
**POLITICAL DISCOURSE OF IMRAN KHAN SPEECHES IN COVID-19:
PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES**

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 pandemic still lurks among us for nearly a year now. Many countries have announced lockdowns and encouraged to maintain the social distancing to cease the spread of the disease. Announcements and speeches by the heads and representatives of governments are key to persuade people to obey the rules through minimizing travels, interactions and staying at home. However, some announcements have caused confusion and distress to people at the same time. Past studies related to political speeches have mainly focused on inauguration, presidential campaign, and legislative debates. Therefore, current study at hand aims to investigate the persuasive strategies employed by Imran Khan as Pakistan's prime minister in his COVID-19 speeches. It further explores that what types of persuasive strategies used, how these were used and whether the COVID-19 speeches were successful in achieving the required control over spread of virus among the people in the country. It is qualitative study which further focuses on descriptive and thematically analyses based on Wodak (2005) discursive strategies and Aristotle's three forms of rhetoric. Speeches and statements of Imran Khan were taken from two national newspapers of Pakistan; Dawn and The News, YouTube and Official Twitter account at the first and second stage of COVID-19. The findings encourage to contribute in the field of national political discourse in social practices and persuasive discourse in leadership specially during a pandemic of an infectious disease.

Keywords: COVID-19, political discourse, persuasive strategies, Imran khan, speeches

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 which is commonly known as coronavirus pandemic still lurks among us for a year now. The entire world is afraid of due to the sudden increased numbers of victims and death rate in second wave. Most of the countries have announced lockdown and travel ban to cease the spread of the disease. Different messages, announcements and speeches by the governments are key to persuade people to obey

the rules and regulations through efforts such as minimizing cross-border travel, staying at home, regularly cleaning hands, wearing masks and maintain public social distance of at least 1 meter from one person to another (WHO, 2020).

Initially, coronavirus was found in 2019 December in Wuhan, China with various symptoms, i.e., “fever, pneumonia, lung infection, cough, flu, and respiratory issues” (Hani et.al., 2020). The virus is not new and usually found in animals around the world until December 2019 when infected humans. World Health Organization (WHO) named the term COVID-19 which is an abbreviation of “Co (corona), Vi (virus) D (December) and 19 (2019)”. In December 2019, it affected only one city of China, Wuhan but immediately it spread all over the world (WHO, 2020). Still, medical experts and doctors are claiming that coronavirus is a type of flu but it is more dangerous than the conventional flu and spread easily from person to person due to coughing and sneezing, handshakes, hugs or any kind of the physical interaction (WHO, 2020). The disease has no safeguards yet, WHO (2020) suggesting some measuring precautions to avoid it because the vaccine is the last option in such viral diseases, usually it takes long time to get tested and approved. Using face masks, avoid social gathering, wearing gloves, using sanitizer, wash hands are some general and effective precautions to avoid from this disease.

Around the world the political announcements or speeches by leaders have caused confusions and distress among people due to the use of figurative, rhetoric and persuasive expressions. One of the reasons is the presidential elections (Minin-White, 2017), declaration of political declaration of political independence (EWB, 2019) as well during the incumbent of Donald Trump as the president of USA (PRC, 2019). On the other hand, poor countries like Pakistan, which is facing many challenges and problems and one of them is over population which is alarming to control on one hand and in addition to that lack of awareness, poverty difficult to convince people to stay at homes. Past studies mostly based on the political speeches by leaders focused on inauguration, presidential campaign, and legislative debates (Abdel-Moety, 2015). The current study depicts political discourse of the speeches of Imran Khan (IK) the prime minister of Pakistan regarding coronavirus. The purpose of this research is to examine how Imran

Khan as leader of the country employ different persuasive strategies in his COVID-19 speeches.

The following are the main research questions;

1. What are the most and preferred strategies used by Imran Khan as prime minister and how they differ from each other?
2. What are the persuasive strategies most and least used in the COVID-19 speeches? And why?

This study is significant to analysis the written discourse that plays an important role in the field of political discourse studies and applied linguistics. It hopes to contribute in the field of political discourse with different aspect in social practices and further in the field of persuasive discourse in national leadership especially during pandemic of a communicable disease. Moreover, to create awareness on the importance of these strategies and how it can avoid confusion and lead fear, so it is crucial to adopt effective strategies as politicians are more mindful on the correct usage of persuasive strategies to achieve the intended effect.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many Politian's around the world took serious steps towards coronavirus. The political tweets of Najib former prime minister of Malaysia and Modi Indian prime minister in the aspects of illocutionary speech acts such as directives and commissives, which are collaborated with Wodak's discursive strategies to perceive how language is systematically used to show commitment and future directions (Renugah, Paramasivam, & Tan, 2020). They further elaborate in research that the presence of two major speech acts was highlighted during the elections: commissives and directives. These two speech acts collaborated under the hood of discursive strategies of predication and perspectivation that empowered Najib and Modi to establish a strong contact with citizens while creating a sense of integrity and oneness.

Mother Teresa's speeches generally followed the pattern of Situation-Problem-Response-Evaluation. Hoey's (2011) SPRE model. The speeches demonstrated emotional and logical appeals. Discursive strategies such as nomination, predication and argumentation were used to advocate the moves, steps, topics and themes of Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) (Sharif, 2015).

A political speech is generally a special discourse which produce orally by a political leader or politician in front of viewers (Dedaic, 2006). Such type of speeches usually addresses to the audience initially to persuade rather than to provide the information. In history, to speak face to face was the single way of addressing the audience. The main purpose of such debates and speeches was to convince the people to accept the opinion of the speaker. Though, such types of speeches are no more acceptable in parliament houses or democratic situations. Nowadays the speaker is not only an orator but at the same time being as an individual representing a political party (Dedaic, 2006). The main objective in such political speeches is to persuade the audience. Persuasion is an effort to change the attitude of people through communication. The speaker uses the rhetorical devices and strong arguments to convince the audience with logic, appeal and emotions which support his/her aims.

Generally, discourse can be examined in many ways with numerous aims by setting, transcribing, and representation hitherto in addition amplification of how and why it functions. It is a part of a language with a applied approach and offers with every type of individual's mind and intellect (Rogers & Schaenen, 2014). Political discourse is the set of different discourse practices in society, classifying the different contestants of political discourse and making the certain range of themes of political communication (Sheigal, 1998). Van Dijk (1998) claims that political discourse is a "class of genres restricted by social sphere, and particularly by the sphere and particularly by the sphere of politics". It is the set of system which follow specific discourse i.e., political discourse and the political context. The language of political discourse is usually between two sides; one is the functionally conditioned discourse and another the jargon of social set with some specific ideology (Wodak, 1998). The political discourse has different categories, i.e., social and political context, individual perception that can be exposed through political discourse (Kirvalidze & Samnidze, 2016). Any text can be divided into language, interaction and communication.

According to van Dijk (1997) political discourse is an interdisciplinary methodology functioning at both levels micro and macro. Political discourse is an important standpoint that helps to identify the implicit and explicit meaning especially in a political

context (van Dijk, 2018). Political discourse is consisting on occasions at an “educational level, which understands specific convictions, personalities, philosophies and other things identified with it (Wodak, 2007, 2011). Furthermore, political discourse can be fused with different type of analysis, for instance, psychological sciences that reviews thinking (Kirvalidze & Samnidize, 2016).

According to Sarfo & Krampa (2013) that the implicit meanings using persuasive and linguistic patterns in social setup can be interpret. Leaders speeches have been analyzed by many researchers in past but mostly those were based on the political agenda, inauguration, presidential campaign, and legislative debates etc. This current study is innovative as it going to analyze the Imran Khan as a leader’s speeches on COVID-19 to persuade the mind of the people. In his speeches related to coronavirus, there are persuasive strategies. Researcher tries to analyze those speeches with the perspective of political discourse by employing the Wodak (2005) model. A few works are done on the speeches of Imran Khan on COVID-19 specially in political discourse. It further blends with the Aristotelian persuasive strategies which is found in his speeches to make them more effective. Aristotle’s Rhetorical Devices on the speeches of Imran Khan was applied and concluded that the leaders deliberately impart them applicably to influence the minds of the people through print, electronic or social media (Sibtain et.al., 2020).

FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Two theoretical frameworks are used in this study. First, Aristotle’s three forms of rhetoric which consists of;

- Ethos (Credibility)
- Logos (Logic)
- Pathos (Emotion)

**FIGURE-1**

While using ‘Ethos’ the speaker uses the ethical language based on morality to attract the attention of people. ‘Logos’ is used to prove the ideology correct and authentic through logic. ‘Pathos’ is the last rhetorical device which evoke the emotions of spectators through the speeches and people convince to the speech of the speaker (Ting, 2018).

The second framework is based on the Wodak (2005) five discursive strategies. First, ‘Referential Nomination’ is concerned with the speaker’s attempt to categorize people into in-group and out-group. Then comes “Predication”, such strategy refers to the intention of speakers to describe social actors negatively and positively. “Metaphorical expressions” are used in describing people. “Argumentation” strategy reveals the moments when speaker attempt to legitimize or justify the negative or positive acts they produce. “Perspectivation”, strategy describes about the attempt of a speaker to get his audience involved throughout a variety of techniques such as reporting, describing, narrating or quoting sentences. “Intensification”, last strategy reveals the moment when the speaker intends to produce utterances implicitly or explicitly.

It is qualitative research which further focuses on descriptive, textual and thematically analysis of the speeches of Imran Khan. The researcher collected the data in the form of speeches of Imran Khan during COVID-19 through random but purposive sampling technique. Mainly from both waves (first wave and current second wave) speeches of Imran Khan is the main data of the research. The texts of the speeches have been obtained from different medias (social,

electronic and print) online. Two national newspapers; Dawn and The News have been used for the written text, Imran Khan official Twitter account statement, and YouTube are the main corpus of the study. The dates to obtain the data are following:

- *The News* 30 March 2020 Imran Khan speech
- *Dawn* 17 March 2020
- *Dawn* 26 March 2020
- *Dawn* 4 October 2020
- *Dawn* 26 October 2020
- Twitter 4 October 2020
- You Tube 17 March 2020
- You Tube 22 March 2020

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The key aim of current analysis is to explain the discourse of Imran Khan as prime minister's speeches to the people of state to create the awareness about the COVID-19. According to van Dijk (1997) the main aim of discourse analysis is to find out the relationships of determination and formality that works between discursive events, lexis and practice and the relationships between broader social and political structures and relations. How he persuades the minds of nation with persuasive language and using language skills. Furthermore, according to Shah and Noreen (2018) he possesses strong integrated skills that can impose his agenda on the minds of audiences. Critical Discourse Studies also applies on political discourse which are written or spoken texts where language is considered a social practice (Wang, 2010).

PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES IN IMRAN KHAN SPEECHES

Ethos: In Ethos speaker uses the ethical language based on morality to attract the attention of people. Being Islamic state of Pakistan, leaders mostly start with the Holy words from Holy Quran to persuade the people with ethics by using language based on religion. Imran Khan uses this persuasive strategy in his speeches to start with the Holy verse from Quran. "Verse 05, Surah Fatihah, AlQuran) (Trans. Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help)". As a prime minister of the country, his first COVID-19 speech was on 17 March 2020 where he explained the nation about the reasons and

precautions from disease (Khan, 2020, March 17). Due to his strong language skills and persuade the minds of the people with using the words like “My Pakistanis” that affects the mind of individuals because the possessive pronoun shows his care for the people and illustrates affection that all are equal for him without showing any kind of discrimination.

“First of all, there is no reason to worry,” he told the nation, urging them to take precautions (Khan, 2020, March 17).

He was trying to motivate the nation using the in group of discursive strategy ‘Referential Nomination’ that whatever the critical situation comes, there is no need to become panic (Wodak, 2005). Language power play very significant role and can change the perception of the people and Imran Khan is using the same strategy.

Twenty five percent (25%) people of Pakistan living below the line of poverty, and the government cannot provide them food at home” (Khan, 2020, March 22).



FIGURE-2

Moreover, he explains the ethical and social barriers that were not allowed him to lockdown the state which is support the van Dijk (1997, 2000, 2005) words that to make radiant to the ideological opposition in political discourse, it is also important to investigate the context of the discourse as political background of the conflict. Khan also connects with the nation to telling them the true picture. He was further, making assure that the nation realizes their right to know and

at the same time referring to the developed countries implied strategies which is also another persuasive technique to compare his plans with the other world. Furthermore, Imran Khan approach for his people is based on the in-group categorization in 'referential nomination' by Wodak (2005) that one of the discursive strategies. He also emphasizes in his speeches by using ethical language to describe social actors negatively and positively. If people do not follow the SOP's they will suffer more which is 'predication and metaphorical expressions' according to Wodak (2005).

Logos: Logos is used to verify the ideology accurate and authentic through logic. Khan is also fulfilling in this persuasive strategy by emphasizing on numbers, quantifiable facts, authentic and relevant information.

"He said the national economy is recovering from a 'very difficult time' and so it was decided not to lock down cities as that could result in people 'dying from hunger'" (Khan, 2020, March 17).

"he 'comes' to address the nation to clarify that he has not proclaimed the full lockdown in the country, because the government could not afford to feed the nation and needy people at their homes" (Khan, 2020, March 22).

"I fear there might be another spike of coronavirus in cities where the rate of pollution increases in October and November" (Khan 2020, October 20).

"I fear that in these two months — October and November, cities like Faisalabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar and Gujranwala where there is more pollution, there might be a second spike in coronavirus cases. The cases are rising gradually, and we hope that they don't increase quickly; we are monitoring it" (Khan, 2020, October 20).

In the above sample texts, he gives the reason of his addressing to the state is important. The country's economic condition is poor and due to the implementation of lockdown people will die with hunger. He related the social context to make people understand the critical situation of the country. It also supports the Wodak (2005) discursive strategies of "perspectivation" where it describes about the attempt of a speaker to get his audience involved throughout a variety of techniques. Khan was giving the reasons that how the individuals

could detain themselves in “self-quarantine and why”. He was explaining to the nation that doing *self-quarantine* will not only stop of spreading the virus but also saving the other people’s life which is ‘argumentation’ strategy as he attempted to legitimize or justify the negative or positive acts they produced. Persuasive language is usually supportive to get the attention of individuals (Higgin & Walker, 2012).

Pathos: It is the last rhetorical device which arouse the emotions of audiences through the languages and people convince to the speech of the speaker (Ting, 2018). It further could relate with the Wodak discursive strategy of “intensification” which reveals the moment when the speaker intends to produce utterances implicitly or explicitly.

“My Pakistanis, 25% poor people, I am thinking for the poor and needy people, be in self quarantine, that is a trial from Allah, and I want to bring you in confidence” (Khan, 2020, March 22).

“Therefore, I appeal to world leaders, to UN secretary general (Antonio Guterres) and to heads of the financial institutions, to launch an initiative, an initiative that will give debt relief to developing countries to combat the coronavirus” (Khan, 2020, April 12).

During his speech, he uses all the persuasive strategies, to motive and realize the people about the pandemic situation. He further, persuade the minds of nation by using the emotive and emotional words in his addresses “to convince the people that they should accept and follow his ideology” regarding coronavirus. He subsequently, announced to introduce the smart lockdown in the country and requested UNO to give relief from the debt. He also said that other world organizations and leaders should help for the developing country in the current pandemic. Due to his persuasive words, he made UNO convinced for debt relaxation for his state (Khan, 2020, April 12). Therefore, the political discourse allows this research to point out the “hidden agenda in such political speeches through political context” (Dijk, 2000, Wodak, 2005).

CONCLUSION

Imran Khan as Prime Minister of Pakistan has a strong hold on emphasizing on the important factors of communication with people. Aristotle’s three forms of rhetorical clearly convey with the insight attitude of him as a leader of the state. The ‘ethos’ is smoothly

generated because the intactness of all the cultural, religious and societal ethic has observed and addressed. Secondly, 'pathos' is connected efficiently as he realizes the pain points and does enough to stress upon nation. Thirdly, 'logos' also performed very well because the arguments are logical and based on facts, numbers and certainty.

Imran Khan as Prime Minister of state has clear and strong integrated skills and qualities that he uses to influence the nation of state with reference to his strategies on COVID-19. With his insight vision he has created the responsiveness for his people about the cause and effect, indications, precautions, and certain solutions along with Cabinet. Discursive practice and persuasive strategies mentioned by Wodak (2005) are 'prediction, metaphorical expressions, argumentation, perspectivation and intensification' which are also fulfilling by him as he uses the language that the nations understand and feels that he is communicating their words for them. Hence, he pointed out towards the financial crisis faced during the pandemic and further recommends that nation must follow safety measures in order to safe from coronavirus. It is difficult for the country to provide the food and other requirements due to the lack of resources and resources. 12 April 2020 he further appealed the UNO for fund reliefs for the developing countries like Pakistan to help poor people. Hence, through the political discourse the hidden plan in Imran Khan as prime minister's speeches, specially by using the model by Wodak (2005) was fruitful. The findings encourage to contribute in the field of national political discourse in social practices and persuasive discourse in leadership specially during a pandemic of a communicable disease.

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