

SHAPING ADVICE THROUGH ENGLISH: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF AUNTIE AGNI'S ADVICE COLUMN IN DAWN NEWSPAPER

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Abstract

Advice columns constitute influential sites of everyday meaning-making, where language mediates personal guidance, social norms, and cultural values. This study offers a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Auntie Agni, a popular advice column published in Dawn, Pakistan's leading English-language newspaper, to examine how advice is linguistically and ideologically constructed through Pakistani English. Drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA, the study analyses 52 advice columns published between January and December 2025 at the levels of text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. At the textual level, the findings show that advice is framed through direct address, soft modality, evaluative reassurance, metaphor, humour, and culturally embedded idioms, constructing an empathetic and non-authoritarian advisory voice. Discursively, the column blends therapeutic, religious, moral, and educational discourses, positioning the columnist as an expert-friend who negotiates authority through intimacy rather than prescription. At the sociocultural level, the analysis reveals how the column engages with key Pakistani social concerns, including family authority, gender norms, marriage, mental health stigma, education pressure, and class anxiety, not by rejecting them outright but by subtly reinterpreting and renegotiating them. Situated within the framework of World Englishes (2009), the study demonstrates that Pakistani English in Auntie Agni functions as a localized, culturally resonant variety used for emotional counselling and moral guidance rather than as a marker of elite or Western identity. By foregrounding advice discourse as a neglected media genre in Pakistani English scholarship, this study fills an important empirical and theoretical gap, showing how newspaper advice columns operate as sites of ideological, emotional, and cultural pedagogy in contemporary Pakistan.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Pakistani English, advice discourse, media discourse, Auntie Agni, Dawn, newspaper columns, World Englishes

1. Introduction

Advice columns have long served as sites of social guidance, reflecting cultural norms, interpersonal expectations, and societal values (Wilbraham, 2025; Zhang, 2021). In Pakistan, *Auntie Agni*, published in the *Dawn* newspaper, represents a contemporary, real-world advice column that addresses a wide spectrum of personal and social concerns, ranging from relationship and family dynamics to academic pressures, financial stress, and mental health challenges. The column is recognized for its empathetic and serious style, often emphasizing professional consultation for those in crisis, thereby positioning itself as both a conversational and informative medium for readers seeking guidance.

The study of advice columns such as *Auntie Agni* offers an important lens for examining Pakistani English in media discourse. Newspapers in Pakistan function not only as platforms for news dissemination but also as arenas where social, cultural, and ideological practices are negotiated through language (Najeeb Ullah, Farhat, & Asim, 2025). English, as used in such columns, reflects local adaptations of a global language variety, aligning with the field of World Englishes, while simultaneously engaging with social hierarchies, gendered expectations, and personal agency (Alkaff & Lulu, 2020; Lulu & Alkaff, 2022).

A critical discourse analysis (CDA) of *Auntie Agni* using Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional model allows for a detailed exploration of the interplay between language, ideology, and power in these texts. At the textual level, linguistic choices and discursive features can reveal patterns of authority, empathy, and persuasion. The discursive practice dimension examines the production, circulation, and interpretation of the column, situating it within its readership and editorial frameworks. Finally, the social practice dimension positions the discourse within the broader sociocultural context of Pakistan, highlighting how advice columns mediate issues of morality, gender, and social responsibility (Wilbraham, 2025; Lulu & Alkaff, 2019a).

By focusing on of *Auntie Agni* advice columns, this study addresses a gap in research: while previous scholarship has analyzed advice columns in various international contexts (Alkaff & Lulu, 2020; Hinnant, 2009; Carr, 2020; Lulu & Alkaff, 2022), little work exists on Pakistani English newspapers as a site for negotiating personal and social guidance through mediated discourse. This gap underscores the need for research examining how English is employed in Pakistani media to construct relational norms, provide advice, and shape public discourse.

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite the prominence of advice columns in Pakistani English media, there is limited scholarly attention to how such texts construct guidance, authority, and social norms through discourse. *Auntie Agni's* column, as a recurring feature in Dawn, offers a rich site for examining how English is used to shape advice, negotiate cultural expectations, and articulate social concerns. A systematic CDA-based analysis is needed to reveal the discursive patterns, ideological underpinnings, and sociocultural meanings embedded in these texts.

1.2 Significance of the Research

The study contributes to the growing field of World Englishes by evaluating how Pakistani English functions within a widely consumed media genre. It enriches theoretical discussions by demonstrating how Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA can illuminate the construction of advice and authority in a local English variety. For scholars, the study clarifies how everyday discourse participates in shaping social norms; for media practitioners, it offers insights into how linguistic choices subtly guide readers' perspectives; and for researchers of Pakistani English, it provides empirical grounding for understanding how English is localized in public communication. By linking textual features with discursive and social practices, the study deepens our understanding of how language mediates cultural values in Pakistan's English-language press.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To examine how textual choices and discursive practices in Auntie Agni's column construct advice.
2. To investigate how sociocultural norms in Pakistan interact with English usage to shape advice-giving in the column

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does Auntie Agni's column construction of advice use the textual features of Pakistani English?
2. What discursive strategies shape the advice within Auntie Agni's column?
3. In what ways does the column's use of English reflect and negotiate local sociocultural norms in Pakistan?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Advice columns occupy a curious cultural space: half-confessional, half-didactic, always negotiating intimacy, authority, and morality. Across global contexts, scholars have treated these texts as rich sites of meaning-making where cultural norms, gendered expectations, and linguistic choices crystallize into recognizable patterns of discourse. Yet within South Asia, particularly Pakistan, systematic critical discourse analysis of newspaper advice columns remains almost nonexistent. Moreover, scholarship rarely situates such columns within the paradigm of World Englishes, where local varieties of English shape and are shaped by sociocultural expectations. This review draws from the international literature on advice discourse, media studies, and discourse-analytic approaches to map the terrain in which the present study is anchored.

2.2 Social Norms in Advice Columns

Much of the foundational research illustrates how advice genres rearticulate societal norms by framing personal problems through culturally resonant scripts. Alkaff and Lulu (2020) show that relationship advice in Middle Eastern magazines foregrounds marital stability and affection for husbands, demonstrating how recurring themes reproduce gendered expectations even when the texts vary linguistically or geographically. Their findings emphasise that despite multilingual contexts, the underlying ideological scaffolding tends to reaffirm normative heterosexual relationships.

Similarly, Lulu and Alkaff (2017) find that English-language magazines across Malaysia, the US, and the Middle East construct women as empowered but ultimately anchored within conventional gender roles. Messages regarded as "empowering" often remain tethered to traditional heteronormative boundaries, a pattern also observed in Akinro and Mbunyuza-Memani's (2019) work, which notes a persistent tension between globalised notions of female agency and culturally specific expectations of femininity. These studies consistently highlight how advice discourse mirrors a society's moral architecture while simultaneously positioning itself as progressive or modern.

2.3 Feminist, Postfeminist, and Neoliberal Contexts

Hinnant's (2009) analysis of US women's magazines reveals a strong postfeminist undercurrent in which health and wellness discourse is framed as an individual moral responsibility. Her work demonstrates how readers are positioned as autonomous decision-makers within a neoliberal framework, even when structural inequalities shape their concerns. This analytical lens resonates with research from Southeast Asia: Alkaff and Lulu's Malaysian study identifies both globalised themes and locally adapted discursive "temperings" reflective of cultural constraints (Sharifah & Lulu, 2020).

Advice texts thus emerge as sites where "empowerment" is rhetorically celebrated but ultimately constrained by broader social norms. The present study—focusing on *Auntie Agni*—intersects with these concerns, given that the column routinely deals with gendered dilemmas embedded within Pakistani sociocultural realities.

2.4 Pedagogical Spaces

Another strand of research treats advice columns as informal educational spaces. Carr (2020) argues that adolescent readers use advice texts as supplementary sex education resources, particularly in contexts where formal instruction is limited. The genre's conversational intimacy creates an environment in which taboo topics can be addressed in a seemingly "safe" format. Advice columns thus become semi-institutional pedagogical tools, shaping readers' perceptions of normality, risk, and acceptable behaviour.

This educational dimension is central to understanding columns published in mainstream newspapers such as *Dawn*, where the audience is intergenerational and often relies on such platforms for culturally palatable guidance. Yet little scholarship explores how Pakistani English mediates this pedagogical function, leaving a substantive gap that CDA directly addresses.

2.5 Solution Based and Persuasive Strategies

Studies applying Machin and Van Leeuwen's problem-solution schema show that advice columns are not merely narrative responses but structured arguments. Lulu and Alkaff (2019) demonstrate that writers simultaneously posture as experts and friendly confidantes, negotiating authority and intimacy through linguistic choices. Across contexts, persuasive strategies adjust to cultural norms: some societies emphasise personal responsibility, while others foreground relational harmony.

Moreover, cross-cultural analyses (e.g., Lulu & Alkaff, 2022) reveal that new types of problems and solutions emerge depending on local sociopolitical climates. These dynamics are crucial for examining *Auntie Agni*, where cultural expectations, class positioning, and urban Pakistani sensibilities shape what kinds of "problems" are legitimate and what solutions are deemed socially viable.

2.6 Power, Surveillance, and Subjectivity

Wilbraham (2025) takes a distinctly Foucauldian approach, arguing that advice columns operate as technologies of confession and surveillance. Readers reveal intimate details that are reinterpreted through psychological or moral frameworks, producing subjects who internalise particular norms. This approach highlights the power relations embedded in advice-giving, a particularly relevant perspective for a CDA of *Auntie Agni*, where moral judgement and social discipline are implicitly enacted through the columnist's linguistic positioning.

2.7 Interactional Dynamics

While most cited studies examine print or magazine advice, research on conversational advice (Pöldvere et al., 2022; Zhang, 2021) contributes important insights into how advice uptake and resistance function. Zhang's (2021) work on epistemic primacy in advice-giving shows how speakers design advice based on perceived knowledge asymmetries. Although *Auntie Agni* is a written, monologic genre, similar asymmetries operate discursively: the columnist writes from a position of epistemic authority, while the anonymous letter-writer adopts a subordinate role seeking validation or direction.

Additionally, online contexts such as travel forums (Wan, 2021) reveal advice as a cluster of discursive moves, assessment, recommendation, moral framing, which map neatly onto the print advice genre. These interactional insights help inform how this study interprets the rhetorical moves in *Dawn's* advice column.

2.8 The Pakistani Context

Only one study directly examines Pakistani newspaper advice columns: Ali and Ali's (2018) archival analysis of *Auntie Agni*, *Letters to Nadine*, and *Nafsiyati Masail*. Their descriptive

work categorises problem types and demographic trends but does not apply a critical discourse lens. Nor does it address language, ideology, or the sociolinguistic status of Pakistani English. This limited scope reveals two clear gaps.

First, there is no CDA-based analysis of *Auntie Agni* that interrogates how discourses of gender, class, morality, modernity, and intimacy are produced through linguistic choices. Second, the literature neglects the position of Pakistani English within the advice genre. Advice columns in Pakistan represent a localised variety of English deployed for moral instruction and emotional guidance, yet they remain unexamined within the framework of World Englishes. The current study therefore addresses both a theoretical and an empirical void.

2.9 Research Gap

Across these diverse global studies, a consistent pattern emerges: advice columns are central to constructing social norms, negotiating gendered power, and offering culturally inflected guidance. However, no existing research provides a critical discourse analysis of Pakistani newspaper advice columns through the lens of World Englishes. Despite *Auntie Agni*'s long-standing presence and cultural influence, its discursive practices, ideological work, and use of Pakistani English remain understudied. This absence is particularly striking given the column's hybrid identity: simultaneously humorous, authoritative, urban, and distinctly Pakistani. The CDA of one year of *Auntie Agni* advice columns fill this gap by situating it within global advice-giving scholarship while foregrounding the linguistic and ideological particularities of Pakistani English in print media.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive research design guided by Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (1989) by investigating textual features, discursive practices, and socio-cultural practices to interpret the relationship between linguistic patterns and broader social structures. The aim is to uncover how linguistic choices in *Auntie Agni*'s advice columns construct identities, project ideologies, and shape social meanings within Pakistani English discourse. CDA provides a suitable framework for examining how language simultaneously reflects and reproduces cultural norms, power relations, and social expectations.

In the field of World Englishes, this research also seeks to understand how English, as used in Pakistani media, takes on hybrid, localized, and socio-culturally embedded forms. Since advice columns deal with interpersonal concerns, moral judgments, and value-laden responses, CDA becomes an effective method to analyze how English is mobilized to offer guidance, discipline behaviour, negotiate modernity, and reinforce social hierarchies in the Pakistani context.

3.2 Data Collection and Sampling

The study uses purposive sampling to select texts that directly align with the research objective. A total of 52 advice columns from the *Auntie Agni* section of the *Dawn* newspaper, published weekly from January 2025 to December 2025 were selected for analysis. All selected texts were accessed through *Dawn*'s official website to ensure authenticity. Although the data is publicly available, ethical considerations are still taken care of because the letters discuss sensitive personal matters. Since *Dawn* already keeps contributors anonymous, this study maintains that anonymity and does not try to identify any individuals. Excerpts are used carefully under fair-use guidelines, and personal details are not exaggerated or sensationalized.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which views discourse as a social practice (Fairclough, 1989). According to this approach, language is not separate from society; rather, it is closely connected to social life. The way language is used both influences society and is influenced by social structures, institutions, and power relations. Discourse is therefore examined at three interconnected levels: text, discursive practice, and social practice.

At the textual level, the analysis looks at language features such as word choice, grammar, transitivity, modality, and evaluative expressions. These features help reveal how meanings are constructed and how texts guide readers' interpretation. At the level of discursive practice, texts are studied as outcomes of social processes of writing and reading. This involves considering shared background knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions that writers and readers bring to the text (Fairclough, 1989). At the social practice level, discourse is placed within wider social, political, institutional, and cultural contexts. This level helps explain how texts support, maintain, or challenge existing power relations and social norms.

By combining these three levels, Fairclough's framework connects detailed language analysis with broader social structures. This makes it especially useful for media discourse analysis, as it allows researchers to examine how newspaper texts not only describe reality but also shape ideas, ideologies, and power relations in society (Fairclough, 1989).

4. Data Analysis

This section presents a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Auntie Agni's advice column published in *Dawn*, employing Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional framework. The analysis addresses how advice is constructed textually, shaped discursively, and embedded within Pakistani sociocultural contexts.

4.1 Textual Analysis

Textual analysis focuses on lexical selection, modality, evaluative structures, metaphors, humour, pronoun use, and Pakistani English features. Table 1 presents all recurrent textual features with multiple evidential examples from the dataset.

Table 1: Textual Features and Example Texts in Auntie Agni's Column

Textual Feature	Example Texts	Observation	Function
Direct Address (2nd Person)	"You are not stuck in a 'dimension of failure.'"; "You've got this."; "You are not late to the game."; "You deserve someone who values you."; "You are worthy of love."	Persistent second-person orientation	Creates intimacy; frames advice as personalised counselling
Evaluative & Affective Lexis	"It takes a lot of self-awareness..."; "That takes more strength than you probably give yourself credit for."; "You're doing something incredibly important."; "You've worked very hard."	Positive appraisal adjectives	Emotional validation; confidence-building

Soft Modality (should, can, maybe)	“You should aim to understand...”; “Maybe you should start by sharing...”; “You can try to come to some sort of understanding...”; “You shouldn’t have to earn someone’s affection.”	Non-imperative guidance	Avoids authoritarian advice
Negation as Reassurance	“Your grades do not define you.”; “You are not broken.”; “This is not your fault.”; “Repeating a year is not failure.”; “You are not behind.”	Repeated negation	Counters dominant deficit ideologies
Metaphorical Framing	“Love shouldn’t feel like a final exam.”; “Life doesn’t come with a stopwatch.”; “Running on a treadmill.”; “Messy middle.”; “Bubble” (online relationship)	Conceptual metaphors	Makes abstract emotions cognitively accessible
Pakistani English Idioms	“Pull up your socks.”; “Word travels fast in desi families.”; “Staycation in limbo.”; “Tick their boxes.”	Localised idiomatic English	Cultural grounding
Humour & Irony	“PhD-level expertise in doomscrolling.”; “Hits harder than the Fatah missile.”; “Unlike mine, which retains only my CNIC number.”; “Dropping truth bombs.”	Hyperbolic humour	Reduces emotional tension; rapport
Imperatives (Mitigated)	“Cry if you need to but don’t stay stuck.”; “Take short breaks.”; “Be kind to yourself.”; “Think deeply about these things.”	Softened directives	Encourages agency
Religious Lexis (Selective)	“Alhamdulillah”; “Closer to Allah”; “Pray”; “Deen”; “Nikah”	Faith indexing	Cultural legitimacy without moralising
Repetition for Emphasis	“This is not your fault.”; “This is the time to let yourself slow down.”; “If she decides to end her marriage...”	Anaphoric repetition	Emotional anchoring
Contrastive Structures	“Hard work alone does not guarantee results. Smart work does.”; “Success is not just...”; “Honesty is one thing; compatibility is another.”	Binary contrasts	Cognitive reframing

Table 1 demonstrates that advice is consistently framed through direct address, with extensive use of second-person pronouns (“you are not broken,” “you deserve someone who values you”), which personalises the discourse and simulates a counselling interaction rather than a

didactic exchange. Evaluative and affective lexis (“self-awareness,” “strength,” “important”) further validates readers’ emotional experiences, positioning them as morally and emotionally competent subjects.

Modal verbs such as *should*, *can*, and *maybe* occur frequently, signalling soft modality. As shown in Table 1, these forms enable guidance without coercion, aligning with Fairclough’s notion of power exercised through consent rather than command. Similarly, negation (“this is not your fault,” “grades do not define you”) functions ideologically to resist dominant discourses of academic failure and personal inadequacy prevalent in Pakistani society.

Metaphorical expressions (“love shouldn’t feel like a final exam,” “life doesn’t come with a stopwatch”) draw heavily on educational and temporal domains familiar to Pakistani readers, thereby enhancing accessibility. The repeated use of Pakistani English idioms (“pull up your socks,” “word travels fast in desi families”) further localises English, constructing it as an indigenous communicative resource rather than an elite or foreign code. Humour and irony (“PhD-level expertise in doomscrolling”) mitigate emotional tension, while mitigated imperatives (“be kind to yourself,” “cry if you need to”) encourage agency without imposing authority.

Taken together, the textual features outlined in Table 1 reveal that advice is linguistically constructed as empathetic, dialogic, and culturally embedded, rather than prescriptive or moralising.

4.2 Discursive Practice

This level examines how advice is produced, framed, and interpreted through genre conventions, authorial positioning, and interdiscursive blending. Table 2 presents all recurring discursive strategies with their full documentary evidence.

Table 2: Discursive Practices and Example Texts in Auntie Agni’s Column

Discursive Feature	Example Texts	Discursive Strategy	Function / Effect
Epistolary Advice Genre	“Dear Help Seeker”; “Dear Directionless”; “Dear Confused”; “Dear Heartbroken”; “Dear Lost and Anxious”	Letter–response format	Simulates private counselling in a public forum
Anonymisation of Letter Writers	“Anxious and Depressed”; “Confused Student”; “Broken-hearted Beta”; “Worried Daughter”; “Concerned About Future”	Use of pseudonyms	Enables discussion of taboo or sensitive issues
Expert–Friend Persona	“Auntie thinks...”; “Let me tell you something...”; “Here’s the thing...”; “I’ll be honest with you...”	Conversational authority	Reduces hierarchical distance
Therapeutic Discourse	“Seek professional help.”; “You are dealing with anxiety.”; “This	Mental-health framing	Normalises counselling language

	sounds emotionally exhausting.”; “This is a crisis situation.”		
Religious–Moral Interdiscursivity	“Closer to Allah”; “Pray for guidance”; “Nikah is a serious commitment”; “Islam does not ask you to suffer silently.”	Faith + advice blending	Cultural legitimacy
Narrative Reframing	“You’re not late to the game.”; “Repeating a year is not the end.”; “This phase does not define your future.”	Counter-narrative construction	Resists failure ideology
Gender-Indexed Address	“Many young Pakistani women...”; “Girls like you often feel...”; “As a woman in our society...”	Gender positioning	Recognises structural constraints
Moral Reasoning Without Moralising	“This wouldn’t be fair to a child.”; “That is not a healthy foundation for marriage.”	Ethical appeal	Persuasion through care
Public Pedagogical Framing	“Anyone reading this should remember...”; “This applies to many young people today.”	Generalisation beyond addressee	Collective moral instruction
Institutional Media Authority	Publication in <i>Dawn</i>	Newspaper discourse	Legitimises advice as credible knowledge

As shown in Table 2, the advice is produced through a traditional epistolary advice-column genre, signalled by recurring openings such as “Dear Help Seeker” and “Dear Confused.” This format constructs a semi-private communicative space within a public newspaper, allowing readers to engage with sensitive issues while maintaining anonymity. The systematic use of pseudonyms (“Anxious and Depressed,” “Broken-hearted Beta”) enables the articulation of socially taboo concerns related to mental health, marriage, and family conflict.

Auntie Agni’s discursive positioning is central to the interpretation of advice. Expressions such as “Auntie thinks...” and “Let me tell you something...” establish an expert–friend persona, combining authority with conversational intimacy. This positioning reduces power asymmetry between advisor and advice-seeker, aligning with contemporary therapeutic discourse rather than traditional moral instruction.

Interdiscursivity is a defining feature of the column. As evidenced in Table 2, advice draws simultaneously on therapeutic discourse (“seek professional help,” “crisis situation”), religious–moral discourse (“closer to Allah,” “nikah is a serious commitment”), and educational discourse.

This blending legitimises advice across multiple interpretive frameworks familiar to Pakistani readers.

Narrative reframing (“you’re not late to the game,” “this phase does not define your future”) functions as a counter-discourse that challenges neoliberal timelines of success and failure. Moreover, advice addressed to individual letter writers is frequently generalised (“anyone reading this should remember”), transforming private counselling into public pedagogy.

Overall, Table 2 illustrates that advice is discursively constructed as culturally legitimate, emotionally supportive, and publicly instructive, while remaining non-authoritarian.

4.3 Sociocultural Practice

This dimension situates the discourse within Pakistani sociocultural structures, including family authority, gender norms, marriage practices, religion, education pressure, and class anxiety. Table 3 includes all sociocultural references explicitly present in the dataset.

Table 3: Sociocultural Practices and Example Texts in Auntie Agni’s Column

Sociocultural Domain	Example Texts	Ideological Positioning	Function / Effect
Parental Authority & Obedience	“Parents don’t intentionally want to hurt their children.”; “Your parents are worried about your future.”; “They believe they know what’s best.”	Soft critique	Maintains filial respect
Gender Roles & Expectations	“Traditional wife”; “Drop your thinking”; “Adjust after marriage”; “Girls are taught to compromise.”	Feminist resistance	Challenges patriarchy
Marriage as Social Obligation	“Court marriage is seen as rebellion.”; “Marriage is not an escape plan.”; “Marriage will not fix your problems.”	Cultural realism	Counters romanticised marriage
Mental Health Stigma	“People don’t take mental health seriously.”; “Seek professional help.”; “Emotional breakdown.”	Destigmatisation	Normalises psychological care
Religious Normativity	“Closer to Allah”; “Pray for guidance”; “Nikah”; “Deen”	Faith-aligned autonomy	Cultural resonance
Education & Exam Pressure	“Grades do not define you.”; “Repeating a year.”; “Academic failure.”; “Competitive environment.”	Anti-merit absolutism	Reduces academic trauma
Class Consciousness	“Elite background”; “Respectable job”; “Glorified job titles.”	Structural critique	Exposes class anxiety

Joint Family System	“Word travels fast in desi families.”; “Family pressure.”; “Relatives will talk.”	Cultural realism	Navigational guidance
Female Legal Awareness	“The law gives you the right.”; “You are legally an adult.”	Rights discourse	Empowerment within system
Collectivist Morality	“Think about your mother.”; “Family reputation.”; “Social consequences.”	Relational ethics	Advice embedded in kinship logic

As shown in Table 3, parental authority is acknowledged but gently critiqued through statements such as “parents don’t intentionally want to hurt their children.” This framing preserves filial respect while opening space for questioning parental pressure. Gender norms are more directly challenged, particularly through references to “traditional wife,” “drop your thinking,” and expectations of female adjustment after marriage. These formulations expose patriarchal ideologies while stopping short of outright cultural rejection.

Marriage is discursively repositioned from a social solution to a site of ethical responsibility (“marriage is not an escape plan”), reflecting a pragmatic rather than romanticised view. Similarly, mental health stigma is addressed through explicit legitimisation of professional help, signalling a shift towards normalising psychological care within Pakistani society.

Religious references (“deen,” “nikah,” “pray for guidance”) align advice with Islamic values, enabling the negotiation of autonomy without appearing culturally transgressive. Education-related discourse (“grades do not define you,” “repeating a year”) resists exam-centric constructions of self-worth, while references to “elite background” and “respectable job” foreground class-based anxieties.

Collectively, the sociocultural patterns in Table 3 demonstrate that the column does not reject Pakistani norms but reinterprets them, offering readers strategies for navigating agency within existing social constraints.

5. Discussion

This section integrates the findings from the textual, discursive, and sociocultural analyses to address the research questions and situate the study within broader CDA and World Englishes scholarship. Table 4 is used here as a summary of how advice is constructed across all three dimensions.

Table 4: Integrated CDA of Auntie Agni’s Advice Column (Textual, Discursive, and Sociocultural Dimensions)

CDA Dimension	Analytical Feature	Example Texts	Interpretation
Textual Practice	Direct address & personalization	“You are not stuck in a ‘dimension of failure.’”; “You are worthy of love.”; “You deserve someone who values you.”	Constructs advice as intimate, reader-centred, and emotionally responsive

	Soft modality	“You should aim to understand...”; “Maybe you should start by sharing...”; “You can try to come to some sort of understanding...”	Frames advice as supportive guidance rather than authority
	Negation & reassurance	“Your grades do not define you.”; “This is not your fault.”; “You are not broken.”	Resists dominant deficit and failure ideologies
	Metaphorical framing	“Love shouldn’t feel like a final exam.”; “Life doesn’t come with a stopwatch.”; “Running on a treadmill.”	Makes abstract emotional experiences cognitively accessible
	Pakistani English idioms	“Pull up your socks.”; “Word travels fast in desi families.”; “Tick their boxes.”	Localises English and grounds advice culturally
	Humour & irony	“PhD-level expertise in doomscrolling.”; “Hits harder than the Fatah missile.”	Reduces anxiety; builds rapport
Discursive Practice	Epistolary advice genre	“Dear Help Seeker”; “Dear Directionless”; “Dear Confused”	Simulates private counselling in a public medium
	Anonymisation	“Anxious and Depressed”; “Broken-hearted Beta”; “Worried Daughter”	Enables articulation of taboo experiences
	Expert–friend persona	“Auntie thinks...”; “Let me tell you something...”; “I’ll be honest with you...”	Softens power hierarchy between advisor and reader
	Therapeutic discourse	“Seek professional help.”; “This sounds emotionally exhausting.”; “This is a crisis situation.”	Normalises mental-health language
	Religious–moral interdiscursivity	“Closer to Allah”; “Pray for guidance”; “Nikah is a serious commitment.”	Culturally legitimises advice
	Narrative reframing	“You’re not late to the game.”; “Repeating a year is not the end.”	Challenges dominant success timelines

	Public pedagogy	“Anyone reading this should remember...”; “This applies to many young people today.”	Extends advice beyond individual addressee
Sociocultural Practice	Parental authority	“Parents don’t intentionally want to hurt their children.”; “They believe they know what’s best.”	Critiques pressure while preserving filial respect
	Gender norms	“Traditional wife”; “Drop your thinking”; “Adjust after marriage.”	Challenges patriarchal expectations
	Marriage ideology	“Court marriage is seen as rebellion.”; “Marriage is not an escape plan.”	Counters romanticised marriage discourse
	Mental-health stigma	“People don’t take mental health seriously.”; “Seek professional help.”	Destigmatises psychological care
	Religious normativity	“Deen”; “Nikah”; “Closer to Allah.”	Aligns autonomy with faith
	Education pressure	“Grades do not define you.”; “Repeating a year.”; “Academic failure.”	Resists exam-centric worth
	Class anxiety	“Elite background”; “Respectable job”; “Glorified job titles.”	Exposes socio-economic pressures
	Joint family politics	“Relatives will talk.”; “Family pressure.”; “Word travels fast in desi families.”	Provides navigational advice
	Female legal awareness	“The law gives you the right.”; “You are legally an adult.”	Rights-based empowerment
	Collectivist morality	“Think about your mother.”; “Family reputation.”	Advice embedded in relational ethics

5.1 Advice as Personalised yet Authoritative Discourse

A central finding of this study is that Auntie Agni’s column constructs advice as deeply personalised while retaining moral authority. As illustrated in Table 4, the repeated use of direct address (“You are not stuck in a ‘dimension of failure’,” “You deserve someone who values you”) positions the reader as an individual subject whose emotional experiences are acknowledged and validated. This linguistic strategy aligns with counselling discourse, where personal affirmation is a prerequisite for guidance.

However, authority is not relinquished; rather, it is reframed. Soft modality (“You should aim to understand...”, “Maybe you should start by sharing...”) allows advice to function as recommendation rather than command. In Fairclough’s terms, power here is exercised through consensual alignment rather than coercion. The authority of the advice-giver is further reinforced through evaluative reassurance (“You are worthy of love”), which positions Auntie Agni as morally credible and emotionally perceptive.

This dual positioning, intimate yet authoritative, marks a departure from traditional advice-giving norms in Pakistani contexts, which often rely on hierarchical instruction. Instead, the column models a relational form of authority, where guidance is legitimised through empathy and shared cultural understanding.

5.2 Pakistani English and the Localisation of Advice

Another significant contribution of the study lies in demonstrating how Pakistani English functions as a localised resource for advice-giving. The examples summarised in Table 4 show consistent use of culturally embedded idioms (“Pull up your socks,” “Word travels fast in desi families”) and metaphors (“Love shouldn’t feel like a final exam,” “Life doesn’t come with a stopwatch”). These expressions root advice in shared social experience, particularly in domains such as education and family life that are central to Pakistani society.

Humour and irony (“PhD-level expertise in doomscrolling,” “Hits harder than the Fatah missile”) further localise English by incorporating culturally recognisable references. Rather than trivialising distress, humour functions as an affective strategy to reduce anxiety and establish rapport. This supports the argument that Pakistani English is not merely a formal or elite variety but a flexible, emotionally expressive medium capable of handling sensitive interpersonal concerns.

From a World Englishes perspective, these findings reinforce the view that English in postcolonial contexts is functionally nativised. In Auntie Agni’s column, English enables the articulation of issues, such as mental health, romantic dissatisfaction, and personal failure, that might be more difficult to discuss openly in local languages due to social stigma.

5.3 Discursive Hybridity and the Legitimation of Advice

The discussion also highlights the importance of discursive hybridity in shaping the column’s effectiveness. As synthesised in Table 4, advice draws simultaneously on therapeutic discourse (“Seek professional help,” “This is a crisis situation”), religious–moral discourse (“Closer to Allah,” “Nikah is a serious commitment”), and educational discourse (“Grades do not define you”).

This interdiscursive blending allows advice to resonate across diverse interpretive frameworks. For instance, mental health guidance gains cultural legitimacy when accompanied by religious reassurance, while challenges to academic pressure are framed in morally acceptable terms. Such hybridity ensures that advice does not appear culturally alien or ideologically threatening.

Moreover, the epistolary genre (“Dear Help Seeker,” “Dear Confused”) and anonymisation of writers (“Anxious and Depressed,” “Broken-hearted Beta”) construct a semi-private space within a public newspaper. This enables readers to engage with taboo topics while maintaining social safety. Advice addressed to individuals is frequently generalised (“Anyone reading this should remember...”), transforming personal counselling into public pedagogy.

In CDA terms, the column thus functions as a discursive bridge between private emotion and public morality.

5.4 Negotiating Sociocultural Norms

One of the most important insights emerging from Table 4 is that Auntie Agni's advice does not reject Pakistani sociocultural norms outright; instead, it negotiates them. Parental authority is acknowledged through statements such as "Parents don't intentionally want to hurt their children," yet this authority is gently questioned by foregrounding emotional consequences. This approach preserves filial respect while allowing space for individual agency.

Similarly, gender norms are explicitly problematised through references to "traditional wife," "drop your thinking," and expectations of adjustment after marriage. However, resistance is framed pragmatically rather than confrontationally, often supported by legal awareness ("The law gives you the right") or ethical reasoning ("This wouldn't be fair to a child"). Such framing makes feminist critique more socially acceptable within a conservative cultural context.

Marriage is also redefined ideologically. Statements such as "Marriage is not an escape plan" and "Court marriage is seen as rebellion" expose social realities while discouraging romanticised solutions to structural problems. Mental health stigma is addressed directly ("People don't take mental health seriously"), with professional help repeatedly legitimised.

Religion plays a crucial mediating role in this negotiation. References to "deen," "nikah," and being "closer to Allah" align advice with Islamic values, enabling autonomy to be framed as morally grounded rather than culturally deviant.

5.5 Ideological and Emotional Pedagogy

Beyond individual guidance, the findings suggest that Auntie Agni's column operates as a site of ideological and emotional pedagogy. As reflected in Table 4, advice consistently challenges dominant ideologies surrounding success ("Grades do not define you") and productivity ("Life doesn't come with a stopwatch"), encouraging readers to re-evaluate socially imposed benchmarks.

This pedagogical function is particularly significant in a context where formal counselling services are limited and mental health remains stigmatised. The column thus fills an important social gap, offering culturally sensitive guidance that blends emotional validation with moral reasoning.

From a CDA perspective, this demonstrates how media discourse can subtly reshape social values by normalising alternative ways of thinking and feeling, without overtly challenging cultural cohesion.

6. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Auntie Agni's advice column in *Dawn* constitutes a culturally embedded and ideologically negotiated advice discourse, shaped through the strategic use of Pakistani English. Applying Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework revealed that advice is constructed through empathetic textual choices, hybrid discursive practices, and sociocultural negotiation rather than prescriptive authority. The column redefines advice-giving by balancing emotional validation with moral credibility, enabling the discussion of sensitive issues such as mental health, gender norms, academic pressure, and family expectations within socially acceptable frames. Overall, the findings highlight how English functions not as a marker of Westernisation but as a locally meaningful resource for mediating personal agency and cultural values in contemporary Pakistani media discourse.

6.1 Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study carry important implications across multiple domains. Pedagogically, the empathetic and dialogic strategies identified can inform communication

practices in education, counselling, and teacher training, particularly in multilingual and culturally sensitive contexts. Academically, the study contributes to CDA and World Englishes by illustrating how advice discourse operates as a site of ideological negotiation rather than cultural rupture, inviting further research into media-based counselling genres in postcolonial settings. From a policy perspective, the normalisation of mental-health discourse suggests the value of integrating culturally aligned communication strategies into public awareness campaigns. Finally, for media practitioners, the column demonstrates how advice journalism can responsibly address private distress while maintaining cultural legitimacy, offering a model for ethically grounded and socially responsive media discourse.

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