"USE OF PASSIVE STRUCTURES TO CONCEAL AGENCY IN PAKISTANI POLITICAL NEWS: A CDA APPROACH"

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Abstract
This paper employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with the findings of the three dimensional model provided by Fairclough (1995) to analyze passive grammatical structures in Pakistani political news to reveal the concealed agency and the diminished accountability. To conceal accountability in stories about protests, security operations, governance failures, economic policies and judicial decisions, editorial pressure, self censorship and ownership interests in the politically constrained media environment of Pakistan, journalists often end up astray in their docket by relying on agentless passives and nominalization to deliver the message. The analysis of headlines and news leads of the largest English or Urdu newspapers, including Dawn, The News, Express Tribune, and Jang, in terms of qualitative analysis provides the researcher with the identification of recurrent patterns where passive constructions are used to depoliticize sensitive events and to rationalize the actions of the states. The sentences such as dozens of PTI workers were arrested or dozens of people had been killed during security operation are processes in which the institutional agency is bypassed and political actions are represented as impersonal, not willful. Such language preferences at the discursive and social stages would conform to the existing power relations, bottom-up elite domination, and de-democratizing measures. It is concluded that passive structures in the Pakistani political journalism serve as an ideological mechanism of forming the perception in the population oriented to maintaining the status quo and restricting the debate around critical democratic issues.

Keywords: Passive structures, agency concealment, Critical Discourse Analysis, Pakistani political news, media discourse, ideological bias, power relations, Fairclough's model**.**

Introduction

Political journalism in Pakistan is conducted in a high complexity web of power structures which include civilian government, military power institutions, aggressive judicial system and media houses, which are frequently pressured by these power in either direct or indirect ways. The media environment resembles a combination of state control, ownership affinity, selfcensorship, as well as viability of operations in a politically unstable environment. In this regard, news discourse often uses latent, though, potent language decisions to steer these relationships with one of the salient elements being the long use of passive forms. They are more prevalent in the reporting of sensitive matters, especially actions of the state, law enforcement, and military action, political unrest cases, economic policy failures, corruption claims, and judicial actions.

Instead of stating the political actors involved in action, e.g., police forces, security services, government or military forces, the Pakistani political news tends to forecast what will happen in advance and background or do not mention the point of blame. Such practice defines the thinking of the masses by introducing controversial acts into the picture of impersonal, unavoidable processes or natural events and, thus, supporting the main actors of power, the

reduction of the possible protest against the institutions of the state. These linguistic practices are particularly prominent in the mainstream English-language family dailies such as Dawn, The news and express tribune and major Urdu newspapers where the necessity to create objectivity and institutional sensitivities often cause impersonalized news coverage. By subjecting active processes of protest to passive ones (ex. protesters were dispersed, rather than police dispersed protesters), journalists establish a facade of objectivity and implicitly defend agents of power, as well as reaffirming other power asymmetries within the socio-political structure of Pakistan.

2. Statement of the Problem

Although much has been made on the aspect of ideological bias, frame making, and lexical formulations in the Pakistani political press, especially in situations of elections, civil military relations, and protest movements, and other issues of national identity, little scholarly focus has been made on syntactic means, in this case, passive constructions as forms of agency concealment and accountability diffusing. The majority of current literature addresses general patterns of disrupted patterns of discursive or semantic characteristics, whilst ignoring how agentless passives, nominalizations and other systems of grammatical forms contribute to the systematic obscuring responsibility in political reporting. The fragile democratic situation in Pakistan requires consideration of this gap especially in that country, where strong military forces, media censorship, ownership pressures, and the possibility of reprisals dominate the practice of journalism. Cases of coercive state practices, violence and failures of rule are depoliticized, normalized or ascribed to abstract forces with the strategic utilization of passive structures in order to protect those political, military and judicial elites effectively. The dearth of concerted CDA study on the nature of these syntactic options limits insight into the capacity of language to reproduce the power of the Pakistani news talk in a subtle manner and inhibits the effective implications of supporting in the mandate of media literacy, ethical news reporting, and democratic responsibility.

3. Objectives of the Study

The first aim of the research is to explore how passive structures are used in Pakistani political news as an agency concealing technique and through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Some of the specific goals are:

- To define and examine the cases of passive constructions (agentless passives, nominalizations, and similar characteristics) in the chosen political news headlines and reports in the mainstream Pakistani newspapers.
- To analyse the use of these grammatical options in the background or the omission of agents to discuss state activities, protests, security operations, corruption, and economic policies and judicial judgments.
- To reveal the ideological components of such linguistic strategies and their acceptable conformity to the power relations of the socio-political environment in Pakistan.
- To emphasize the consequences of agency concealment on both the accountability of the people and democratic discussions and media ethics in Pakistan.

4. Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a strong model of operation of the ideological aspects of language to reproduce and naturalize power relations. According to Fairclough (1995), the grammatical decisions, such as passive voice and nominalization, are not neutral but ideologically motivated, which makes the agency hidden and the social processes depoliticized. In a similar vein, van Dijk (2008), highlights the contribution of media discourse to the justification of elite control by blocking the access to information and presenting events in such a manner that safeguards influential actors. Passive and avoiding the responsibility of agents, passive constructions have been extensively reported in the world

as part of political and conflict reporting, the victims being events or processes (e.g., having been dispersed by protesters, rather than police or security agents).

The Pakistani case has been no exception, as studies conducted on media discourse have exposed ideological inclinations especially on election, civil-military affairs, protest campaigns, terrorism, and matters of national security. Research shows that the Pakistani press extensively uses agentless passives and nominalizations in order to frame background state or institutional agency in the press, particularly when it comes to covering acts of violence, arrests, military actions, or political crackdowns. Indicatively, the examination of 2014 sit-ins in Islamabad reveals how headlines and leads employed passivity, such as clashes occurred, injuries reported, etc., to make the instigatory position of ruling-party proponents or police become obfuscated, and to de-politicise state violence.

The linguistic analysis of Pakistani newspapers of corpus also proves that agentless passivity is widespread in politically sensitive spheres of the language. These grammatical forms are inextricably coupled with nominalizations (e.g., the operation, the dispersal, the crackdown) to take the abstract actions of the perpetrators out of the nominalized sentences, as well as position events and actions as necessary or philosophical. This trend has been in line with greater ideological trends in Pakistani media, where self-censorship, ownership factor, and direct political pressure promotes linguistic ambiguity to escape conflict with those in major power.

Nevertheless, in spite of these studies, there is still a huge gap in the literature: whereas lexical framing, metaphors, and wider ideological tendency have been extensively studied, the particular syntactic role of passive constructions as systematic means of agency suppression in Pakistani political news have not been addressed with the necessary focus. The current literature is more likely to consider passives as peripheral or secondary to represent major processes of ideological work. In this paper, this gap will be filled by explicitly looking at passive constructions (agentless passives, nominalizations, and so on) in mainstream political news and placing them in the context of the three-dimensional CDA model (textual, discursive practice, and social practice level) and adjusting the framework to the particular power structures of civil-military-media to use in Pakistan. In so doing, it helps form a more grainy perspective on the way grammatical options reproduce elite privilege, institutionalize coercive action and constrain democratic responsibility in Pakistani political talk.

5. Methodology

This paper adopts an approach to qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) derived out of three dimensional model proposed by Norman Fairclough (1995) which provides a systematic approach to analyzing the role of language in constructing and maintaining power relations and meanings of ideologies. The model works on three levels that are interconnected, i.e., textual analysis, which involves micro-level linguistic characteristics; discursive practice, which involves processes of text production, circulation, and interpretation at the meso level; and social practice, which places discourse in context (socio-political and ideological) at the macro level. Such a framework is specifically suitable to Pakistani media environment, where journalism is conditioned by civil military pressure, self-censorship, and institutional restrictions and where grammatical options can be put substantially in relation to broader structures of power.

5.1 Paradigm and methodology of the research.

The studies are based on the critical-interpretive paradigm, which perceives language as a place of power, ideology, and social struggle (Fairclough, 1995). It works qualitatively, through inductive approach where the themes and patterns are developed through the data and not by testing hypotheses. It is descriptive and exploratory and seeks to identify the

ideological roles of passive structures in agency concealment, and elite naturalization of political news.

5.2 Research Design

It is a written and discursive analysis that involves text, which is desk based, and mostly heavily concentrated on written news. Although multimodal aspects (such as supporting graphics or designs in electronic versions) can be mentioned where applicable, linguistic characteristics that are under consideration are passive constructions, agent deletion, nominalizations, modality and hedging in headings and lead-ins. The design was based on the model of CDA applications in the Pakistani media studies that applied purposive sampling of headlines and reports to uncover ideological biases of politically sensitive coverage.

5.3 Population and Sampling

Population: The sample consists of political news headlines, leads, and excerpts of selected bodies in major Pakistani newspapers (both English and Urdu) published in the leading newspapers (Dawn, The News, Express Tribune, The Nation, Jang and Nawa-i-Waq). These outlets reflect a variety of ownership base and ideology inclination and have extensive coverage in Pakistan.

Sampling Technique: Data illustrating the phenomenon of interest were selected through purposive (non-probability) sampling i.e. those situations where passive structures are involved in politically charged situations involving state agency, repression or accountability avoidance. Inclusion criteria: Reports published since 2014 to 2025 (including such major events as the 2014 Islamabad sit-ins, the Panama Leaks, economic crises, security operations in Balochistan/Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, corruption scandals and recent political arrests). Passive constructions (agentless passivity, passive with an unspecified agent, nominalized passivity).

Reporting of sensitive issues: protest/ dissent, policing/ security operations, corruption/ government failures, economic policy, and judicial/ government actions.

Sample size: About 20-30 sampled headlines and leads/excerpts of 5-7 major events or themes of purposely chosen headlines. The small sample makes it deep in qualitative analysis and representative of the patterns in both English and Urdu media.

5.4 Data Collection

In 2024-2025, electronic forms (official archives of newspapers, online editions, and credible portals, e.g., dawn.com, thenews.com.pk, express.com.pk, jang.com.pk, etc.) were used to gather data in digital format. The only sources utilized were materials that are publicly available and of open source type, and they have been fully cited in order to be transparent and ethically reproducible. There was no personal and confidential data accessed.

5.5 Data Analysis

The analysis will be carried out in three phases, which are consistent with the model of Fairclough:

5.5.1: Textual Analysis (Micro Level).
- Detailed linguistics analysis of chosen texts in order to determine:
- Passive voice forms (e.g. they were arrested, they were dispersed, they were killed).
- The agent deletion or vagueness (absence of by-phrases or vague agents such as authorities).
- Nominalizations (e.g. arrests, operation, withdrawal).
- Connecting features: modality (e.g., hedging), transitivity options and lexical framing which complements agency concealment.

5.5.2 Discourse Practice (Meso Level)

Meaning of production, distribution, and consumption of texts: There are editorial controls and self-censorship, the effect of ownership on the press, and political influences which promote the development of ambiguous reporting or depersonalization of the press. Intertextuality (e.g. how passive framing pulls in line with officialism or institutional narratives). Distribution in print/digital and the way the audience interprets it (e.g. the way readers can experience events as agentless, inevitable).

5.5.3 Social Practice (Macro Level)

Civil military relationship, elite domination, poor democratic accountability and monitored media space. Ideological consequences: legitimization of forceful behavior, preservation of strong institutions, and recreation of power structures. Patterns are perceived qualitatively where an example is contrasted with active-voice counterparts in order to bring out ideological implications. It is context-sensitive and recognizes the media ecology that is specific to Pakistan because of its historical military interventions, the press regulations and polarized politics. This methodology approach provides the gap in textuality and the greater socio-ideological criticism and contributes to an informed comprehension of the agency concealment in Pakistani political news discussion.

6. Analysis and Discussion
6.1 Protests and Political Dissent

In the United States, there are several factors that may have contributed to the emergence of protests and political dissent.

One of the most striking examples of passive structures in Pakistani political news is when protests against the Pakistani government are covered, especially the protests lead by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Look at the headline and the lead:

They say dozens of PTI workers were arrested in Islamabad in the course of the protest.

In this type of construction, the arrests are normally left agentless by the use of agentless passive. This grammatical decision makes the arrests appear as a necessary part and parcel of the protest itself and not a strategy planned by the state authorities. It is centered on the incident and the victims (PTI workers) and thus depersonalizes the exercise of power and places less emphasis on the responsibility of the state agency (explicitly stating that the action was carried out by the law enforcers and the action is coercive).

In contrast, the passive form of the words is a strategic neutrality toward this kind of direct attribution, and it adds some tint to a narrative where state repression is impersonal or procedurally neutral. The trend is common in Pakistani mass media reports about opposition demonstrations in which headlines and leads often use agentless versions of the same grammar to depoliticize crackdowns, naturalize arrests, and protect the security forces against criticism. An example is that PTI connected stories tend to mention mass arrests using terms such as hundreds of PTI activists were arrested during an overnight raid, or several PTI workers were detained, always supporting the use of the phrase grounding so that the activity of the protesters is highlighted or, rather, the uproar.

These linguistic options also resonate with ideological trends in the media ecology of Pakistan in general, where editorial controls, self-censorship, and political influences promote ambiguity to preserve an apparent balance and comply with institutional discourses of power. These passive constructions are useful in legitimizing coercive practices, restricting the scope of critical public discussion on accountability, and reproducing power asymmetries through depicting dissent as a problem, but not a legitimate form of expressing democratic rights, in the context of polarized civil-military and government-opposition relations.

6.2 Law and Order & Security Operations

The other common use of passive constructions in Pakistani political news is when writing about law and order events especially security or counter terrorism activities in conflict-

touched provinces like Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and former FATA provinces. An average example is the headline or lead sentence:

"In Baluchistan, a security operation resulted in the killing of several people"

In this case, the passive voice is used in a consistent way to obscure the role of the most frequently used actors; most often, it was military forces, paramilitary units (such as Frontier Corps or Levies), intelligence agencies, or integrated security forces. This omission of any explicit agent (there can be no construction such as by security forces or by the army) effects the deaths as consequential results of an abstract operation, but not as the direct results of a planned military intervention.

This grammatical decision helps to reduce the criticism that security institutions might face, which have a high level of institutional prestige and protection against any kind of scrutiny of the institutions within the civil-military power aspect of Pakistani society. The passive voice makes the event depersonalized and changes the focus not towards the issues of proportionality, responsibility, or even potential human rights violations, but introduces victims as unfortunate but inevitable by-products of keeping law and order. Conversely, a comparable active-voice form"Security forces killed several people in an operation in Balochistan" would propell the agency of the state apparatus, explicitly hold the party accountable, and invite more questions in the general public and the press about the actions of the operation.
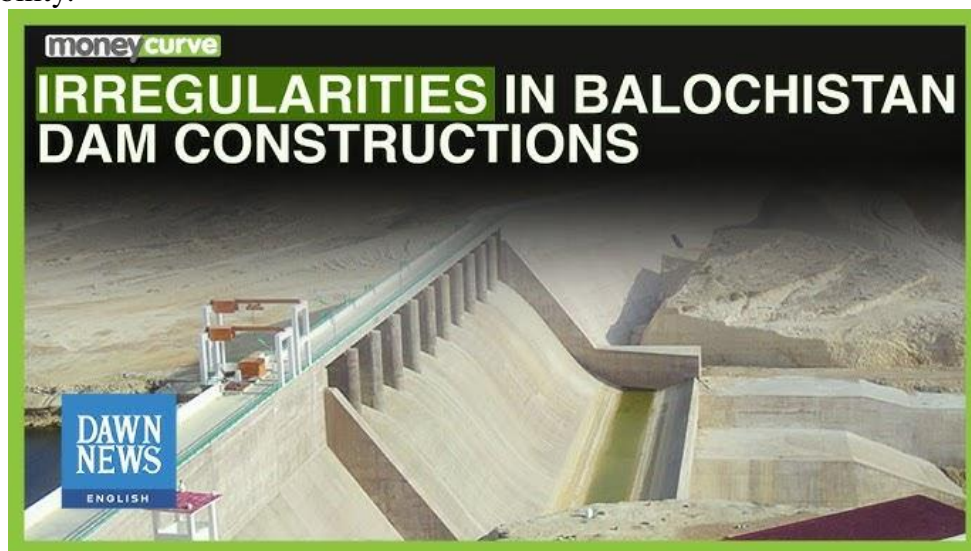

This tendency is common in the Pakistani media reporting of military or paramilitary operations, where headings and leads are regularly written in an agentless form: "militants were neutralized," "suspects were killed in an encounter," "civilians were caught in crossfire," or "targets were eliminated in a drone strike." These kinds of constructions go hand in hand with larger discursive practices that insulate the security establishment against direct accusations, naturalize the application of lethal force in the context of internal security and reproduce the ideological discourse according to which the violence of the state is a necessary defense, it is natural and has little to do with individuals. These passive structures, in the settings of the current civil-military asymmetry in Pakistan and limited media coverage of powerful institutions, represent a very delicate but efficient instrument of justifying coercive practices and reducing criticism of accountability, civilian casualties, and human cost of security operations.

6.3 Corruption and Governance Failures

Passive forms are also commonly used in Pakistani political and investigative journalism to present cases of corruption, mismanagement and governmental failure by structurally denonoting malfeasance and spreading the burden. A typical case would be in headlines and

leads like; Irregularities were detected in the development project. This agentless passive form does not name those responsible officials, government departments or ministries, contractors or political actors who either authorize, control or reap the rewards of the irregularities. The exclusion of any agent turns a potentially attributable corrupt or careless act into an abstract and near self occurrence of irregularities just found there and, thus, the problem is presented as an impersonal issue independent of human behavior or institutional responsibility.

This linguistic structure is widespread in reporting on big corruption scandals, auditing on infrastructure projects, anomalies in government procurement and mismanagement of development funds in Pakistan. Such structures are regularly used in headlines: "Money was stolen in the scheme," "Embezzlement was found in the department, anomalies were found in the accounts, or noncompliance was found in the contract award process. These kinds of structures are consistent with the larger discursive tendencies in Pakistani media wherein editorial censure, vested ownership in political/bureaucratic elites and the threat of legal or institutional punishment promote ambiguity and abstraction. These passive structures have the benefit of depersonalizing the issue of corruption so that powerful actors ministers, bureaucrats or elected representatives or influential contractors are not held directly to account, systemic governance failures are normalized as single incidents and any critical discussion on accountability, transparency, and structural reform are curtailed. By doing this they help recreate the ideological lake of elite impunity and undermine the democratic checks and balances in the politically charged Pakistani media landscape.

6.5 Judicial and Administrative Actions

Passive forms in the Pakistani political news are also used when referring to judicial decisions, court decisions, and administrative decisions and especially when it involves a high profile or politically sensitive case involving high-profile individuals or institutions. The typical example is the headline or lead phrase:

"The decision was made under a strict security"

The emphasis in this type of agency passive structure is so much laid upon the event the announcement of the verdict where the responsible institution or authority (usually the Supreme Court, high courts, accountability courts, or individual judges) is completely left out.

The grammatical decision is indicative of the timorous and submissive attitude that the media have taken towards such mighty organs of the state as the judiciary, which in Pakistan enjoys great institutional reputation, constitutional safeguards and oftentimes works under a very political climate where such direct attribution may be controversial, legally punitive, or even seen as prejudiced. The passive formulation, by predicting the event and the security situation and not the judicial actor, the verdict is framed as a depersonalized and near self-executing event and thus the use of judicial power is depersonalized as well as there is less opportunity to challenge the court reasoning, independence, and the dangers of the political factors.

A close analogue of active voice will be an announcement by an accountability court that gave the verdict in a tight security would actually mention the judicial body as the agent, emphasize its prerogative in pronouncing the verdict, and invite more public attention to issues of judicial accountability, fairness or institutional balance. By comparison, the passive form preserves ambiguity, which is a much more typical aspect of Pakistani discursive practice, where reports of such legal matters as disqualification, contempt determinations or high-profile convictions (i.e. one against a former Prime Minister like Imran Khan or Nawaz Sharif) are regularly reported using the same type of formulation: "The decision was reserved," The bench observed," Relief was granted, or The petition was dismissed. These structures add to an ideological trend that protects the judiciary against outright criticism, naturalizes their interventions as procedural necessities, and restrains critical popular discussion of such phenomena as judicial overreach, delay, or perceived partisanship.

These passive forms of organization assist in maintaining a course of institutional neutrality in the face of the judicial system often being involved in the politics of executive and military dominance in the socio-political life of Pakistan, though quietly strengthening the hegemonic hold of the elites and managed democratic rhetoric. Through agency obfuscation of judicial coverage, media houses are able to manoeuvre editorial limitations, as well as partisan pressures, which ultimately recapitulate relations of power, keeping institutions of power unaccountable.

7. Findings

In the qualitative analysis of the purposively chosen political news headings, leads, and excerpts of the mainstream Pakistani newspapers (in English and Urdu) it is established that passive constructions are consciously and strategically used in various politically sensitive issues. These grammatical options act as instruments of ideology, which fulfil several overlapping functions in the reproducibility of power processes:

Anonymity of state and institutional agency: Agentless passives and nominalizations always leave out or bracket the agentic subjects (e.g. police, military, government officials, or

courts), and turn willful acts into impersonal activities or events. This clouds responsibility and protects institutions of significance against close blame.

Depoliticizing controversial acts: It is only by concentrating on the results, not the actors, that passive structures depersonalize events, making the arrest, murder, finding of corruption or withdrawing of a policy, or verdict seem a dispassionate, unthinking, and unquestioning routine event rather than an act of force or authority.

Institutionalize the use of coercion: The consistent application of depersonalized language when telling the story of security actions, crackdowns of protests, and state actions against lawbreakers legitimizes state violence, repression, and coercion as normal aspects of order maintenance, and makes such potentially abusive practices routine.

Secure the elite: These buildings offer a discursive buffer to those who hold power especially military and security institutions, ruling political elites and the court system to mitigate criticism as well as make their presence less visible and hold on to their institutional prestige in a world of civil-military asymmetry.

Restrict the fundamental popular discourse: Passivity forms block the ability to question the corporate accountability, causality, and justice, through linguistic ambiguity and abstraction, limiting the ability to engage in informed and widespread discourse, responsiveness, and democratic dialogue.

These are not the only linguistic strategies, but rather they fit in larger ideological patterns that can be seen in discourse in the Pakistani media. Combined, self-censorship, direct and covert political influences, proprietary suitability to elite interests, editorial restraint, and terror of retribution by influential authorities all influence journalist and editor to prefer ambiguity and depersonalization. Passive voice and the associated non-congruent forms (e.g. nominalizations) are low-risk strategies that are used to report sensitive events and retain an outward look of disinterest in such situations. The outcome is a media ecology that biasedly protects the prevailing institutions particularly the military-security complex and the allied political elites at the expense of the opposition voices, makes coercive governance normalized, and recreates the power imbalances existing in the weak Pakistani democratic system.

This trend is reminiscent of discursive propensities found in other related CDA research on Pakistan, including the employment of English-dominant, prestige-based nomenclature, which also masks exclusionary realities, measures elite identity, and naturalizes socio-spatial inequality (Samo et al., 2026). In the two areas, language plays not only the descriptive role but also as a dynamic ideological process which justifies elite control, depoliticizes inequalities in the structure and restricts the transformative popular action. The results demonstrate the importance of paying more attention to syntactic strategies in media discourse and the critical importance of CDA in revealing how ostensibly neutral grammatical decisions perpetuate unequal power relations in modern Pakistan.

9. Conclusion

Passive grammar structures are introduced in the Pakistani socio-political and media sphere as an effective but unobtrusive ideological instrument of political news. Mainstream newspapers nominalise state actions, naturalise coercive and repressive practices, shield political and military elites against direct responsibility, and constrain the ability of the mass public to critically discuss matters of governance, security and justice by systematically concealing agency using agentless passives, nominalizations, and other pertinent syntactic features.

Through the analysis, it has been seen that these linguistic decisions are not only visually stylistic and incidental but indeed very much in the discursive practices of Pakistani journalism, where editorial constraints, self-censorship, ownership formations, political

pressures and the necessity to preserve institutional neutrality impel such ambiguity in place of attribution. At the level of the social practice, these patterns reproduce and legitimize the established power asymmetry in specific ways especially the civil-military balance that has remained unchanged and elite impunity and manipulated discourse of the democratic in exclusion of the voice of opposition and contextualized dissent or state violence as a natural occurrence, not as a political one.

Following the three dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) used in this context-specific analysis, this paper demonstrates how a seemingly neutral grammatical choice contributes to the perpetuation of unequal power relations in present day Pakistan. The results are in line with the similar CDA studies in other Pakistani areas (e.g., naming real estate in housing societies), where language also marks elite identity, naturalizes exclusion, and masks structural inequalities (Samo et al., 2026). Collectively, these papers highlight the more general importance of linguistic strategies in the legitimization of neoliberal, elitist and securitized discourses in places of publicity.

To counter the ideological job that passive structures do, a response is a greater media literacy of the audience, more self-reflexivity and moral training within the journalism field, and more institutional protection of press freedom and responsibility. Revealing these concealed processes of hiding agencies, CDA not only adds to the academic knowledge, but also has the potential to transform Pakistan into a more transparent, equitable, and democratic public dialogue. This analysis may be developed in future studies by either quantitative analysis in terms of large scale corpus studies or comparative between English and Urdu media to further describe the extent and diversity of these discursive practices.

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