the traditional gender roles in politics. The paper points out the significance of feminist stylistics in uncovering these processes and supports the sphere of gender and political communication.

Even though it is informative, the research has limitations such as the small size of the corpus and the textual analysis as the sole analysis. Future research may be done using larger datasets, multimodal analysis, and audience perception to provide further insight.

To conclude, the linguistic and communicative practices of Imran Khan and Maryam Nawaz in their speech are examples of specific gendered acts of power, which are indicative of larger cultural and ideological categories. Not only do their speeches convey political agendas, but they negotiate the complicated landscape of gendered leadership in Pakistan and demonstrate the consideration of language as a location of power and a co-creator of gendered identity.

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