

## EUPHEMIZED/DYSPHEMIZED EXPRESSIONS AS POWER-SHIELD: A CRITIQUE OF SELECTED POLITICAL DISCOURSE

*Muhammad Akbar Khan  
Muhammad Ajmal Khurshid  
Nazir Ahmed Malik*

### ABSTRACT

*Language plays an important role with its variety of techniques in the attainment and sustenance of power. Euphemism is one such way in power related dimensions. The current paper is intended to critically unearth the use of euphemism and dysphemism in safeguarding power. The idea has been explored in the political autobiography titled “**In the Line of Fire (2006)**” by General Rtd. Pervez Musharraf under the heterogeneous paradigm of critical discourse analysis with its outlook towards politics, power, discrimination, inequality and exploitation. The ideas regarding the showing-off one’s positive face and highlighting others’ negative aspects have been exploited from Teun Van Dijk (1998) named as ideological square. These ideas have further been collaborated with the outlines on euphemistic expressions devised by Thomas et.al., (2004). During the critical analysis of the said discourse, it has been found out that euphemized expressions are used abundantly in implicit and explicit ways as power-shield along with some other objectives. The author has tried really hard to create mild effects of controversial issues related to his thoughts, policies and doings. These euphemistic expressions therefore serve the purpose to shield power and can also be viewed in other political discourse.*

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**Keywords:** Euphemism, Dysphemism, Critical Discourse Analysis, Ideological Square, Political Discourse.

### INTRODUCTION

The use of language or discourse is not merely communication of one’s feelings or ideas to others rather it goes beyond that. In many research studies, it has been indicated that language cannot be taken for granted as merely a communication tool rather than it is the most influential part of human life where they exploit it for many other purposes like influencing others’ minds to grab or sustain power (Khan, 2015). In this process, the importance of language comes to light. Many language theorists and scholars opine that the use of language never goes neutral rather it contains various aspects and elements – inherently found

in it – that can help out the speakers or writers to justify, rationalize or calm down the bad and offensive things to look as inoffensive and neutral ones. In this way, language is inherently political (Gee, 2015). The use of language contains various aspects and elements that help to fulfill the purpose. These elements are numberless but among these the use of pronouns, metaphors, similes, euphemism, dysphemism, parallel structures, the rule of three etc. are quite prominent (Simpson, 2010). In political discourses, these linguistic devices serve multiple purposes. One such aim revolves around power dimensions.

Pakistani political history of about seventy years has observed the practice of power by two different types i.e. civilian politicians and military dictators. They claimed to play their positive and constructive role in the development of the country but the conditions have worsened on sociological, political, economic and geographical fronts. For these worsened conditions, both political leaders and military generals seem responsible for their thoughts and deeds (Khan, 2012). They are criticized for their policies and actions. They seem busy all the time in defending them in different discourses i.e. political speeches, debates, interviews, books etc. They apply linguistic mechanism for the purpose. Euphemistic expressions may provide one such way-out for them by showing their offensive acts as inoffensive ones. In the current study, the researchers have given an extensive critical reading to one such prominent name in the Pakistani power corridors i.e. General Pervez Musharraf who took power after overthrowing the elected government of Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif in 1999 and continued till 2008. The selected discourse for the critiquing purpose is his political autobiography, “In the Line of Fire”.

#### **IN THE LINE OF FIRE**

“**In the Line of Fire**”, by General Pervez Musharraf was published in 2006 by Simon and Schuster, when the author was the president of Pakistan besides being the army chief. It consists of 352 pages, comprises six parts which are subdivided into thirty-two chapters along with an epilogue. The first part, “In the Beginning” deals with the early life of the author especially the migration of his family from India to newly established Islamic state, Pakistan in 1947 after the division of the sub-continent. In the second part, “Life in the Army”, he describes his ingress into the army besides the worse political, economic and social conditions of Pakistan, his becoming the army chief, and a description of the Kargil issue. Then the author moves to his conflict with the Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, the hijacking of his plane, and his “inevitable” takeover. The fourth part of the book coped with his endeavors regarding the

rebuilding of his nation concerning economic, political and educational fronts. The major issue which can be called a focal point, especially to attract the foreign audience, the terrorism, is undertaken in part five of the autobiography. It unleashes the commitment of the author to tackle terrorism, the successes and future plans against it. The last part entitled, “Pakistan at Home and Abroad”, sorts out the issues of nuclear proliferation and the negative role of Dr. Abdul Qadir Khan in the episode besides describing the enterprises in the fields of women’s emancipation, progress in social sector and his efforts to cope with the effects of the earthquake of 2005. The book ends at “the epilogue” in which General Musharraf gives his reflections and describes the strong role of fate in shaping his life and gives various examples to be a leader.

#### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Being an open system human language is infinite and holds the capacity of creativity and productivity (Varshney 1993; Aitchison, 2003; Chomsky, 1966). This attribute of human language bestows humans for constructing novelty, and makes them innovative for their societal endeavors. It can be (re)shaped and patterned according to the necessities and requirements from time to time. This feature of language has been exploited by human beings extensively for all types of purposes either negative or positive, according to the needs of individuals and norms of a given society. This facet of language also helps in rationalizing and modifying offensive and unpleasant acts and things into inoffensive and agreeable ones. Being a social practice, language is not just a tool of communicating one’s ideas or information to others rather it actively works at every level of a society. It rambles from smaller groups to larger ones; connects them; harmonizes and regularizes them. Thus it becomes such an essential part of a society that it involves and grips the issues which affect the lives of people in general. This socially consequential nature of language gives rise to the issues of ideology, power and domination which are the main essence of critical discourse analysis (Wodak, 2002:8).

In the modern world, the notion of power is related to politics that enables individuals – aspiring or striving for power and domination – to accomplish their motives. Language as an influential and consequential tool is employed frequently in power dynamics (Fairclough, 2015). Politicians seem to exploit it in their discourses i.e. debates, statements, speeches and interviews besides writing their autobiographies.

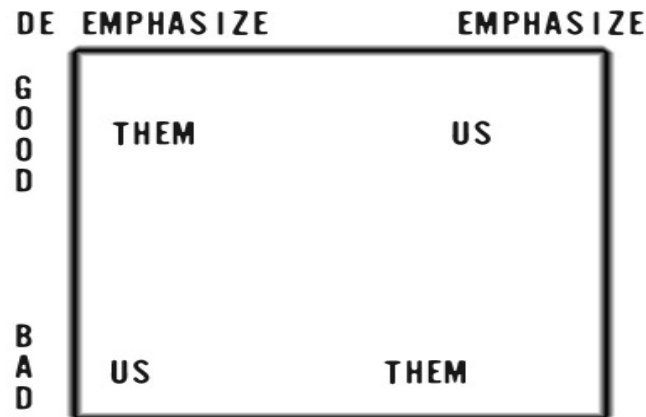
In the recent times, print and electronic media are considered major tools for political communications. Both advertisements and

representatives of political parties and leaders appear and present their party viewpoints. But these have their limitations related to both time and space. For television advertisement or debate shows are unable to provide the audience with a complete access to the views or ideologies of their politicians (Jamieson, 1988). In this regard, Pakistani media is an instance where political talk shows and exposition of other political activities like protests, meetings, rallies etc. are presented in abundance. Almost every talk show deals with the time to time issues or current affairs and provides arguments and counter arguments on public related issues where it becomes difficult for the viewers or listeners to reach at some concrete understanding and conclusion. Besides the issue of confusions, media has also its concerns regarding entertainment factor. Media owners, anchors, producers and editors etc. keep the element of entertainment in view so they cannot present the true and wider picture more often. Their premium motive is to attract audience rather than conveying the complete picture of politics which is treated there as a show business (Postman, 1985). Paid commercials and advertisements by the politicians cannot communicate the larger perspective to their audience for many limitations involved in the process (Jamieson, 1988). In this scenario, both politicians and the public need such type of a precise and extended medium which can help them to avoid the inadequacies of communication. Autobiography is much helpful in this regard (Gray, 1998). Gray (1998) considers political autobiography as the strongest tool employed by politicians for the objective of persuasion besides changing attitudes of the audience. As a matter of fact, political autobiography is a long narrative in which so many settings, characters, ideas etc. are presented.

The autobiographical discourse provides the writer with an opportunity of saying his/her viewpoints in detail without any interruption. The major objective of the politicians is power so they remain busy in every type of discourse for achieving and defending this objective (Fairclough, 2015).

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

As the current study focuses on exploration, discovery and its political implications in the selected discourse so it is qualitative in nature. It basically exploits ideas from critical discourse analysis as proposed by Teun van Dijk (1998). These ideas are sometimes named as ideological square which can be seen in the following image.



The Ideological Square

The above image is retrieved from Joshua's Digital Art Portfolio. This ideological square consists of the following four elements:

1. The good related to oneself is emphasized.
2. The good related to others is de-emphasized.
3. The bad related to oneself is de-emphasized.
4. The bad related to others is emphasized.

These endeavors are made by the political authors or speakers in their discourse very frequently. Euphemism and dysphemism can also be seen in this perspective because these are also intended for the same purpose. The current study is a critical evaluation of General Musharraf's political autobiography in the light of the above factors of ideological square which are joined with euphemistic expressions proposed by Thomas et al. (2004) and others.

#### EUPHEMISTIC/DYSPHEMISTIC EXPRESSIONS

Euphemism is non-literal use of language that makes use of inoffensive, placid and equivocal expressions to display or make something look more reasonable than it may otherwise be (Thomas *et.al.*, 2004). The politicians employ this technique in their political rhetoric to defend their in-defendable deeds or sayings and to conceal their imperfect and wicked feats (*ibid*). The basic purpose of euphemism is intended to conceal some undesirable act rather than reveal it (Steinmann & Keller, 1997). The opposite term for euphemism is dysphemism which presents

reasonable, inoffensive and equivocal things or ideas as unreasonable and offensive. This is done by the politicians to counter and disparage their opponents by showing defaming them. These ideas also coincide with the elements presented in ideological square by van Dijk (1998) and are joined together to address the following objectives and research questions.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the current study are:

1. To find out euphemized and dysphemized expressions in the selected political discourse i.e. "*In the Line of Fire*" by General Pervez Musharraf.
2. To discover the role of euphemisms and dysphemisms in the selected discourse keeping special concern on the Pakistani context.
3. To explore whether euphemistic and dysphemistic expressions serve the purpose as power-shield in the political discourse or not.

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study focuses on the following research questions:

1. Does General Pervez Musharraf use euphemistic/dysphemised expressions in "*In the line of Fire*"?
2. How do these euphemistic/dysphemised expressions play the role of power-shield in the selected political discourse?

In the following section, a critical analysis of "*In the Line of Fire*" by General Pervez Musharraf is done keeping in view the above ideas about ideological square, euphemism and dysphemism to arrive at the implied meanings underneath the author's discourse.

#### ANALYSIS OF EUPHEMISTIC EXPRESSIONS

In this section, a critical analysis of General Musharraf's political autobiography, "*In the Line of Fire*" is made through a very close reading of the said discourse. Wherever the euphemistic or dysphemistic expressions are found, they have been picked out randomly and analyzed under the model formerly outlined. The selected text is written in italics with page numbers. Some of the euphemistic expressions are provided in a list also.

*"I have lived a passionate life, perhaps an impetuous one in my early years...(p.xi)*

Here the author, General Musharraf, has used a euphemism “impetuous” for himself rather than “reckless” or “impulsive” to conceal his nastiness and to create mild and placid thinking of readers for himself. General Musharraf has actually grabbed power after ousting an elected government of Mr. Nawaz Sharif in 1999 through a military coup d'état. This was an action quite contrary to the constitution of the country. He remained in power for about nine years. In several of his discourses, he tried hard to defend his actions. Here on the very onset of his autobiography he tries to imply his actions as part of his daring and rigorous life where he never felt afraid of any consequences for the sake of general good.

*“Often I have been chastised for being too forthright and candid...”(p.xi)*

The word “chastised” is being used here for more offensive word “punished” to sustain his status of being an army chief, of being the chief executive and the supreme commander of the armed forces of his country. In various places of his life, the general was punished for the acts undesirable and offensive. He also implies himself as honest and straightforward person. The euphemistic expression further carries the stance and persona of the author towards rationalization of his unconstitutional acts.

#### **EUPHEMIZED EXPRESSIONS      REAL MEANINGS**

National Security (p.5)	protection of nation from danger
Conservative (p.9)	old fashioned.
Strategic Gain (p.45)	occupation over opponent's territory.
Counteroffensive (p.93)	strike back, the attack in response of some attack.
Strategic Assets (p.206)	the nuclear weapons.
Collateral Damage (p.332)	the unintended damage to either civilians lives or property.

*“Before the assassination attempt, I would stop with the normal traffic, stopping at every red light. Now things started changing. The police started blocking all traffic in either direction along the route that I was to take” (p.4).*

In this passage, the writer has euphemized the worse situation for the people on roads who have to bear the pain of long wait on traffic signals while some political figure is to pass there. He has used “the police” as subject and agent of the sentence to divert the responsibility from his shoulders to someone else. The use of the agent “the police”



shows as if he were not responsible for the troubles of the people who had to wait for long time. Thus this type of obscuring responsibility is a type of euphemistic expression which is used to mild the dictatorial effects in the political discourse.

*“The brigade later saw action against revolting tribesmen in Sui and Kohlu in Balochistan”* (p.58).

A mild word “action” is here being used to euphemize the effects of the killings and kidnappings of the people of Balochistan Province. This province has remained a disturbed place in Pakistan and different governments – political or marital – tried to tackle it differently. Sometimes political efforts have been made to settle the issue and sometimes history has seen military actions against the people of Balochistan working against the government and the country. The author has committed a very daring action against the tribesmen of Balochistan and one of their prominent leaders, Sardar Akbar Bugti, was killed along with many more. The agency regarding the action is obscured in this given statement when the author says “the brigade saw action” rather than says that he himself ordered that action against the Balochis.

*“The wretched man, who was to get five lashes, was in underpants and was tied to a wooden X frame with his arms and legs so firmly stretched out that he could not move a muscle....”* (p. 64).

Here General Musharraf gives an account of the atrocities of General Zia’s martial law to dysphemize Zia’s status. He uses this dysphemism to show and justify his own martial law which was not so strict and inhuman as compared to Zia’s. Such implication underlying the given discourse is an effort to show others’ actions as negative and the author’s as positive ones that is an effort to euphemize one’s undesirable deeds too. Van Dijk (2007) considers such efforts as the integral part of some political discourse.

*“Never in the history of Pakistan had we seen such a combination of the worst kind of governance – or rather, a nearly total lack of governance – along with corruption and the plunder of national wealth”* (p.78).

The General dysphemizes the role of civilian politicians by charging them for malpractices, corruption and “worst kind of governance”. With such deprecations of the politicians, he aims to rationalize and soften his ventures of coup by overthrowing an elected government and a long tenure of his unconstitutional regime. In a way, he is propagating the inevitability of his coup against the civilian government.



*"... and officeholders of one prime minister physically assault the supreme court of Pakistan" (p.78).*

*"... the errant Prime Minister Sharif."*

*"... then the prime minister got his party goons to storm the Supreme Court building while the court was in session" (p.82).*

*"Some felt that Nawaz Sharif was using his brute majority in the National Assembly" (p.83).*

*"An overhearing prime minister with a huge parliamentary majority, he was busy gathering all powers in his office.*

*"... his party goons physically attacked the Supreme court, ..."*

*"... he had bribed and coerced the judges" (p.85).*

One way of justifying and softening the effects of one's gloomy role is to point out the negative elements of the opposites (van dijk, 2002). Such efforts are a way of euphemizing one's unfavourable actions. In all the above statements, General Musharraf dysphemises the position of the elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif by blaming him of his majority and pointing out his mistakes, especially that of disgracing the Supreme Court, time and again. He ignores his achievements like nuclear testing, building of infrastructure of the country like roads etc. On the other hand, he repeats his fault of dishonoring the Supreme Court and the purpose behind all this is to prove the elected government as crooked and unethical to justify his coup.

*"I ordered FCNA to improve our defensive positions..." (p.91).*

This statement occurs in the chapter "The Kargil Conflict". The word "improve" is used by the writer in euphemized way for his advancing troops to capture the "enemy positions". Kargil is one of many controversial actions, the General committed. His version of the story is that there was nothing wrong in the Kargil conflict with India on his part rather the enemy, India, was responsible for the conflict. He only ordered for defensive position. "Improving defensive positions" is basically a euphemized expression which originally means "the order of the war".

*"On our side, our political leadership displayed a total lack of statesmanship and made no serious effort to rally the country (p.93)*

*"International pressure had a demoralizing effect on Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif."*

*"Yet in truth, it was no negotiation at all. Sharif agreed to an unconditional withdrawal" (p.95).*

These statements occur during the narrative of Kargil conflict with India. In all the above accounts, the dysphemizing factor for the political leaders in general and Nawaz Sharif in particular is dominant. He is of the

opinion that the Kargil war was in favour of Pakistan that could not be comprehended by the politicians and they could not stay in front of the international pressure against the war. This happened during 1999 when Nawaz Sharif was still in power as a prime minister. By defaming the elected prime minister, the author actually euphemizes his own unconstitutional act of overthrowing the Sharif government.

*“Air traffic control suggested that we head to Bombay, Oman in Muscat, Abu Dhabi, or Bandar Abbas in Iran...”*

*“Since India was the country closest to us, we would have no option but to go there... This would put us in the hands of our most dangerous enemy...”*

*“Sacking an army chief is one thing; but hijacking his plane and sending it to India is diabolical” (p.103)*

*“Over my dead body will you go to India” (p.104)*

*“...not allowing my plane to land, nearly letting it crash, and even suggesting that it go to India” (p.111)*

*“When Nawaz Sharif was sending my aircraft to India, was he not committing treason?” (p.128).*

All the above statements show almost the same idea that the plane on which the army chief was returning to Pakistan was hijacked by Nawaz Sharif and ordered not to land in Pakistan. But Musharraf tends to dysphemize the civilian government, particularly Sharif, by proclaiming repeatedly that he (the army chief) was being sent in the hands of India, the enemy. These statements also tend to evoke the emotions of the public against such an act of government and provide a justification for what he did to the government. The ideological square is again in action for dysphemizing the actions of the opponents which result in showing off the author's positive image.

*“... perhaps they were also fed up with Nawaz Sharif's misrule” (p.123)*

The General gives the account of the army takeover and tells the behaviour of the policemen, posted at the security of the prime minister, who surrendered before army men without any resistance. He implies the misconduct of the elected prime minister towards his subordinates. This is an attempt to dysphemize the elected prime minister to rationalize and euphemize his own endeavors of unconstitutional acts.

*“Ghous Ali Shah was the de facto chief minister of the province (Sindh). He had replaced the elected chief minister; this replacement was one in a long list of Nawaz Sharif's many undemocratic actions” (p.125)*

By highlighting the faults committed by the elected prime minister, the General is tending to dysphemize him. By pointing out the mistakes of the adversary, Musharraf creeps towards the legitimacy and rationalization of his acts.

*“All he needed now to effectively make him a civilian dictator was to become commander of the faithful.”*

*“With the 15<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment Nawaz Sharif wanted to usurp all power and become Ameer-ul-Momineen, commander of the faithful” (p.139)*

These are some more examples of the dysphemism in which the General intends to give rationale of his takeover by creating bad image of the democratic government.

## CONCLUSION

After a critical evaluation of the euphemistic and dysphemistic expressions found in *“In the Line of Fire”* by General Pervez Musharraf under the ideas presented by Teun van Dijk (2005) and Thomas *et.al.*, (2004), the following findings are arrived at:

- Background assumptions are identified in abundance for the purpose of rationalizing and justifying the exploits undertaken by the General in which he has been much criticized.
- The rhetorical tools like euphemism and dysphemism are also exploited at various places of his discourse by the author.
- Denunciation and dysphemism of the opposition especially the political parties and their leaders are the essential features of the General’s discourse in which he tries to defame them by bringing their weak points to light.
- On the other side, euphemistic expressions are used in abundance where the author needs to conceal his own actions.
- The elements of self-fondness and narcissism on the part of the author remain dominant essence of the whole writing.
- The ambitious nature of the General is quite evident in his autobiography.
- He focuses much on rationalizing and euphemizing his illegal activities like violation of the constitution and the overthrow of an elected government and considers these activities necessary for the survival of his country and the country men.
- The passions of patriotism are broadcasted most of the time.

- The author does not ignore the miseries of the common people and presents himself as the only judicious leader in Pakistan having the keys to them.
- In the light of the above findings, it can be concluded that the author has more often exploited the elements like euphemism and dysphemism from linguistic mechanism to create a good image for him on the fronts which are offensive and undesirable. This also gives the strong impression that language has very strong role in the lives of human beings. It never goes neutral in political discourse especially in the context of Pakistani politics.

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