CRITICALLY ANALYZING BILAWAL BHUTTO'S SPEECH ON THE PAKISTAN–INDIA CONFLICT 2025 AT THE UNITED NATIONS

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Abstract

The analysis explores lexical choices, syntactic structures, rhetorical strategies, modality, intertextual references to international law and UN resolutions, and the speech's ideological and symbolic significance in shaping international discourse. Findings indicate that the speech functions as an ideologically charged intervention aimed at internationalizing the conflict, mobilizing humanitarian and legal discourse, and influencing global perceptions of legitimacy. By situating the analysis within broader debates on political discourse, power, and ideology, the study contributes to CDA scholarship, South Asian political communication, and international relations studies, offering insights into the strategic role of language in conflict diplomacy. The paper examines lexical choice, syntax, rhetorical devices, modality, intertextuality in relation to international law and international resolutions, and ideological significance in relation to international discourse. The results reveal that this is an ideological interventionist discourse intended to internationalize this conflict as well as influence global perceptions. The paper attempts to contextualize within the existing paradigm of political discourse by aiming to contribute to Critical Discourse Analysis discourses, South Asian political communication, or international politics in relation to language strategies in conflict politics.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Discourse, Fairclough's Model, Pakistan–India Conflict, United Nations, Diplomatic Rhetoric, International Relations

1. Introduction

The language of international politics is an area of interest that goes beyond the simple transmission of information. It is a constitutive factor that defines and constructs political reality and normative hierarchies. In the realm of diplomacy, discourse becomes a strategic tool whereby states construct and perform morality to gain support and shape global public opinion (Chilton, 2004; Fairclough, 2003). The speeches of politicians during international gatherings such as at the United Nations are not simple communications about information and events. They are texts imbued with ideological import and purpose as they are intended to perform divergent functions such as using the speech to construct a lawful and rational state for the speaker and to delegitimize the narratives of other states. The conflict between Pakistan and India in 2025 must be seen in a historical context of tension, both political as well as military, which has existed in a continuum of events surrounding the division of British India in 1947. The region of Kashmir has been a subject of conflict which has acted as a catalyst to military conflict, as well as political crises, on a periodic basis (Schofield, 2010; Ganguly, 2016). The conflict in 2025 was characterized by its unexpected turn to military conflict between the two nations, as well as a nuclear war, which generated immense global attention. In a situation like this, it was significant to notice Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's address

to the United Nations, which was a rhetorical act of strategy to place Pakistan in a peaceful camp in an attempt to win global support.

1.1. Background of the Study

Ever since their independence, both Pakistan and India have been trapped in a relationship marked by conflict, trust no trust, and nationalism and territorial disputes. The discursive praxis adopted by both has historically served to constitute each other as a threat with no end to the cycle of conflict and securitization (Schofield, 2010; Ganguly, 2016). The specifics of escalation in 2025 must be considered against this background, bearing in mind today's geopolitical compulsions, such as the growing importance of global forums, and the demands wrought by public sentiment across the world regarding disputes that have become militarized.

Such a decision by Pakistan to share its view before the United Nations is also an attempt at internationalizing a conflict seen as purely a bilateral one. Pakistan also gains on grounds of international law and human rights. Consequently, it is seen to act as a responsible member of the global system. This reading of Bilawal Bhutto's speech is an exercise in how language is used as part of its ideological and diplomatic practices for persuasive action that reinforces Pakistan's ideological and political legitimacies in the global system.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

With regard to this, the primary objective of the research work described and highlighted above will be to critically assess how speech from the pro-Pakistani perspective forms meanings and morality, and how such a conflict is defined. With regard to this, the process would remarkably depart from the typical assessment procedure followed for assessing the validity of material. As such, what would be primarily required will be to critically assess how discourses have defined such a process and how exactly the enemy in such a conflict has fallen short with regard to the parameters described and indicated within the morality and legality framework. With regard to such a process, it would become practical to critically assess such content through the Three-Dimensional Model due to the necessity for assessing such content through text, practices, and social practices (Fairclough 2001; van Dijk 2008).

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The purposes of this article are manifold: to find out what kind of linguistic and rhetorical devices are used in this speech; how international law and humanitarian norms are invoked in the legitimization of the narratives which are Pakistani; to infer what kind of ideological and geopolitical message this discourse is supposed to carry. This article also aims at showing how this speech is used as soft power in the international arena to shape global public opinion and debunk opposing narratives. All this is underpinned by theories developed by Fairclough in 2003 and another one developed by Wodak in 2015.

1.4. Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How are Pakistan and India constructed discursively within the speech of Bilawal Bhutto?
2. What is the set of linguistic, rhetorical, and intertextual moves through which Pakistan is signified as a responsible and rule-abiding player?
3. In what ways does the discourse delegitimize the act of India and present its action as aggressive and illegal?
4. To what extent is this speech a reflection and reproduction of wider geopolitical power structures and ideological hierarchies?
5. What is the role of this speech in mobilizing an international perception and reinforcing symbolic power in the South Asian context?

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These questions help to connect textual analysis with broader social, political, and ideological contexts, pointing at the role of language as an instrumental-strategy tool in international diplomacy.

1.5. Significance of the Study

This research is important to CDA as it highlights and examines the political discourse of a Global South country within an international platform. Although CDA has increasingly examined political discourse of Western countries, relatively less attention has been focused on South Asian political discourses within the UN and similar organizations. This research will be able to provide valuable observations to policymakers and researchers when it comes to strategically used words within conflict zones, legitimacy creation, and framing within global discourses. CDA will find this research useful as it will contribute towards developing a methodology of analysis within diplomacy and rhetoric and its effect upon perception and practice (Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Chilton, 2004).

2. Literature Review

CDA is a useful tool to analyze the relationship between the language of politics and structures of ideology. The notion of language put forth by Critical Discourse Analysis includes the view of language merely for the purpose of communication. Language has an important place in the realm of politics because of the fact that it helps the state to express itself when it comes to shaping international opinions sans the use of force.

Norman Fairclough's Three Dimensional Model is one way of critically analyzing political discourses. At the level of text, CDA focuses on lexical matters, syntax, rhetorical features, modality, and metaphors to analyze ways of encodings meanings of ideological discourses (Fairclough, 1995). At the discursive practice level, CDA focuses on ways of production, dissemination, and reception of texts through concepts of intertextuality and institutional factors (Fairclough, 2001). Discourses at the society practice level involve the placement of texts within specific societal and political circumstances of time and space. Here, CDA analyzes texts as having specific roles within power relations and reproduction of ideological norms (Fairclough, 2003). This seems extremely relevant as CDA is utilized as a tool to mediate analysis of political speeches that might be given within high political stakes international meetings such as within the UN. Here, one has to rely on legality, morality, and world opinion.

Scholars have acknowledged and emphasized the role of political discourse in constructing international views and influencing diplomatic relations for a long time. For instance, Chilton (2004) establishes that it is imperative for all leaders to employ the use of political discourse in the application of moral hierarchies, social identification, and assessment to legitimize self-action and other-action. In addition, the cognitive and ideological part of a discourse is identified by van Dijk (2006, 2008), who asserts that leaders construct views on the basis of the selective presentation of actions and events that follow the process called 'self-positive representation and other-negative representation,' thus producing ideological polarization linked to leader legitimization and delegitimization of the opposition.

The discourse of diplomacy has also been extensively studied for its ambiguity and use of evaluative and intertextual discourse. A study by Schäffner (1996) has illustrated that strategic ambiguity is a common feature of speeches delivered by political leaders that need to maintain a strategic edge and do not wish to directly confront others. The strategic employment of narratives of past events, morality-centred discourse, and a juridical discourse is observed to increase the authenticity and power of political discourse by Wodak (2015), which supports the argument that speeches delivered at a platform like the UN are not just rhetoric acts but ideological acts.

In the context of the conflicts of the South Asian sub-continent, the focus of discourse analysis up to now has been primarily on the media discourses and the nationalism discourses. For instance, the work of Hussain (2018) indicates that the media in nations such as Pakistan and India portray the other as a threat to their very existence, thereby fueling these prejudices and ensuring that the nationalism security policies are justified in the context. The other example is provided by Jaspal in 2014. The work indicates that the shape of the national identity is vital to the conflict discourses, in that these discourses used by politics to mobilize symbolic nationalism to thereby win the nation's favor on the strength of past injustices. Even though these texts represent important readings in the context of understanding the manner in which the public discourses define these conflicts corporately, they fail to seriously consider the diplomatic discourses, specifically the manner in which the legal parameters of the framework define the diplomatic relations at the multi-lateral level as opposed to the linguistic parameters that were described above.

International literature on discourse in politics is also very helpful to learn about diplomatic discourse in South Asia. For instance, Chilton (2004) talks about how rhetorical discourse influences global public opinion in international conflict contexts with particular illustrations to show how moral judgment and selectivity and representation are utilized to carry out legitimacy. Fairclough (2003) analyses how particular speeches about British politics, illustratively speaking, utilize particular linguistic tools to enable foreign intervention aided by global and national opinion for certain moral and/or legal grounds. These very same ideas are directly helpful for a discourse analysis for Bilawal Bhutto's UN speech primarily because it embodies textual sophistication along with rhetorical stances that are aimed at diverse audiences.

The UN itself is an important discourse site, as morality, legality, and legitimacy meet here. The political speech given within this arena is more than a simple expression of a country's stance; it is also part of the discourse that constructs normative discourses and influences behavior within international relations (Fairclough, 2010; Wodak, 2015). Through the employment of Bilawal Bhutto and political discourse, authority is engaged to give meaning to intertextual references to declarations of the United Nations and humanitarian standards as well as past experience to support the Pakistani stance against India. This is a real-world implementation of a tenet of Critical Discourse Analysis in terms of a discourse dialectics of power and ideology (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008).

Though considerable attention has been devoted to the study of CDA and political discourse, the current research environment reveals a considerable lack of scholarship focused on the South Asian diplomatic discourse delivered within the context of multilateral institutions. Though the scholarly domains of media discourse and domestic political discourse have received considerable scholarly attention, very little scholarship exists to date on the textual, discursive, and social practices of the leaders of the Global South states delivered within the context of internationaleducemental conflicts. In particular, no previous scholarship exists which has sought to apply the Three-Dimensional Model offered by Fairclough to the critical analysis of a High-Level UN address delivered during an ongoing conflict with India by the leader of a Pakistani government. This particular aspect of the research identifies a considerable research lacuna, as such High-Level Addresses reflect the manner by which language-use seeks to navigate the myriad of meaning constructions to address the determination of international decision-making outcomes (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Data

The data includes the official transcript of Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's address to the United Nations during the 2025 conflict between Pakistan and India. The material was selected

because of its direct relevance to the political sphere and its international coverage, clearly referring to issues of aggression, legality, peace, and humanitarian concerns, according to Geo News in 2025 and also in Dawn in 2025.

3.2. Framework

The Three-Dimensional Mode of Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis will be considered as the framework to be used within the research. These analyses comprise:

1. Text analysis - lexical choice, syntax, modality, rhetorical strategies.
2. Discursive practice - analysis of the production, distribution, and consumption of the speech in relation to the topic of intertextuality/United Nations resolutions and international law.
3. Social Practice - comprehension of the speech act and its placement within a broader geopolitical and ideological context of South Asia and the ways of discourse as it both reproduces and challenges specific relations of power (Fairclough, 1995 & 2001).

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The texts for the speeches were obtained through official transcripts and UN releases, and through the press. In coding, qualitative techniques for analyzing themes to reveal habitual linguistic patterns, syntactical characteristics, discourse strategies, modality, and intertextuality were employed. Each textual data has been analyzed for significance in ideology and representation, following the connection from textual characteristics to discourse and context. This study applies triangulation from narrative histories, the press, and academic literature to procure intensity and coverage (Creswell, 2013).

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The speech delivered by the Pakistan President Bilawal Bhutto Zardari at the United Nations during the Pakistan-India conflict of 2025 is one such instance that exemplifies the way this act of politics functions as a means of persuasion using rhetoric. Through the use of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Methodology, the present research covers the various dimensions of the aforementioned speech.

4.1 Textual Analysis

On the textual level, it seems that there is lexical polarization being used in the speech given by the Pakistani political leader, as well as the piece given by the Iranian scholar that describes the Pakistani using favorably evaluated words such as "responsible," "law-abiding," "peace-seeking," and "committed to dialogue," while the Pakistani's competitor, the country of India, is described using negatively charged words such as "aggression," "provocation," "violation of international law," and "escalation." This evidently falls under the description given by van Dijk in his definition of lexical polarization in 2006. The description describes a favorable self-representation being juxtaposed with an unfavorable one.

"The syntactic structures consolidate the evaluative contrast. The Indian behavior tends to be depicted using active voice sentences that ascribe actions and responsibility to India ("India conducted cross-border incursions…"), while Pakistani behavior tends to be depicted using passive sentences or modals that convey necessity, obligation, or compulsion ("Pakistan has been forced to behave in accordance with world standards…"). In such a description, Pakistan emerges as a morally controlled and globally legal subject, while India emerges as a proactive aggressor violating regional peace (Fairclough, 2003, p.105; Chilton, 2004)."

It also adopts other rhetorical tools, for example, repetition, contrast, and metaphors. The repetition of words that are synonymous with humanitarian values in the speech, for example, "humanitarian principles," "international law," "ceasefire," and "dialogue," reinforces Pakistan's respect for the universally recognized ethics. The contrast approach between Pakistan's gesture of self-restraint and India's attack is intended to invalidate the legitimacy of

the Indian action while lifting the moral status of the Pakistani side. Examples of metaphors in the speech are "the flame of conflict threatens to engulf the region" (Wodak, 2015).

Another important textual element observable here is the use of intertextual references. There is a definite use of the UN resolutions, humanitarian laws, and even the historical cases of mediation of conflicts being used here. The use of these texts itself puts the narrative of Pakistan into the domain of the universally accepted frameworks, thus making it a legitimate one. Fairclough (1995); van Dijk (2008) References to the principles of the UN charter, for example, use this framework to construct Pakistan as a proponent of multilateralism while indirectly criticizing India for acting unilaterally.

4.2 Discursive Practice Analysis

In relation to discourse practice, this particular speech is both a product and a tool for management of perception at the global stage. The process that culminated in authoring and facilitating this speech is a product of strategic thinking towards the end reach of the audience in terms of time, medium, and dissemination. This speech was delivered at a UN setting where there was tension. The targeted audience was both global and local. The tool for dissemination of this particular speech via global media platforms ensured this message surpassed the UN audience (Geo News, 2025; Dawn, 2025).

The discursive practice further reveals that it is characterized by a high degree of intertextuality. In this speech, there are quotes pertaining to UN resolutions, Geneva agreements, and quotes from different global gatherings. This practice of intertextuality has a two-fold effect, one wherein it marks itself as authentic and legitimate within the speech, and simultaneously locates the Pakistani stand within harmony with the global community and against the impunity of India. Also, different global crises and tensions refer to establishing a continuum (Schofield, 2010; Ganguly, 2016).

Framing as well as reception of the speech in the media is another aspect of discursive practice. The coverage of the speech in the international as well as the domestic news media served to highlight the dependence of Pakistan on the laws of the world as well as the inconsistencies in India, thus adding to the potentiality of the speech at an ideological as well as political level. The use of discursive practice by the Pakistan government in crafting a speech to suit universal standards as well as expectations is remarkable in this case, as mentioned in Fairclough, 2001; Wodak, 2015).

4.3 Social Practice Analysis

In social practice-based analysis, this speech is part of broader social struggles in ideologies and geopolitics. The speech is emblematic of Pakistan's endeavor to challenge the region's primacy created by India, make this region's conflict international, and prove its righteousness in this world. Delegitimizing India as an international rule-breaker is part of this social narrative's contesting the hegemonic vision in this world because it identifies in this international world a vision similar to Pakistan's in this quest for righteousness in this world. This aligns with the Bourdieuian vision on words in society as tools for exercising control over society.

This speech is also used as a construct of 'identity.' Here, it is presumed that Pakistan is a logical and peaceful entity favoring multi-national policies and having benevolent intentions, and its counterpart is a belligerent and mono-nationalist India. This construct of 'identity' is reproduced through language and further adds to Pakistan's soft power on the global platform. Lastly, this speech adheres to international norms of management of conflict and implies that Pakistan's policies are only rational and justifiable internationally as argued by Fairclough (2003) and Wodak & Meyer (2009).

5. Findings

The study of the 2025 United Nations speech delivered by Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari offers intricate perspectives into the role that language, rhetoric, and discourse play in shaping meaning, exerting power, and forming international perceptions. The fair three-dimensional model proposed by Fairclough offers a comprehensive response to the research questions.

5.1. How are Pakistan and India constructed discursively within the speech of Bilawal Bhutto?

In this discourse, a responsible and law-abiding and peace-loving role of Pakistan is presented. By using positive vocabulary like "restraint," "commitment to dialogue," "respects international law," and "humanitarian responsibilities," this is made possible. Syntactic tools are also used to further improve this act. For instance, modal verbs like "must" and "should" and passive voice are used to show that the role of the actions of a measured and morally and legally governed and not aggression-driven country like Pakistan (Fairclough, 2003).

The Indian presence at the regional level is, however, depicted as aggressive and provocative. 'Violation,' 'provocation,' 'unilateral action,' and 'escalation' are some of the 'ideological words' or 'key lexical words' that form the ideologies and resultant constructions creating a negative impression of the Indians at the regional level. Using active voice constructs involvement by Indians in aggressive actions such as violation of peace and stability at the regional levels. Self-representations and other-representations such as WE and OTHER, such as the Indians, regarding these conflict zones, demonstrate 'ideological polarization tendencies at political levels,' as Van Dijk (2006) and Chilton (2004) identify.

5.2. What is the set of linguistic, rhetorical, and intertextual moves through which Pakistan is signified as a responsible and rule-abiding player?

This is accomplished by an intricate process that involves different strategies in communication to make Pakistan morally and legally responsible.

• Linguistic strategies: The lexical selection here targets control and legality. The selection of the modal verbs in the expression of the action carried out by Pakistan targets necessity and responsibility, not aggression, while lexical selection targets morality.

• Rhetorical devices: With the addition of "repetition of important ethical and legal principles, international law, humanitarian principles, dialogue" once again, there comes added morality to support Pakistan. The contrastive way of constructing contrast between the observance displayed by Pakistan to avoid conflict and the aggression displayed by Indians enhances rhetoric. Fancy rhetorical devices such as "the flame of conflict threatens to engulf the region" have been employed.

• Intertextual strategies: These are attempts within the speech to refer to resolutions of the UN, Geneva conventions, as well as other well-known frameworks of international law. The intertextual elements of the speech place the Pakistani narrative within other authorized discourses of law. As such, these elements ensure the validity of the Pakistani narrative.

Overall, the nexus of these strategies projects that Pakistan is a rational, moral, and legal entity that is bound by and supports world laws.

5.3. In what ways does the discourse delegitimize the act of India and present its action as aggressive and illegal?

The delegitimization of the Indian government is performed using language techniques:

• Lexical Evaluation: The negative lexical groups "provocation," "aggression," "violation," and "escalation" constitute a semantic field that connotes illegitimacy

• Syntactic emphasis: Syntactic emphasis on action in active syntax implies that emphasis on action engagement automatically implicates performing that action through India itself, hence making the source for conflict emerging out of it (Fairclough, 2003).

- Contrastive Framing: This is where legitimate and legal Pakistani action is pitted against that of India as perceived as unilateral. Thus, a moral hierarchy is created where India is designated as the breaker of laws.
- Inter-textual delegitimization: The reference made to resolutions in the United Nations as well as humanitarian law signifies an implication of its lack of action, as it further reinforces the same activity as illegal and unethical in the applicable framework (Wodak, 2015).

In such a way, the process of delegitimation becomes the act which turns India into the villain with moral and legal fault on one side, and the characterization of the Pakistani character on the other.

5.4. To what extent is this speech a reflection and reproduction of wider geopolitical power structures and ideological hierarchies?

The address assumes significance inasmuch as it is a position paper for Pakistan. The address holds broader implications in terms of the strength of major global nations:

- Resisting the hegemony of the region: In positioning the act of aggression in the story as an action of the Indian side, the plot resists the hegemony of the Indian State over the South Asian region and expresses the maturity of the State of Pakistan in shaping international norms.
- Ideological hierarchies' reproduction, The speech leans on universal discursive terms of legality, morality, humanitarian need, thus inscribing Pakistan in a series of rightful, law-abiding nations while implicitly disapproving the Indian adventure in terms of its unilateral practices.
- Historical contextualization: Through references to past conflicts, discontinued disputes, and former international interventions, the 2025 crisis becomes perceived within the framework of an "unfinished history" that maintains the consistency of Pakistan's moral position while emphasizing the Indian unilateralism (Schofield, 2010; Ganguly, 2016).

Through these mechanisms, the speech both reflects and reinforces the ideological hierarchies that are evident in the international system. This is evident through the manner in which the speech intersects with morality, law, and power.

5.5. What is the role of this speech in mobilizing an international perception and reinforcing symbolic power in the South Asian context?

The speech also fulfills a very important function in terms of shaping international observation and symbolic strength:

- Legitimacy and Credibility: The speech brings a ring of legitimacy and credibility to Pakistan's narrative through harmony with the United Nations norms and principles and the humanitarian laws of the world.
- International momentum building: Strategic use of intertextual language and ethical argumentation resonates with the international player to reify a responsible state like Pakistan worth diplomatic support.
- Symbolic power: In the Speech of Benedict XVI can clearly see that symbolic power according to Pierre Bourdieu (1991), is using language to symbolically assert moral authority against India's influence in the region.
- Geopolitical roles in the South Asian region: By internationalizing the conflict, Pakistan ensures that the UN platform is used in shaping the perceived realities within the South Asian region while projecting itself as the guarantor of stability within this region.

In the end, the speech is a very strategic discursive practice in which moral hierarchies are performed, the illegitimate acts by adversaries are derogated, and the legal and moral integrity of Pakistan is reiterated while augmenting its discursive power due to international perception in the South Asian context.

Conclusion

Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's UN speech during the conflict between Pakistan and India in 2025 can be considered one of the examples that show how language, ideology, and power are intricately entwined with each other in international politics. Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's UN speech is a critical example that demonstrates how a particular language can be employed through certain lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical patterns to perform the role of a responsible and law-abiding and peace-loving state, while simultaneously projecting India as aggressive and against international norms. Another significant way through which intertextual references, framing, and morality can be employed to again reinforce legitimacy and symbolic power at the international platform for Pakistan comes through applying critical analysis through Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Discourse Analysis. The critical analysis through Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Discourse Analysis can show how political rhetoric at different levels and through different modes can display complex levels of dynamical interactions. While at different levels, at the textual linguistic level, political rhetoric can be studied through lexicographical and syntactical analysis. Similarly, at different levels through analysis of production and dissemination and intertextual analysis, political rhetoric, at different levels, can again show how perception through social practice can be shaped and contested.

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