

## A Critical Discourse Analysis of Mainstream News Headlines Covering the Panama Verdict in Pakistan

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### Abstract

*This study presents an analysis of newspaper's headlines from critical discourse analysis of the newspaper about the Panama verdict. The examination of the issue of power struggle amongst state institutions has been a highly contested topic among linguists worldwide in recent decades. The Panama leaks controversy triggered a power struggle between the Supreme Court and the government at the time, ultimately leading to the disqualification of the Prime Minister. The entire matter was extensively covered by the Pakistani print media. The judgement of the Panama case was officially declared on the 28th of July, 2017. The study investigates the narratives of different newspapers from different print media including Urdu, Sindhi and English media sources by using Olowe (1993) model of analysis and Vaidik's (2013) approach of surface structure analysis and linguistic analysis of news headlines. In this regard, 6 different newspapers of Pakistan were selected including Sindhi, Urdu, and English to investigate the ideologies framed in news headlines about "Panama verdict pronounced by Supreme Court of Pakistan on 21/14/2017. The study's findings suggest that the issue is portrayed as a power struggle between dominating institutional authorities using specific linguistic strategies, such as metaphors, metonymic expressions, modality, passivation, and nominalization, in an ideological manner.*

**Keywords:** Panama verdict, Ideologies, Pro-government, Anti-government, Impartial feelings.

### Introduction:

The discussion around ideologically biased language in journalistic articles pertains to the exertion of power in shaping public opinion, which is controlled by entities that prioritise their own gains and interests. When discussing media discourses, it is widely acknowledged that they are inherently ideological and serve as reflections of the prevailing public power dynamics. The notion of language exerts a significant impact on various aspects of an individual's existence (Abreu, 2015). The profound significance of linguistic interaction and its various manifestations in communication significantly influence opinions development. Furthermore, language exhibits various characteristics, such as the ability to convey emotions or provide solace at times of mourning (Ahmed, Yousaf, & Habib, 2018). According to Iqbal and Hussain (2017), it is apparent that the news articles presented in newspapers are not simply spontaneous occurrences, but rather deliberately constructed to promote a specific perspective. It is a commonly seen phenomenon that some parties and organisations possess ownership of media groups, resulting in these specific organisations prioritising the protection of the interests of their affiliated entities (Pavel, 2010). In countries such as Pakistan, influential political factions

exert their influence on the public media, with some even possessing their own media outlets that exclusively disseminate news in a manner that aligns with their political objectives. Hence, journalists employ diverse methods to attribute news to the broader public (Karamat, Saleem, & Arshad, 2020). From a functional perspective, text linguistics can be seen as an explanatory phenomenon, contrasting with the traditional model of language which emphasises interpretation. In the former, the analysis of a text aims to reveal and articulate its intended meaning, while the latter focuses on understanding the meaning of a specific text. Consequently, the deconstruction of texts to identify agents assists analysts in uncovering the implicit interpretations and biases present in media discourses.

The purpose of this study was to examine the media discourse in which the Panama leaks were portrayed in prominent national newspapers between October 1st, 2016 and January 31st, 2017. The Panama case continued to be a prominent subject of discussion in both national and international media during the specified time frame.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study aims to develop an understanding about media discourse within the framework of a momentous political occurrence and its impact on the formation of public opinion and political discourse. This study has the potential to offer valuable insights on the phenomenon of media biases, polarization, and the impact of media framing on societal and political dynamics within the context of Pakistan. Moreover, the discovered results may have significant ramifications for the field of media ethics, responsible journalism practices, and the advancement of transparent and accountable reporting within democratic societies.

### **Research Questions**

1. How different ideologies are framed in different newspapers carrying the same news item.  
How far ideologies of different media agencies differ with each other on single news item.

### **Literature Review**

This section of the paper provides an in-depth examination of all the relevant research conducted on this topic in the past. It comprehensively explores the existing body of knowledge by delving into previous studies, summarizing their methodologies, key findings, and contributions to the field. (Khokhar et al., 2018; Maitlo et al., 2022; Soomro et al., (2023; Kalhoro et al., 2023; Maitlo et al., 2024).

### **Panama Verdict**

Pakistan has had persistent challenges in achieving political stability and addressing governance difficulties over the course of its history (Kazmi, Kerio & Lashari, 2020). Since its establishment in 1947, Pakistan has experienced a recurring shift between military and civilian types of governance. Pakistan has consistently grappled with a dearth of financial resources in order to address its diverse array of social, political, economic growth (Niazi, 2022; Baloch et al., 2023). The deficiency in public education and the prevalence of dishonesty among a significant portion of politicians have contributed to the challenging political landscape in Pakistan (Siraj & Waheed, 2019).

The Panama leaks was a significant data breach from the offshore business Mossack Fonseca, based in Panama. Various individuals from different domains, such as politicians, celebrities, athletes, and judges, were also implicated in acts of corruption (Widdowson, 1998). This

incident brought attention to the much discussed and questionable realm of offshore entities. The event encompassed the identification of numerous political figures, and its economic, political, moral, and legal ramifications swiftly garnered international media coverage. Given the significant role that framing plays in shaping the perception and comprehension of an issue among the audience, it has become imperative to delve into the framing of the Panama leaks (Saleem & Siraj, 2019). The leaks have changed the political scenario in Pakistan particularly the exiting government faced the media trial and challenges for their existence and stability.

Approximately 200 journalists, 100 media organizations, and 80 countries actively engaged in the investigative process. The Panama leaks were comprised of an estimated 1.5 million papers. Data was gathered through many means, including electronic mail, photo files, PDF documents, and input from database experts. The chosen temporal scope for the research encompassed the period from the 1970s to the spring of 2016 (Specia, 2010). In the same way on May 5, 2017, a significant milestone was reached when the Supreme Court of Pakistan established a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) with six members, with Wajid Zia, the Additional Director of the Immigration department of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) of Pakistan, serving as its head.

The disclosure of the Panama Papers in 2016, which implicated three of Sharif's offspring in offshore financial holdings, generated significant public attention. The Sharif family's reports on the acquisition of assets held through offshore entities, which were characterized by vagueness and conflicting information, seems to have been deemed satisfactory by the regulatory authorities, despite the claims of corruption being dismissed as baseless. The investigative bodies in Pakistan, namely the Federal Bureau of Revenue (FBR), Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), were unable to effectively conduct investigations into the claims of corruption (Dsouza, 2017).

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

Opinions development through media discourse is one of the important techniques. The act of altering the audience's attitude and decisions on specific problems is considered to be a valuable form of discourse (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2009). Fairclough (1995) defines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as an interdisciplinary methodology that examines discourse and views language as a social practice. Scholars that operate under the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) contend that social practices, both linguistic and non-linguistic, are mutually constitutive. Their primary objective is to examine the ways in which power dynamics within society are built and strengthened via the utilization of language (Fairclough, 1995).

Critical Discourse Analysis is an emerging field for media research which has given different lenses to look into the text beyond its surface structure meaning. Language is no longer seen as merely reflecting our reality, but as central to creating reality (Taiwo, 2004). A text or any news may have different cultural or ideological assumptions for manipulating the meaning for desired audience. Newspapers are particularly known to lead in the initiation of discourse on the national issues by picking on statements or reactions of prominent national figures (ibid). In newspapers, Headlines receive major focus in reading because people in this ultra-busy society don't find much leisure time to read the whole newspaper. These headlines manifest all ideological, cultural, and social assumptions in stories and keeping in view following is the analysis of said above elements to explore different headlines of same story with different ideologies respectively.

The primary objective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is to elucidate the inherent linkages between discourse practises, social practises, and social structures. These links, which may not be readily apparent to individuals without specialised knowledge, are the focal point of CDA (Sheyholislami, 2001). The perception of language has evolved beyond its traditional role of mirroring external reality. Human language and its lexis are not only just words with meaning but there is a social and political power behind each word or sentence. Language is woven with ideologies that media agencies, institutes or individuals attach to it.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis of Printed Papers**

Newspapers are seen the most significant vehicles of carrying discourse about statements of politics and politicians of any country. Editors frame ideologies in discourse in a very wise manner that the discourse conveys its purpose of what readers want to read. Newspaper editors try to build up the ideologies of what is talked about and in which manner (Henry & Tentor 2002 as cited in Taiwo). Therefore, newspapers are fundamental way of power imposition in society where just headlines can carry ideology of agency rather than to read the full story about any event. Headlines became key focus of readers while they hand in any newspaper. According to Sheyholislami (2001) themes and topics are realized in the headlines and lead paragraphs. Dijk (1988) is of the view that headlines depict the unity of discourse and are a source of information which is easily memorized by the reader. Hence, CDA works as to unfold the latent meanings behind text and uncover the ideologies behind each segment of news and headline acts as whole summary of news report.

### **Newspapers Headlines**

News headlines are considered to be representation of main social, political and cultural ideologies of any region or agency. People are more attracted towards headlines than the whole story report published in newspapers. Their impact is likely to be more upon the readers due to certain linguistic features which make them memorable and effective (Develotee & Rechniewski, 2001). Because there is an effective impact with choice of diction, syntactical structure and semantic relationship that serve the readers in a meaningful way that readers get communicated with whole summary of news story and it lasts forever in their mind. There are some other different etymological gadgets utilized as a part of news features as Olowe (1993) has recognized, to frame ideologies implicitly. That includes thematicization, passivization, presupposition and nominalization.

This study is the critical discourse analysis of news headlines of different newspapers about Panama Verdict. Therefore, the study investigates different ideologies of headlines of different newspapers showing one single story of Panama Verdict. The present study used a multidisciplinary approach known as critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine newspaper headlines. The results of this study will hold significant relevance as an exploratory examination of the ideological attributes exhibited by newspapers. Moreover, the discovered results will serve as a foundational resource for discourse analysis within language departments. In addition, they can also serve the purpose of providing recommendations for improving students' reading proficiency. Moreover, the outcomes of this study will serve as a valuable resource for English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors, providing them with guidance in shaping their instructional approach to teaching reading skills, particularly with regard to the application of Discourse Analysis.

The underlying premise of these studies is that the ideologies held by authors or reporters can be revealed via careful reading, comprehension, and systematic analysis. In this study, we utilised the Discourse Analysis Approach to examine newspaper headlines from a range of newspapers representing different communities. However, our analysis is constrained by a restricted sample size of English, Urdu, and Sindhi newspapers, which restricts our ability to examine regional political beliefs.

### **Method and Procedure**

The study uses qualitative method to analyse the Critical discourse analysis of selected newspapers. The data has been collected through 6 different newspapers for investigation. The criteria behind selecting the newspapers was to select two most circulated newspapers in three languages particularly in English, Sindhi and Urdu. There is two Sindhi leading newspaper Kawish and "Ibrat" in Sindhi language, two Urdu newspapers including Nawa-E-Waqt, and JANG in Urdu language and two English newspapers including The Dawn, and The Nation" in English language comprising on six total in numbers. The purpose of this research is to investigate how same story line in headlines is framed differently in different newspaper by different media agencies to mainly shape their ideologies and throw lasting effect over readers and to get attraction of readers with sense of only newspaper providing right information. This research will also unfold the regional politics of country that shapes ideologies too in newspapers.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Classification of News Headlines**

##### **Plain Headlines**

In plain headlines, social events are described in a way that it seems plain headlines, but they carry implicit ideology of editors.

##### ***PM stays for now (The Nation, 21<sup>st</sup> April,2017)***

In this news item, the editor exhibits Prime minister's position that court has declared Nawaz Sharif to stay with his designation but gave no clear victory in Panama case. The editor does not discuss the further investigation or the formation of JIT as ordered by apex court nor giving counter argument by opposition leaders. It carries plain information for supporters.

##### ***Wazir-e-Azam bachgye (Jang 21<sup>st</sup> of April,2017)***

This Urdu leading newspaper clearly states that the apex court has set Prime Minister free to go and charged with no allegations made against him. He is safe now as if he has won the battle. The editor discusses Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister that clearly again suggests that it is pro-government media agency and does not mention details as apex court ordered formation of JIT for further investigation in Panama matter.

##### ***Supreme Court gives reprieve to Sharif, but no clean chit (Dawn 21<sup>st</sup> April,2017)***

This English leading newspaper is widely read across Pakistan. The media agency discusses Panama issue as temporary relief to PM and personalised his name as Nawaz than his chair. In one way this media agency implicitly declares prime minister as accused as if he is found guilty in his charges made against him by opposition leaders. Editor again doesn't report the further developments like formation of JIT and its report submission within 2 months. Hence editor's role is neutral in his ideologies.

- “*Na Naa ahel qaraar dino vayo an na aajo*” *Supreme court Nawaz sharif khilaaf ilzaaman g jaach laae JIT thaahin jo hokum daee chadyo (Daily Kawish, 21<sup>st</sup> April,2017)*
- “*Neither ineligible nor exempted*” *Supreme Court ordered to form JIT to probe into allegation made against Nawaz sharif.* This sindhi news media also clearly gives plain information about panama verdict. It’s a kind of speech headline as Supreme Court words are framed in speech quotes. Editor of this news agency has played neither pro-government nor anti-government role but gave expression of neutral ideology. He personalised Prime minister with his name Nawaz Sharif.
- “*Nawaz sharif naa-ehal naahe*” *Supreme court panama case men money trail g jaach laae JIT qaaim karan g hidaayat kre chaddi (Ibrat, 21<sup>st</sup> April,2017)*
- *Nawaz Sharif is not ineligible. Supreme court has ordered to form JIT to investigate money trail in panama case.*

Here the news is produced by another leading sindhi newspaper of sindh about panama verdict. In this plain headline, it can be seen that editor clearly represents prime minister with his name Nawaz sharif than his chair and says that he has not been declared guilty of allegation but supreme court asked for further investigation by forming JIT.

### **Headlines with Pointers**

In such type of headlines, news carries certain pointers which further elaborate it. Such headlines carry two parts. First part carries such words which make readers informed about what to follow next. Such markers represent editors’ political inclination towards any political party.

- *Panama Case: Nawaz Sharif uhde par barqaraar,JITbnegi, 2 maah men report talab(Naway-e-waqt 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2017)*

In this news headline the editors gave comprehensive details regarding panama verdict in headline. Editor represented Nawaz Sharif with his name than with his designation. Editor also mentioned the formation of JIT and time duration of its report submission in apex court. Here Agency is hidden who passed these orders.

### **Linguistic Features of Headlines in Presenting Ideologies**

There are certain linguistic features of headlines to identify ideologies that include Topicalization, Passivization, information, evaluation and judgements in news items. Topicalization

Topicalization is a significant element of news headlines and serves as true depiction of ideology of news editors. There are certain words in headline which signify editors ideology.

- PM stays for now (*The Nation, 21<sup>st</sup> April,2017*)
- Wazir-e-Azam bachgye (*Jang 21<sup>st</sup> of April,2017*)

- Panama Case: Nawaz Sharif uhde par barqaraar,JIT bnegi, 2 maah men report talab. (Naway-e-waqt 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2017)
- “Nawaz sharif naa-ehal naahe” Supreme court panama case men money trail g jaach laae JIT qaaim karan g hidaayat kre chaddi (Ibrat, 21<sup>st</sup> April,2017)
- Nawaz Sharif is not ineligible. Supreme court has ordered to form JIT to investigate money trail in panama case.

### 1. Passivization

It is also another important feature in news headlines. Passivization shows omission of agency that develops curiosity among readers and readers make their assumption about agency. This linguistic feature also exhibits ideology of media agencies.

- Panama Case: Nawaz Sharif uhde par barqaraar,JITbnegi, 2 maah men report talab (Naway-e-waqt 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2017)

### 2. Information

Another important factor of news headlines is the information carried by the news. Headlines provide plain information carrying ideologies of news editors rather than short phrases.

- Panama Case: Nawaz Sharif uhde par barqaraar,JITbnegi, 2 maah men report talab (Naway-e-waqt 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2017)
- “Nawaz sharif naa-ehal naahe” Supreme court panama case men money trail g jaach laae JIT qaaim karan g hidaayat kre chaddi (Ibrat, 21<sup>st</sup> April,2017)
- “Nawaz Sharif is not ineligible” Supreme Court has ordered to form JIT to investigate money trail in panama case. “Na Naa ahel qaraar dino vayo an na aajo” Supreme court Nawaz sharif khilaaf ilzaaman g jaach laae JIT thaahinjo hokum daee chadyo (Daily Kawish, 21<sup>st</sup> april,2017)
- “Neither ineligible nor exempted” Supreme Court ordered to form JIT to probe into allegation made against Nawaz sharif.

### 3. Evaluations and Judgements

In this analysis, the editor makes peculiar choice of diction to get readers’ attention. Such diction enables reader to read full story out of curiosity. The editor gives his own ideologically framed evaluation as verdict.

- Wazir-e-Azam bachgye (Jang 21<sup>st</sup> of April,2017)
- PM stays for now (The Nation, 21<sup>st</sup> April,2017)

### Discussion

In the field of Critical discourse analysis, the investigation revealed that how ideologies are framed by editors implicitly in news headlines. Though seemingly headlines appear to be plain text but carry hidden ideologies of news agencies regarding any news. Thus study revealed that how Panama verdict news is interpreted in different newspapers differently by many news agencies regionally particularly sindhi media agencies and nationally. There were pro-government, anti-government and impartial behaviours detected in news headlines. There were two sindhi newspapers “Daily Kawish and Ibrat” which had impartial ideological expression towards panama verdict and published their news headline accordingly. Likewise, three other

newspapers that include “The Nation”, “Jung” and “Nawa- e-waqt” had given coverage to panama verdict with pro-government manner. Lastly, only the “DAWN” newspaper seems to be having anti-government attitude towards panama verdict.

## Conclusion

The present study undertook a Critical Discourse Analysis of the Panama Leaks, focusing on the court trial of the former Prime Minister (Muhammad Nawaz Sharif) and his family in the Panama case as reported by the print media in Pakistan. The analysis was conducted through the lens of CDA and it was found that the news media has reported the content during the Panama Leaks, including conflict, public interest, responsibility, economic consequences, accountability and morality. The Urdu press provided greater coverage of Panama compared to the English press across all mentioned aspects. The analysis of prominent Urdu, English and Sindhi newspapers reveals that the prevailing frameworks employed in their coverage of the Panama issue were primarily the accountability, public interest and conflict of interest. However, while doing a comprehensive analysis, it was found that the Urdu and Sindhi main newspapers predominantly employed the public interest frame in their coverage of the Panama issue.

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