

FAKE NEWS AND DISINFORMATION IN PAKISTAN: A FORENSIC LINGUISTICS INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines linguistic and discursive underpinnings of fake news and disinformation through a forensic linguistic perspective. The rapid rise of social media and digital news has enabled false and manipulated information to spread across the internet (and around the world) like never before, affecting the shared beliefs of people, the functioning of democracies, and the security of nations. Using forensic linguistic techniques, this study seeks to reveal preferential features related to lexical selection, syntactic reorganization, modality, and rhetorical patterns characteristic of disinformation campaigns in Pakistan. The analysis is based on a purposive sample of misinformation coverage and viral social media posts from 2018-2024. The findings indicate disinformation in the country generally uses emotive language, unclear sourcing, shock value and linguistic ambiguity to shape the reader's attitude and divide society. Further, the paper reflects on the sociopolitical implications of disinformation, and suggests potential responses in terms of media literacy and policy reforms. This study adds to increasing base of forensic linguistic investigation in South Asia and underscores the importance of a multi-dimensional preventive strategy as far as the "fake news" or disinformation is concerned.

Keywords: Forensic Linguistics, Fake News, Disinformation, Pakistan, Media Discourse, Cybercrime, Language Manipulation

1. INTRODUCTION

In an era of digital communication, fake news and disinformation have become a pervasive threat to societal peace, democratic functioning, and individual conceptualizations of truth. This is especially dangerous in countries like Pakistan, where social-political nuances coupled with rampant utilization of social media and weak regulatory frameworks for media etc., makes the country susceptible to the spread of doctored view point. The rise of internet and mobile technology as the main mechanism in news distribution has weakened the traditional journalism gatekeeping functions and chain of command, resulting in an inundation of unverified, sometimes libelous material. It is modifying language – in subtle and explicit ways – that has been at the center of this information crisis. As a field which investigates language use in legal and forensic contexts on the one hand and in public contexts on the other, forensic linguistics represents a robust methodology to dissect and understand the production, spreading, and reception of fake news and disinformation.

The relevance to Pakistan is that fake news can trigger off ethnic, religious and political squabbles. Research has demonstrated that the disinformation can be used as a tool to create tensions in the society and change the public opinion through fomenting antagonism among different sects and ideological entities (Ahmad & Farooq, 2023). Those campaigns are usually conducted on social media services such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter (now X) and TikTok, where user-generated content is spread with little policing. The discourse upon these is usually very emotional, sensational, and catered to confirm existing beliefs. This is what makes fake news so dangerous as a tool to influence public opinion and perception. The 2022 floods in Pakistan, for example, were flooded with fake videos and fake content of government responses and political blame (Shahzad & Abbasi, 2023).

The difference between fake news and other forms of misinformation is that it is produced intentionally. It is, after all, one thing to spread a rumors or an accident, the fake news is supposedly a deliberate untruth, a lie even, with the purpose of misleading, deceiving or provoking. In linguistic terms, these texts usually use rhetorical tropes, buzz words and structural ambivalence to persuade the readers. Such a comic speech act does not play any part in making the story more credible in itself, but it makes the story more believable by creating (ilo popping) linguistic features used for mind manipulating the audience. Forensic linguistics and the investigation of language as evidence offer one of the most useful and important methods to detect, investigate, and analyze these patterns of language use. Methodologies like discourse analysis, pragmatic inference, authorship attribution and corpus linguistics can help scholars and investigators to separate the linguistic signs of deception and manipulation (Coulthard & Johnson, 2017; Grant, 2022).

There is not much work on the intersection of fake news, and forensic linguistics in Pakistan. There are already studies about the effect of disinformation in media, but none focus on the language structures behind these phenomena. This void is most pronounced in the lack of linguistic analysis in studies on politically or religiously motivated disinformation. Forensic linguistics has potential implications not just for academia, but for legality and regulation as well, with linguistic evidence submitted in courts of law for cases involving cybercrime and defamation, or in the investigation of counter-terrorism initiatives. Considering the growing challenges of hate speech, religious intolerance and political polarization in Pakistan, there is an imperative to include forensic linguistic perspectives into the larger conversations about media integrity and information ethics (Khan & Jamil, 2022).

The reaction to fake news from the Pakistani government has been contentious and politically charged. Efforts by the country's chief regulatory authorities on the issue of misinformation, including the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulator Authority (PEMRA) and the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), have also been deemed to be politically motivated and non-transparent. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016 has also reportedly been used to tackle fake news; however the vague nature of the language and wide scope of PECA has led to misuse, as well as violated freedom of expression (Zulfiqar, 2023). In such a context, forensic linguistic analysis is an objective and empirically-grounded method for assessing the veracity of disinformation allegations, promoting more equitable decisions and policy.

The involvement of social media influencers, political parties or even the state actors adds more complexity to the problem. Instead, organized disinformation campaigns have been reported during election periods, protest movements and geopolitical events. For instance in the 2018 general elections, several fake news pieces flooded the social media claiming fake turnout stats,

morphed images of contestants and fake political endorsements (Raza & Saeed, 2022). Aspects of language used in these messages – e.g. the use of modal diction for certainty ('must,' 'definitely'), pair opposition ('us vs. them') and a high amount of personal pronouns in constructing in-group and out-group dynamics – can be examined to reveal ideological positioning and strategic framing. These characteristics not only suggest intent, but reveal the target audience's cognitive weaknesses.

The worldwide escalation of AI tools and deep fake technologies further complicates things. These days disinformation is not limited to just text information, and we must analyze audio-visual information as well, which is sometimes 'multi-modal forensic analysis'. In Pakistan, deep fake videos have been used to defame public figures, discredit journalists and stir up protests. Linguistic analysis of accompanying captions, hash tags, and comments can help to identify CIB and anomalies in textual markers, such as abrupt changes in vocabulary or syntactic style, that are indicative of bot-generated or one person impersonating another (Nisar et al., 2023).

Moreover, being a country where there is a lot of cultural and lingual diversity, Pakistan faces obstacles in determining and addressing disinformation. Pakistan is a multilingual country with Urdu, English, Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Baloch, and other regional languages being widely spoken. The left and right's diametric positions differ widely on issues of language – and fake news content frequently plays to these linguistic schisms with messages that are written to appeal to certain ethnic or linguistic communities. This hyper-targeted disinformation aggravates regional discrepancies and can result in localised violence. Multilingual analyses form an integral part of forensic linguistic approaches in order to incorporate the subtleties of such material. Bilingual code-switching, lexical borrowing and idioms act as linguistic finger prints on disinformation texts (Ali & Baig, 2023) and rhetorical devices that permeate these texts (Geana, 2021).

This research utilizes a forensic linguistic model to unpack what fake news and disinformation look like in the digital sphere of Pakistan. Discourse-based, corpus-driven and pragmatic research is combined to detect linguistic patterns and discursive strategies which are invariant across fake news. Fake news has undermined the role of generic tools in the fight against the fake news. The investigation is also supposed to analyze how these linguistic characteristics are used in the sociopolitical dimension to produce an impact over public opinion. Based on corpus analysis of case studies derived from contemporary Pakistani political, religious, and crisis stories, this study advances the analysis of the linguistic mechanics of disinformation, and proposes corrective measures in the form of legal, educational, and technological interventions.

The need to address fake news is also driven by its panoptic impact in the long run. Beyond any immediate political or social impact, prolonged exposure to disinformation undermines public confidence in bona fide news and breeds cynicism and echo chambers that impair democratic discourse. In Pakistan, where literacy rates differ considerably and critical media literacy is not taught largely, the susceptibility to fake news is still quite high. In this perspective, forensic linguistics could have a significant impact by offering media literacy tools that inform the public about linguistic signs of disinformation, thus promoting an aware citizenry (Farooq & Zubair, 2024).

In short, the correlation between fake news, disinformation and forensic linguistics is a promising area of inquiry, especially in Pakistan, where political instability, media fragmentation and linguistic diversity converge. Though it's a complex issue, and while the linguistic dimension is only one among many, linguistic analysis provides a necessary lens to make sense both of how

and what is happening with strategies of deceit, manipulation, and division. This paper aims to fill this gap by using forensic linguistic approach in a current and urgent topic, and in the end, to be able to provide not only theoretical but also practical solutions.

1.1 Research Objectives

This paper aims to:

- Analyze linguistic and rhetorical patterns in selected fake news texts.
- Understand how language choices contribute to the spread and believability of disinformation.
- Provide forensic linguistic insights to support detection and mitigation strategies.

1.2 Research Questions

This study addresses the following questions:

- What linguistic features are commonly found in fake news and disinformation in the Pakistani context?
- How is language used to manipulate, deceive, or impact public opinion?
- What implications do these findings have for media regulation and public policy?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term *fake news* broadly refers to fabricated or misleading information presented as legitimate news, often intended to deceive or manipulate audiences (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). *Disinformation*, more specifically, involves the deliberate creation and dissemination of false information with the intent to mislead (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). In the Pakistani context, disinformation is frequently weaponized during election cycles, communal conflicts, and periods of national crisis (Zaheer, 2020). Social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and WhatsApp have become fertile grounds for such content due to their viral potential and limited regulation.

Linguists have increasingly examined the language of fake news through the lens of pragmatics, converse analysis, and stylistics. Studies (e.g., Rubin et al., 2016) show that fake news articles often employ emotionally charged vocabulary, repetition, and appeals to authority. Lexical density, ambiguity, and nominalizations are also typical markers used to obscure agency and exaggerate credibility (Fairclough, 1995). Such strategies influence readers' interpretation, making falsehoods appear more plausible.

In forensic linguistics, these analyses help in determining authorship, identifying intent, and distinguishing authentic texts from manipulated ones. Coulthard and Johnson (2007) emphasize that forensic linguistics not only serves the courtroom but also extends to analyzing deception in digital media, including fake news.

Forensic linguistics has traditionally been applied to legal texts, police interviews, threat letters, and courtroom discourse. However, its application has evolved to include digital content analysis, especially with the rise of cybercrime (McMenamin, 2002; Olsson, 2008). Tiersma and Solan (2012) argue that forensic linguistic tools can expose inconsistencies in online language use, such as sudden stylistic shifts, syntactic anomalies, or manipulative discourse markers.

In Pakistan, the forensic linguistic approach remains underutilized in digital forensics. Although agencies such as the FIA's Cyber Crime Wing occasionally handle digital misinformation cases, there is no systematic linguistic framework to investigate or prosecute disinformation effectively. Research on media discourse in Pakistan (Yousaf & Sheikh, 2021) shows that linguistic manipulation is often used to support ideological agendas. During the 2018 general elections,

several disinformation campaigns were documented targeting both political figures and the electoral process. Studies by Soch Fact Check and Digital Rights Foundation (2022) identified recurring patterns such as image manipulation, false attributions, and fabricated statistics in viral posts. However, most analyses remain descriptive and lack a forensic linguistic foundation. Moreover, Urdu-language disinformation often employs indirectness and rhetorical tropes like metaphor and irony, making detection even more complex. Few studies have explored how such linguistic features contribute to the perceived credibility of fake news in Pakistan's multilingual environment.

The low media literacy rate in Pakistan amplifies the effect of disinformation. Most people accept whatever the news tells them without questioning the news source, its writer or the words used. There is a belief that English is important while Urdu represents the national passion (Rehman, 1996). A formal style of disinformation in English may be accepted, but Urdu content generally relies on feelings to gain attention. This relationship must be understood for a deeper analysis in forensics.

In Pakistan there is much attention paid towards fake news but yet, there is a

- A lack of empirical studies analyzing fake news linguistically;
- No application of forensic linguistic techniques in identifying deception or manipulation;
- Limited understanding of how language shapes public belief and digital behavior.

The current study focuses to fill these gaps by conducting a forensic linguistic analysis of selected fake news samples in Pakistan, focusing on both English and Urdu content.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This forensic linguistic study is based on principles of discourse analysis, pragmatics and stylistics. We seek to understand ways fake news and disinformation in Pakistan make use of language and how such language affects those who consume it. Researchers use both exploration and interpretation to detect ways language is used in everyday materials.

3.2 Data Collection

Data were collected from two primary sources: (1) fact-checking archives from credible Pakistani organizations such as Soch Fact Check, Digital Rights Foundation, and AFP Pakistan Fact Check, and (2) publicly available social media posts (e.g., from Facebook, Twitter/X, and WhatsApp forwards) that were later confirmed as false or misleading. The selection was based on a purposive sampling method, targeting texts that had wide digital circulation (based on shares/retweets/views), were confirmed by independent bodies to be false, and covered sensitive domains such as politics, religion, health (especially COVID-19), and national security. A total of 30 fake news items were selected: 15 in English and 15 in Urdu. These texts ranged from short social media posts (50–150 words) to long-form articles (400–800 words).

3.3 Analytical Framework

The study uses a triangulated framework combining:

A. Forensic Stylistics

To examine:

- Lexical choice and repetition
- Use of modal verbs(e.g., “ must, ” “ may, ” “ can ”) to express certainty or enterprise
- Syntactic manipulation (e.g., passive voice to obscure agency)

B. Discourse Analysis

To uncover:

- Thematic patterns (e.g., conspiracy, patriotism, fear)
- Ideological stances
- Persuasive and emotive appeals

C. Pragmatic Markers

To study:

- Implicature and presupposition
- Vague attributions (e.g., “sources say,” “experts believe”)
- Use of hedging or exaggeration

D. Comparative Analysis

For this study the researchers conducted contrastive analysis between:

- English and Urdu disinformation
- Politically motivated vs. socially motivated content

3.4 Tools and Ethical Considerations

Manual and interpretive, analysis was made through statistical tools like **AntConc** and **NVivo**.

- Keyword frequency analysis
- Collocation patterns
- Concordance viewing

3.5 Limitations

The study focused solely on text-based fake news, and did not include memes, images or videos with doctored audio. A few idiomatic or context-specific Urdu words and phrases were difficult to translate; in-depth attention was given to the context in which they occurred. The truthiness of classification (fake) was up to fact-checking organizations, which could be subject to their own limitations and biases.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

In this section, we demonstrate how the forensic linguistic methodology outlined above can be applied to selected texts of fake news, in terms of lexical, syntactic, pragmatic and discursive. The results are structured around the recurring linguistic techniques with specific examples from the dataset; focusing on the fake news in both English and Urdu.

4.1 Lexical Features: Emotionally Charged and Sensational Language

Emotionally loaded language: Words in the fake news stories (which comprised both English and Urdu text) were fraught with emotion and triggered feelings of anger, fear and nationalism

Example 1 (In English, Political domain):

“Shocking disclosure Pakistani PM involved in secret addresses with adversaries of the state!”

Words such as “shocking,” “secret talks” and “enemies of the state” are chosen to provoke fear and mistrust. Hyperbolic adjectives (e.g., “massive fraud,” “deadly virus,” “immoral attack”) were used repeatedly and intentionally to drive up arousal.

Example 2 (Urdu, religious domain):

"اسلام دشمن عناصر نے ایک بار پھر ہمارے مقدس جذبات کو لٹکا رہے"

(Translation: “Anti-Islamic forces have once again attacked our sacred sentiments.”)

Words such as “اسلام دشمن عناصر” (anti-Islamic forces) and “مقدس جذبات” (sacred sentiments) disclose a tactical use of sensitive and ideologically stimulating terms directed at provocative anger among religious spectators.

4.2 Syntactic Features: Passive Voice and Nominalization

Passive constructions technique is often used for fake news content to obscure agency, a classic strategy in deceptive writing.

Example 3 (English):

"It has been reported in a leading newspaper that vaccines of Corona virus contain injurious substances."

The agent who reported this news is abandoned, flagging responsibility. Likewise, nominalizations turning verbs into nouns were used to abstract or generalize claims.

Example 4 (Urdu):

"یہ انکشاف ایک غیر ملکی رپورٹ میں کیا گیا ہے"

(Translation: "This revelation has been made in a foreign report.")

The syntactic vagueness here functions to give a false sense of legitimacy while avoiding direct attribution.

4.3 Pragmatic Markers: Hedges, Presuppositions, and Vague Sources

A hallmark of disinformation is the **strategic use of vague authority**, often expressed through hedges or unspecified sources.

Example 5 (English):

"Many experts believe the virus was man-made."

- Who are these experts?
- Where are they cited?

Such vague expressions lend credibility without factual grounding. Pragmatic presuppositions—statements that assume the truth of a proposition—also subtly reinforce misinformation.

Example 6 (Urdu):

"یہ ثابت ہو چکا ہے کہ ووٹنگ مشینوں میں چھیڑ چھاڑ ہوئی ہے"

(Translation: "It has been proven that tampering occurred in voting machines.")

The phrase “ثابت ہو چکا ہے” (has been proven) presupposes truth without offering evidence, preempting skepticism.

4.4 Rhetorical Structures: Binary Framing and Polarization

Many texts used binary oppositions (e.g., “us vs. them,” “patriots vs. traitors”) to polarize public opinion.

Example 7 (Political, English):

"Only true Pakistanis will reject this foreign agenda. The rest are traitors."

Such rhetorical framing invokes nationalism while delegitimizing dissent. In Urdu, similar patterns emerged with even stronger affective appeal.

Example 8 (Urdu, sectarian content):

"جو ہمارے عقیدے کے ساتھ نہیں وہ دین کا دشمن ہے"

(Translation: "Those not aligned with our belief are enemies of faith.")

This tactic not only simplifies complex issues but also fuels division and conflict.

4.5 Repetition and Alliteration for Persuasion

Disinformation texts often relied on **repetition** and **sound-based features** like alliteration or rhyme to create memorability and rhetorical strength.

Example 9 (English, COVID-related):

"Mask madness, vaccine villains, and lockdown lies!"

The alliteration (repetition of initial sounds) increases recall and emotional impact.

Example 10 (Urdu):

جھوٹ، جادو اور جنگ کا کھیل"

(Translation: "A game of lies, magic, and war!")

The rhythmic structure enhances virility and appeals to auditory memory.

4.6 Contrastive Observations: English vs. Urdu Fake News

Feature	English Fake News	Urdu Fake News
Tone	Formal, authoritative	Emotional, religious, communal
Source Attribution	"Experts say", "Reports suggest"	"غیر ملکی ایجنسی", "مصدقہ زرائع"
Manipulation Focus	Political, health-related	Religious, political, national security
Linguistic Tactics	Passive voice, modality, statistics	Religious idioms, metaphor, emotional tone

This difference indicates that how language and ideology interconnect with culture and literacy levels to pay the way of disinformation is constructed and consumed.

4.7 Discursive Themes Identified

Three dominant themes emerged:

1. **Distrust in Authority:**

The present study aimed at delegitimizing political institutions, journalists, or health experts.

2. **Moral Panic and Nationalism:**

Many texts used overstated moral language to provoke panic and draw partisan lines.

3. **Conspiracy and External Threats:**

Persistent references to "foreign hands" or "Zionist agendas" powered conspiracy narratives.

5. DISCUSSION

Looking at fake news in Pakistan, we can see that language is used to convince and manipulate people. The paper reveals the various forensic linguistic methods used by disinformation in Pakistan to influence public opinion, support certain beliefs and hide the truth.

Using hazy phrases, descriptions and strong emotions is a planned choice. These are well thought out ways to use the reader's belief in the validity of the author. The claim is consistent with

Coulthard and Johnson's (2007) belief that we can find deception in language by analyzing how it is spoken rather than by studying its words directly.

It is common to find "It has been reported" or "experts say" in English-language disinformation which is like the way false confessions and altered testimony are presented. The use of religious meanings and emotional language allow the Urdu speaker to disguise their lies as something morally significant.

The difference between English and Urdu in disinformation shows that there are deeper and stronger language hierarchies within Pakistani society. Fake news often uses English which is often seen as an elite language, when it targets readers from large cities. The influence here is based on the subtle use of statistics, medical terms and a formal manner of speaking.

Because Urdu is easy for most people to relate to, it is the language often used in texts that appeal to people's beliefs and religious feelings. Spells and doctrines from Urdu's traditions, along with some sayings and principles based on morality, ensure that the work resonates with many of its fans.

Due to this division, Rehman (1996) explains that Pakistanis view different languages as more or less trustworthy, emotionally appealing and properly used.

The language commonly found in fake news, indicating opposition between in-group and out-group members, agrees with van Dijk's (2006) argument. The strategy puts the country at great risk as religious, sectarian and ethnic differences in Pakistan can lead to violence very fast.

Making everything black and white in ethical terms, fake news discourages people from thinking about the detail and makes them sleep with other members of their group. They silence those who disapprove, present disagreement as a form of disloyalty and link sweetening propaganda to patriotism. It is noteworthy that this tactic links to moral panic theory, making people more likely to support police and government using fears.

It is also interesting to note that language is specifically shaped to help something go viral. The strong presence of rhyme, alliteration and vivid wording in fake news stories makes them simple to recall and very effective. These stylistic touches play a big role in the sharing process, making it quick for most users on popular platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook since they usually don't look into the claims first.

This fits with Wardle and Derakhshan's view (2017) that manipulated information spreads faster than its refutation, because it excites feelings but not the calculating mind. In forensic analysis, these fake news stories usually show signs of being modified and analysts can detect this.

This study contributes to the nascent field of forensic linguistics in Pakistan by demonstrating how linguistic analysis can assist in identifying deceptive discourse in the digital public sphere. The findings suggest that forensic linguistics should be integrated into:

- Cybercrime investigations
- Media literacy education
- Digital content regulation

Currently, Pakistan's cybercrime and legal systems rely on digital forensics (e.g., IP tracking) without analyzing the language of the content. This leaves a significant blind spot in efforts to curb disinformation. A forensic linguistic toolkit—incorporating stylistic analysis, authorship profiling, and discourse analysis—can greatly enhance content moderation and evidence evaluation.

The linguistic strategies used in Pakistani fake news reveal an alarming pattern of emotional manipulation. By targeting communal identities, faith systems, and political ideologies,

disinformation erodes public trust in institutions and intensifies polarization. In a country already grappling with misinformation-induced violence (e.g., blasphemy accusations, mob lynchings), the stakes are not merely academic—they are deeply human.

Therefore, there is a strong ethical imperative for linguists, educators, and regulators to understand and intervene in the discursive construction of disinformation.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has investigated the linguistic architecture of fake news and disinformation in Pakistan through the lens of forensic linguistics. By analyzing authentic fake news texts in both English and Urdu, the research identified a range of linguistic, rhetorical, and pragmatic strategies that are systematically employed to deceive, manipulate, and polarize public opinion.

Key findings include:

- The strategic use of passive voice, vague attributions, and emotionally charged vocabulary to obscure truth and create the illusion of credibility.
- Clear distinctions between English-language fake news, which tends to appear authoritative and fact-based, and Urdu-language disinformation, which often relies on emotional, religious, and nationalistic appeals.
- The presence of binary oppositions, rhetorical exaggeration, and ideological framing that reinforce tribalism, misinformation, and mistrust.
- Evidence of linguistic engineering for virality, including repetition, rhyme, and alliteration to ensure maximum public reach.

From a forensic linguistic standpoint, fake news is not just misinformation—it is deliberately constructed discourse, using language as a weapon to exploit social fault lines and cognitive biases. In the Pakistani context, this becomes especially dangerous given the socio-political instability, religious sensitivities, and limited media literacy across large segments of the population.

This study contributes to the growing body of work that positions language as central to the forensic investigation of digital crimes, highlighting the need for greater integration of linguistic expertise into both academic and regulatory frameworks in Pakistan.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this forensic linguistic investigation, several actionable recommendations are proposed:

A. Integrate Forensic Linguistics into Cybercrime Investigation Units

- i. Law enforcement agencies, particularly the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), should collaborate with forensic linguists to analyze the textual content of disinformation.
- ii. A linguistic profiling system can help identify common stylistic markers of known disinformation networks.

B. Develop a National Forensic Linguistic Corpus for Disinformation

- i. A digitized, annotated database of fake news samples (in Urdu and English) should be developed for researchers, law enforcement, and journalists.
- ii. This corpus would allow for pattern recognition, stylometric analysis, and comparative studies.

C. Launch Media Literacy Programs Focused on Language Awareness

- i. Schools and universities should integrate language awareness modules into digital literacy curricula, teaching students how linguistic choices manipulate perception.

- ii. These modules can include case studies of fake news analyzed in this research, showing how grammar and vocabulary influence credibility.

D. Promote Collaboration between Linguists, Tech Platforms, and Fact-Checkers

- i. Forensic linguists should work with social media companies (e.g., Meta, X) and local fact-checkers to train algorithms on detecting manipulative language patterns common in Urdu and English.
- ii. Regular workshops and roundtables can facilitate knowledge-sharing across sectors.

E. Encourage Policy Reforms Based on Linguistic Evidence

- i. Content regulation bodies like PEMRA should incorporate linguistic analysis in their evaluation of complaints related to misinformation.
- ii. Laws targeting disinformation must differentiate between opinion, satire, and maliciously deceptive language—a distinction that forensic linguists are uniquely qualified to help make.

F. Future Research Directions

- i. A larger, multilingual study involving regional languages (e.g., Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi) is needed to understand how fake news operates beyond Urdu and English.
- ii. Further research should explore multimodal disinformation (e.g., fake news in memes and videos) using combined linguistic and visual semiotic tools.
- iii. Longitudinal studies could track how disinformation strategies evolve during key political or national events (e.g., elections, pandemics, or civil unrest).

Fake news is not just a technological or political issue—it is a linguistic phenomenon that thrives on exploiting the cognitive and cultural defaults of its audience. In Pakistan, where the written and spoken word holds immense power—be it through sermons, news tickers, or viral social media messages—understanding how language is used to deceive is both urgent and essential. By bringing forensic linguistic scrutiny into the heart of disinformation analysis, we move closer to a future where misinformation is not only detected and debunked, but also prevented through awareness, education, and linguistic vigilance.

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