

“WE WILL FIGHT”: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF IMRAN KHAN'S KASHMIR SPEECH THROUGH VAN DIJK'S IDEOLOGICAL SQUARE

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Abstract

Political speeches play an important role in shaping public opinion, promoting ideology, and constructing national identity. This study critically analyzes Imran Khan's Kashmir speech, "We Will Fight," using Teun A. van Dijk's Ideological Square to examine how language constructs ideological polarization. The study aims to investigate how linguistic and discursive strategies create positive self-representation and negative other-representation, and how linguistic features such as lexicalization, modality, passivization, and intertextuality contribute to ideological construction. An interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative research design based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) were employed. The data consist of an official excerpt from Imran Khan's speech delivered at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) after India revokes Article 370 in August 2019. The findings reveal that the speech consistently portrays Pakistan and the Kashmiri people as peaceful, courageous, and morally justified, while India is represented as oppressive and the United Nations as ineffective in fulfilling its responsibilities. The analysis further shows that carefully selected lexical choices, modal expressions, religious references, historical analogies, and passivized structures strengthen persuasive communication and ideological polarization. These linguistic strategies construct a discourse of resistance, victimhood, justice, and international accountability. The study concludes that Imran Khan's speech is a strategically organized ideological discourse that employs language to influence public perception, legitimize political positions, and reinforce national identity. By applying Van Dijk's Ideological Square, the research contributes to Critical Discourse Analysis and political discourse studies by demonstrating how language functions as a powerful tool for persuasion and ideological representation in the context of the Kashmir conflict.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Van Dijk's Ideological Square, Political Discourse, Imran Khan, Kashmir Speech, Ideology, Lexicalization, National Identity, Political Communication.

1.1 Introduction

The characteristics of political speeches make these forms of speech one of the most influential forms of public communication since it creates an impact on the public opinion, spreads political ideologies and creates perceptions on the matters of national and international issues. Political leaders intentionally craft an argument, narratives, identities in speeches or public statements on

salient issues. As a consequence, rather than being neutral, language in political discourses is an expression of power and ideology, and is used by people who are interested in its use for reasons of their own. (Fairclough, 1995; Owais et al., 2026.) Political leaders try to unite people, provide and advocate for politics, and manipulate both domestic and international public opinion through their speeches.

The Kashmir dispute is one of the longest-standing political issues in South Asia that is yet to be resolved. Kashmir has been a major troublesome area of concern for Pakistan and India since the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. It is of special importance in international forums due to the historical, political, humanitarian and security aspects. The issue of Kashmir has been discussed at every such platform in Pakistan's national and international speeches by the political leaders where they have expressed Pakistan's position, Kashmiris rights and Pakistan's aspiration for international support in the matter. Of these, the now-forgotten "We Will Fight" speech by former Prime Minister Imran Khan is unique, in the sense that it drew attention even globally due to its emotional content, ideological bent and rhetoric. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a good method to analyze construction of political meaning, power and ideology. For CDA, discourse constitutes a type of social practice, a way by which political actors form public opinion and propagate ideological beliefs (van Dijk, 1998). Van Dijk's Ideological Square is one of the most important models in the field of CDA that explains the focus on the positive attributes of one's own group and on the negative attributes of the other group. This strategy is also represented in how speakers downplay their own shortcomings and how they downplay positive representations of their opponents (van Dijk, 2006).

In the following study we are using Van Dijk's "Ideological Square" as a framework to investigate Imran Khan's Kashmir speech. Discusses the lexicological features, the rhetoric used and ideological components employed to build the image of a nation, reflect a positive image of Pakistan and Kashmir, and denigrate the opposing actors. This study seeks to uncover the functions of political language in terms of its role in the promotion of ideology, in public perception and discourse on the Kashmir issue and other discourses from the international sphere. The results will be important for the study of Critical Discourse Analysis, political communication and Southern Asian discourse studies as well as understanding the link between language, ideology, and political power.

1.2 Problem Statement

It is one of the most sensitive political and humanitarian conflicts in South Asia, the Kashmir issue which has resulted in wide political debate at the domestic and international forums. State leaders' speeches and political eloquence have importance in building national identity, ideology and opinion. Imran Khan's Kashmir speech focused mainly on "We Will Fight," that statement garnered a lot of attention internationally, but paucity in scholarly examination of the speech has been done, a critical examination using Van Dijk's Ideological Square. Previous research on political discourse has tended to concentrate on general rhetorical strategies, the portrayal of the media or foreign policy narratives, with little consideration of the linguistic processes whereby ideological polarization is built in this speech. Hence, it is hoped that this study would bridge the gap with regard to the depictions of positive image of Pakistan and Kashmir and negative image of opposing groups within the context of the Ideological Square of Van Dijk through the lenses of lexical choices and discursive strategies in order to restore the relationship among language, ideology and political power.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To examine how linguistic and discursive strategies construct positive self-representation and negative other-representation in Imran Khan's Kashmir speech through Van Dijk's Ideological Square.
2. To analyze the role of lexicalization, modality, passivization, and intertextuality in constructing ideological polarization in the speech.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does Imran Khan use linguistic and discursive strategies to construct positive self-representation and negative other-representation in his Kashmir speech through Van Dijk's Ideological Square?
2. How do linguistic features such as lexicalization, modality, passivization, and intertextuality contribute to the construction of ideological polarization in the speech?

2.1 Literature Review

Over the last few decades, Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA, has emerged as one of the most influential models of analysis for language ideology and power. It assumes that language is not a neutral medium for communicating, but rather a social activity which serves to negotiate, legitimate and reproduce power relations, political interests, and ideology belief (Fairclough, 1995). The use of CDA has a special appeal in political speeches, which are engineered for persuading an audience, creating national identity and backing political acts. Political discourse, via language, has the power to create the view held by the populace and it gives government the political control it seeks. Fairclough (1995) is contestant that discourse not only mirrors reality but also is an active construction of it which enables to agree to certain worldviews and ideological positions.

However, one of the foremost scholars in CDA has contributed greatly to the explanation of how ideology is embedded in political discourse, namely Teun A. van Dijk. According to Van Dijk (1998) ideologies are sets of beliefs which are prevalent in the society and shape the vision of the group within the society and the representation of the group and the other groups. He emphasizes four strategies in his model of political discourse that can be analyzed in relation to his Ideological Square, which include: highlighting positive features of "us," highlighting negative features of "them," de-emphasizing negative features of "us," and minimizing positive features of "them. van Dijk (2006) states that these are some of the tactics that are employed in political speeches to polarise the ideology and project group identity. This model has been one of the most popular models in the analysis of political discourse, as it enables to describe and explain construction of social division and political identities through language.

There are numerous linguistic devices used to communicate ideology in political speeches. An important one is lexicalization - choosing the lexical items intentionally to convey assessment and forge the perception of their audiences. The use of positive lexical items is often reserved for the own nation; negative lexical items are used for opponent (van Dijk, 2006). Likewise, modality can be used to show certainty, obligation, possibility and commitment, which is a way of making an argument more convincing. According to Fairclough (2003), modal expressions are useful indicators of the speaker's level of confidence and authority, and are important variables in communication in politics.

One of the other characteristic characteristics of political discourse is passivization, in which the responsibility for specific actions can be concealed or highlighted. In these passive constructions,

the political actors can be indirect in their lines of questioning and thus influence the interpretation by the audience (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). In political speech, too, intertextuality is common when speakers address historical events, religious texts or texts of international laws, or political intervention made earlier for establishing credibility and legitimacy. In Fairclough's view (1992), intertextuality demonstrates the interconnection of all discourses with past discourses and other social contexts.

Some empirical research has been able to use the concept of Van Dijk's Ideological Square, to political speech. Van Dijk (1998) studied parliamentary debates and the media, concluding that the political elite uses a positive language for itself and a negative language for its others to favoured, ideologically defined standpoints. In the same way, Chilton (2004) maintains that political discourse is essentially rhetorical and that it serves to not only legitimate policies, but also to build up national identities and to provide support for the public. According to Wodak (2009), political communication also helps to shape the national identity, as the discourse comes with a certain understanding of 'who is in' the national community and 'who is not' who is then construed as an outsider.

South Asian political discourses have also been successfully applied in the study of South Asian political ideologies using CDA. Research regarding political speeches surrounding the Kashmir issue shows that it is a common practice for political leaders to use emotional words, historical allusion, and expressions of nationalism in order to justify a political stance and mobilize the audience (Ahmed & Hashim, 2022). In terms of studies on political communication available on the web, however, few studies have studied Imran Khan's Kashmir speech within the specific framework of Van Dijk's Ideological Square. Existing research has concentrated on rhetorical devices and media framing, and diplomatic narratives, but has been lacking a detailed linguistic analysis of ideological polarization. The present study thus aims at filling this void and intends to look at the role of positive self-representation, negative other-representation, lexicalization, modality, passivization, and intertextuality in presenting ideology in Imran Khan's speech on Kashmir. To this end, by using Van Dijk's concept of the Ideological Square, the study will attempt to better understand the construction of national identity, the legitimation of political occupations and the influence of political language on public perception.

3. Theoretical Framework

Van Dijk's Ideological Square

IDEOLOGICAL SQUARE

- + Emphasize Positive Things About Us
- De-emphasize Negative Things About Us
- + De-emphasize Positive Things About Them
- Emphasize Negative Things About Them

According to van Dijk (1998), these four strategies shape political discourse by creating polarized representations of social groups.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This research is qualitative interpretive study using critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a framework of this study. It is appropriate to use a qualitative approach because the aim of the study is not to calculate frequencies for statistical purposes but to examine how the conception of meaning was conceptualised in the language. CDA allows researchers to investigate the connection between language, ideology and power. Because of the political nature of the topic in the speech under study, CDA is effective in revealing the logical shadings and persuasive arguments used.

4.2 Research Paradigm

The study approach is founded on the interpretivist paradigm, which is based on the premises that meaning is socially constructed and is context dependent. Political speeches are not considered as neutral texts but ideological products of social, political and cultural realities.

7 eggs and 54 generations originated from this position.

This is an excerpt from the Kashmir part of Imran Khan's speech at the UN General Assembly.

Speech Excerpt

There is no God but one! Anything could happen, if Africa had another country half the size of her country that was facing them in front of them with the question, either you surrender or you fight till the end, I would ask myself this question and that is the belief I would have and we would fight! But I'm not here to threaten you of a nuclear war; I'm worried, I'm a test case for you, United Nations, I'm a demand from you Kashmiris that you lift the curfew imposed on us, we have lost 13,000 Kashmiris in this war, you are United Nations, lift the curfew imposed on us, this is our right of self-determination.”

The speech excerpt was divided into analytical clauses for systematic examination.

4.4 Data Collection Procedure

The speech was retrieved from publicly available official recordings and transcripts.

The selected excerpt was chosen because it contains:

- i. Ideological polarization
- ii. Political argumentation
- iii. Religious references
- iv. International criticism
- v. Human rights discourse

These characteristics make the speech suitable for CDA.

4.5 Analytical Framework

The analysis employs *Van Dijk's Ideological Square (1998)*.

Four Principles	
Strategy	Description
Positive Self-Representation	Highlighting positive aspects of the in-group
Negative Other-Representation	Highlighting negative aspects of the out-group
De-emphasizing Negative Self	Concealing weaknesses of the in-group
De-emphasizing Positive Other	Suppressing positive characteristics of opponents



4.6 Linguistic Categories Used in Analysis


To strengthen the analysis, five linguistic categories were incorporated.

Table 4.1 Analytical Categories

Linguistic Category	Function
Lexicalization	Reveals ideological word choices
Modality	Expresses certainty and obligation
Passivization	Conceals agency
Intertextuality	Refers to historical or religious texts
Parallelism	Creates emphasis and persuasion

5. Data Analysis

Table 5.1 Clause			Level Ideological Coding
Clause No.	Speech Segment	Ideological Coding	
1	Anything could happen	Neutral	Epistemic Modality  20%
2	Country seven times smaller	+US	
3	Either surrender or fight	+US	High Affinity Modality  40%
4	I ask myself this question	+US	
5	La ilaha illAllah	+US	Deontic Modality
6	We will fight	+US	

7	I am not threatening	-US	 40%
8	Test for United Nations	-THEM	
9	You are the one who said	+THEM (subverted)	
10	Not the time for appeasement	-THEM	
11	UN must urge India	-THEM	
12	Kashmiris disappeared	-THEM	
13	UN must insist	-THEM	

5.1 Analysis of Positive Self-Representation

Van Dijk argues that political discourse frequently emphasizes positive characteristics of the in-group.

Table 5.2 Positive Self-Representation

Text Segment	Strategy	Function
Seven times smaller	Victimization	Moral legitimacy
We will fight	Resistance	National unity
La ilaha illAllah	Religious identity	Spiritual legitimacy
I ask myself	Moral reflection	Leadership credibility

Interpretation

The speaker constructs Pakistan as:

- i. Morally righteous
- ii. Spiritually committed
- iii. Victimized
- iv. Courageous

These representations strengthen collective identity and solidarity.

5.2 Analysis of Negative Other-Representation

Table 5.3 Negative Other-Representation

Text Segment	Target	Representation
Test for United Nations	UN	Failure
Appeasement	International Community	Weakness
Lift the curfew	India	Oppression
Disappeared Kashmiris	India	Human rights violation

Interpretation

The speech portrays India as:

- i. Oppressive
- ii. Aggressive
- iii. Violating human rights

The United Nations is represented as:

- i. Passive
- ii. Ineffective
- iii. Morally accountable

5.3 Modality Analysis

Modality reveals levels of commitment and obligation.

Table 5.4 Modal Expressions

Expression	Type
Could happen	Epistemic
Will fight	High certainty
Must urge	Deontic
Must insist	Deontic

Interpretation

The speaker combines:

- i. Uncertainty (could happen)
- ii. Determination (will fight)
- iii. Obligation (must urge, must insist)

This progression creates persuasive intensity.

5.4 Lexicalization Analysis

Lexicalization refers to ideologically loaded vocabulary.

Table 5.5 Ideological Lexical Choices

Word/Phrase	Ideological Meaning
Fight	Resistance
Surrender	Defeat
Curfew	Oppression
Appeasement	Historical failure
Self-determination	Justice

Interpretation

The selected vocabulary frames the conflict as a moral struggle between justice and oppression.

5.5 Religious Discourse Analysis

One of the most significant ideological features is religious code-switching.

Table 5.6 Religious Reference

Expression	Function
La ilaha illAllah	Spiritual legitimacy

Interpretation

The religious phrase transforms political resistance into a sacred duty.

The conflict is therefore represented not merely as territorial but also as moral and spiritual.

5.6 Intertextuality Analysis

Intertextuality refers to references to historical events.

Table 5.7 Historical References

Reference	Meaning
Munich 1939	Failure to stop aggression
UN Resolution	International obligation

Interpretation

The Munich analogy warns against repeating historical mistakes.

The UN reference reminds audiences of previously established commitments.

5.7 Passivization Analysis

Table 5.8 Passivized Structures

Text	Hidden Agent
Kashmiris who have disappeared	India (implied)

Interpretation

Passivization removes direct attribution while maintaining emotional impact.

This linguistic strategy strengthens the perception of victimhood.

5.8 Syntactic Parallelism

Table 5.9 Parallel Structures

Structure	Purpose
This is the time	Repetition
UN must	Emphasis
To lift / To free	Intensification

Interpretation

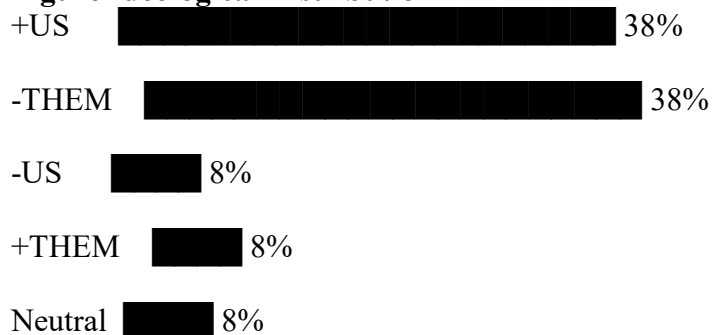
Parallelism increases rhetorical force and reinforces urgency.

5.9 Frequency Distribution of Ideological Strategies

Table 5.10 Frequency Analysis

Strategy	Frequency
Positive Self Representation	5
Negative Other Representation	5
Negative Self Representation	1
Positive Other Representation	1
Neutral	1

Figure Ideological Distribution



5.10 Summary of Findings

The analysis demonstrates that:

- i. Positive self-representation dominates the speech.
- ii. India is represented as an oppressive actor.
- iii. The United Nations is portrayed as morally responsible but ineffective.
- iv. Religious references strengthen ideological legitimacy.
- v. Modality creates certainty and urgency.
- vi. Passivization intensifies victimhood narratives.
- vii. Historical analogies strengthen persuasive power.

6. Discussion

In this study, Kashmir speech by the Pakistani PM Imran Khan has been explored using Teun van Dijk's (1998) Ideological Square. The analysis shows that the system of polarization is created with the help of lexical distinction, modality, passivization, religious references and historical analogies.

The findings indicate that the speech is realized in line with Van Dijk's basic four principles of ideology: positive self-representation and negative other-representation. On the one hand, Pakistanis and Kashmiris are characterized as morally righteous, oppressed, and the United Nations as weak and passive as leaves took no initiative, and on the other hand, Indian is portrayed as an aggressor. The results are in line with the socio-cognitive theory proposed by Van Dijk, who maintains that ideological discourse establishes a dualistic relation between social actors and social groups called "Us" and "Them". It is in this polarization that speakers look to shape the perceptions of their audience, normalise specific political points of view.

An interesting element of the speech is, as mentioned before, the discourse of the victims. When speaking of a "country seven times smaller than its neighbour" a picture of non-symmetrical power relations comes into mind. This isn't a speech about strength, but about weakness and the righteousness of the soul. Such presentations are typical in political communication campaigns for gaining sympathy and validation. Another significant result is with regard to the use of modality. Epistemic modality, translated as "could happen," is followed by high-affinity, that is, obvious modality, "will fight," and then deontic modality, "must urge," "must insist. This speech pattern enhances expressiveness and makes the speaker appear to be a moral leader.

In the speech too, religion is used strategically. The phrase *la ilaha illAllah* is a spiritual one that goes beyond simplistic, political debate. Religious code-switching is a mode of resistance and not just political resistance but also moral and religious. This result confirms earlier CDA research indicating that reference to religious language can serve to legitimate political discussions.

The construction of ideology continues through analogies from the past. The mention of Munich in 1939 is an echo which evokes collective memories of political appeasement and global failure. This comparison brings the speaker's words to life for the listener, and helps the listener analyze the current events in light of a set that they know well. Another big discursive strategy is passivization. The term 'Kashmiris who have disappeared' does not mention the responsible handplaying someone's name but is still powerful in appeals. This grammatical shift allows to draw attention to the victims instead of the perpetrators, which accentuates concerns of humanitarianism. Overall, the results suggest that the speech is not a simple informative speech, but rather an extremely persuasive and ideologically laden speech. Linguistic choices are made at the semantic, grammatical, rhetorical and cognitive level and are used to build a coherent narrative of justice, resistance, and international accountability.

6.1 Discussion Through Van Dijk's Ideological Square Positive Representation of "Us"

The speech portrays Pakistan and Kashmiris as:

- a. Courageous
- b. Morally justified
- c. Victimized
- d. Spiritually committed
- e. Defenders of justice

Examples include:

- a. "We will fight"
- b. "La ilaha illAllah"
- c. "Seven times smaller"

These expressions strengthen collective identity and national solidarity.

Negative Representation of "Them"

India and the United Nations are represented as:

- a. Oppressive
- b. Aggressive
- c. Morally responsible
- d. Politically ineffective

Examples include:

- a. "Lift the curfew"
- b. "13,000 Kashmiris who have disappeared"
- c. "A test for the United Nations"

These representations create ideological polarization between opposing groups.

Suppression of Negative Self-Representation

The speech minimizes any potential negative role of Pakistan through disclaimer strategies.

Example:

"I am not threatening here about a nuclear war."

This statement distances the speaker from accusations of aggression while maintaining the seriousness of the situation.

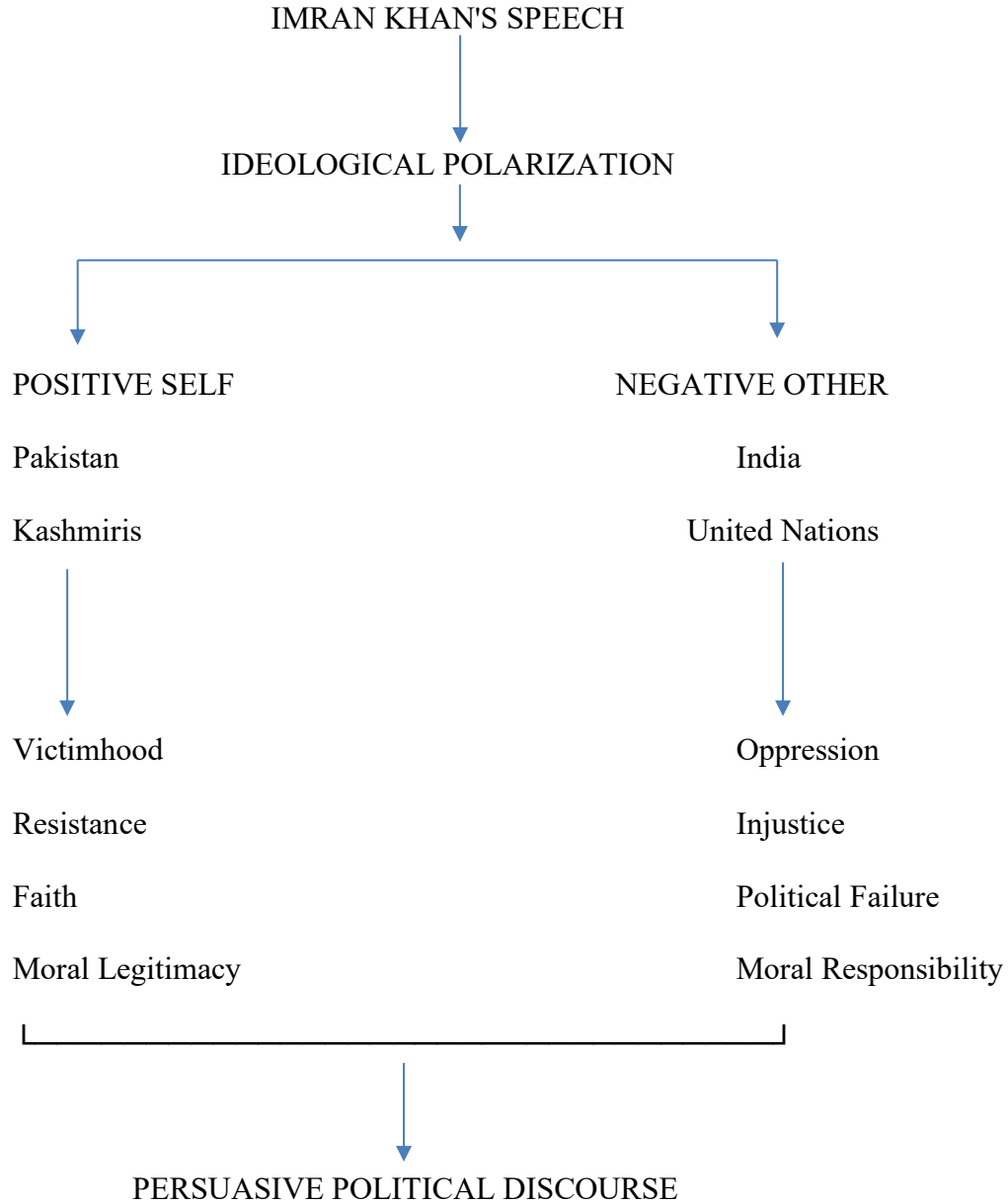
Suppression of Positive Other-Representation

The United Nations is acknowledged as the institution that recognized self-determination rights; however, this positive role is immediately undermined through criticism of its current inaction.

This strategy aligns precisely with Van Dijk's fourth principle.

6.2 Conceptual Model of Findings

Figure 6.1 Ideological Construction Process



7. Conclusion

In this study, the critical analysis of Imran Khan's speech on Kashmir has looked into the VD square model of an Ideological Square.

Although the analysis illustrates that message with direct politics is not the primary means of ideology production, a combination of linguistic and rhetorical means is. Lexicalization, modality, passivization, historical analogies and religious references are all reinforcing each other to create a very polarized discourse. The results find that Pakistan and Kashmiris are depicted as "morally virtuous victims as legitimate resistance" and India is perceived as "an oppressive power" and the United Nations "an apathetic institution not doing enough to enforce international commitments". Additionally, the study indicates the potential of Van Dijk's political field of 'Ideological Square' to analyze political discourse in South Asian countries. The framework does an adequate job of revealing the ideology and meanings created by language and how it aids in identity and the process of persuasion and political legitimation. The findings of the study uphold that political speeches are strong ideological tools that can affect the outlook of conflict, morality, and responsibility.

9. Acknowledging the results of the Study.

There are a number of implications of the study.

8.1 Theoretical Implications

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach was validated with the findings, as it shows ideological polarization creating a presence of linguistic structures.

Another area of contribution of the study is the integration of the semantic and grammatical analysis under a single framework concept of Critical Discourse Analysis

8.2 Methodological Implications

The research shows how clause-level analysis is able to reveal the ideological meanings that may not have been explicit in more general studies of themes.

Similar analytical strategies can be utilized in the analysis of political speech and media discourse in the future.

8.3 Practical Implications

The findings can help:

- i. Political discourse analysts
- ii. Media researchers
- iii. Linguists
- iv. Communication scholars
- v. Policy analysts

understand how language shapes public perception of international conflicts.

9. Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be acknowledged.

Limitation 1

The study focuses on a single speech excerpt.

Limitation 2

Only qualitative analysis was employed.

Limitation 3

The study examines discourse from a Pakistani political perspective only.

Limitation 4

Audience reception was not investigated.

10. Findings

Table 11.1 Summary of Findings

Research Question	Major Finding
RQ1	Positive self-representation dominates the speech
RQ2	India and UN are negatively represented
RQ3	Modality, lexicalization, passivization, and intertextuality support ideological polarization
RQ4	Religious discourse strengthens legitimacy and resistance narratives

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