



FRAMING PEACE AND CONFLICT THROUGH EDITORIAL DISCOURSE: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF IDEOLOGICAL REPRESENTATIONS IN LEADING INDIAN AND PAKISTANI NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract

This study explores how leading newspapers in India and Pakistan frame issues of peace and conflict through editorial discourse. Editorials are critical opinion pieces that reflect a newspaper's ideological stance, thus serving as a rich site for uncovering subtle representations of national identity, conflict narratives, and peace-building efforts. The purpose of this research is to investigate how language is used ideologically in editorials from selected newspapers to construct particular views on Indo-Pak relations. Using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis, the study analyzes editorials from a purposive sample of English-language dailies such as The Hindu, Times of India, Dawn, and The News International from the time period 2025. The research aims to unearth how linguistic choices contribute to either polarizing or peace-promoting narratives. The expected outcome is a clearer understanding of how editorial discourse sustains or challenges conflict ideologies. The study has broader implications for conflict-sensitive journalism and can guide media literacy programs, peace education curricula, and inter-state dialogue initiatives. The study will combine qualitative textual analysis with interpretative frameworks to uncover discursive strategies like nominalization, presupposition, metaphor, and lexical choices. This CDA-driven inquiry contributes to the growing body of interdisciplinary research at the intersection of media studies, sociolinguistics, and peace and conflict studies.

Keywords: Fairclough, CDA, Ideology, Social, Discursive, Textual, Editorials, Indo-Pak, peace, conflict

Introduction

This research examines how prominent English-language newspapers in India and Pakistan frame peace and conflict in 2025 editorially, concentrating on linguistic strategies that either perpetuate conflict ideologies or facilitate peace-building narratives. Given that geopolitical tensions are often refracted and amplified through journalistic representations, a close reading of editorial discourse is strategically significant for understanding the construction and reproduction of collective



national identities and conflict positions. Scholars of media and diplomacy have increasingly turned their attention to the discursive contributions of newspapers to the Indo-Pak relationship. Thus far existing studies have tended to focus either on factual reporting or on overtly aggressive rhetoric, thereby neglecting the subtler, yet equally consequential subtleties of editorial discourse. The present study seeks to fill this empirical and theoretical gap by systematically examining editorial columns from four leading newspapers—The Times of India (later written as TTI) and The Hindu (later written as TH) on the Indian side, and Dawn and The News International (later written as TNI) on the Pakistani side—through a sustained Critical Discourse Analysis. The chosen temporal scope encompasses significant milestones, ranging from airstrikes to subsequent diplomatic rupture, thereby capturing the length and breadth of editorial reflections on peace overtures, military crises and the framing of the other as either a legitimate partner for dialogue or a perpetual adversary.

Further, the analysis foregrounds the discursive strategies that newspapers employ to construct national identity and foreign policy legitimacy as guided by the premise that discourse and power are inextricably intertwined. By following Fairclough's 3D Model, the study attends to the macro structure of editorial placement, the selection of argumentative strategies and rhetorical tropes, and lexical and stylistic choices that signal foregrounding and marginalization. Special attention is devoted to the categories of victimization, militarization, and civilizational discourse, as these have recurrently surfaced in both print cultures. The study highlights not only the convergences and divergences in their representations of the other, but also the ways in which prevailing political hegemonies on either side of the border inflect the editorial framing of ostensibly shared crises. As far as the contribution of the study is concerned, it is twofold. Empirically, it extends the CDA of South Asian political discourse by moving the focus from the spoken to the written genre of editorials and by treating the print cultures of India and Pakistan as an interconnected discursive field. Theoretically, it reinforces the claim that editorials operate as sites of ideologically infused common-sense while conditioning the parameters within which both policymakers and publics negotiate the ever-shifting terrain of bilateral relations. In short, the article argues that editorials are not mere comment on events; instead, they are instruments of diplomatic socialization that help constitute the very realities they purport to explain.

Significantly, the language they employ is irreducibly non-neutral, anchored in specific epistemological assumptions, power hierarchies, and historical legacies. Editorials can legitimize particular discourses while sidelining alternative voices, and this normalization is accomplished through rhetorical techniques such as metaphor, presupposition, selective lexis, and syntactic arrangement. A critical examination of these features permits the identification of the editorial voice as either a conduit of ideological hegemony or as a site of potential contestation. This approach enables a sophisticated examination of editorial material by engaging not only with surface meaning, but with the configurational choices that generate that meaning. By positioning language simultaneously as a reflective outcome of social processes and an active determinant of those processes, the model is particularly well-suited for scrutinizing commentary that navigates the fraught and politically laden field of Indo-Pak relations. Besides, the newspapers chosen for this analysis are both highly circulated and acknowledged for their editorial weight. Collectively, they embody a range of political biases and stylistic paradigms, rendering them suitable for mapping the heterogeneous conversation on Indo-Pak peace and conflict.



The queries are predicated on the dual proposition that discourse mirrors existing social formations while simultaneously participating in their ongoing production. Consequently, the manner in which editorial authors frame peace and conflict issues can materially influence reader comprehension and, in turn, the decisions of policymakers and wider publics. The study's contribution resides in its constructive interdisciplinarity, interfacing media studies, sociolinguistics, and peace and conflict scholarship. By directing attention to editorial discourse—a domain that remains comparatively underexamined within Indo-Pak media studies—it advances understanding of journalistic language's ideological efficacy. Furthermore, the inquiry highlights the heightened ethical obligations of editorial voices operating within conflict-sensitive environments. Previous research has primarily concentrated on news reporting and political discourse; editorials, however, frequently occupy a marginal position in such analyses, even while exerting considerable authority over national narratives and identity configurations.

Literature Review

Current literature review discusses the media's influence on Indo-Pak relations which is intensively documented, indicating that “journalistic output typically reproduces dominant national narratives and official policy lines” (Thussu, 2002, p. 28). Editorial pages conceived as sites of elevated opinion, function as instruments of ideology that delineate in-group and out-group identities, invariably casting the rival state as the “principal antagonistic force” (van Dijk, 1996, p. 34). Thus, this literature review is anchored in the interdisciplinary nexus of media discourse, peace and conflict studies, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It draws upon three interrelated bodies of scholarship: studies on media framing of Indo-Pak relations, analyses of the ideological underpinnings of editorial writing, and the implementation of Fairclough's three-dimensional framework.

Multiple comparative examinations reveal how the press in India and Pakistan persistently fashions antagonistic portraits of the adversary amid cyclical conflict. Siraj (2008) demonstrated that both national systems of journalism predominantly employ war-centric frames, cementing enemy archetypes and “reinvigorating the primacy of state-centred narratives” (Siraj, 2008, p. 10). Khan and Safdar (2010) further documented a pervasive practice of vilifying and delegitimizing the other's political top brass, a trend that “intensifies in the run-up to military confrontations and during their course” (Khan and Safdar, 2010, p. 131). Even within the intervals of purported diplomatic warming, the discourse remains marked by a notable reluctance to credit peace processes, instead “privileging a resilient nationalist lexicon” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 52).

In this regard scholars as Badshah, Kausar & Khan (2023) investigate ideological conflict in editorials on terrorism. The findings of this study indicate that “the editorial discourses of the two nations exhibit discernible discursive strategies that articulate the underlying ideological confrontation over the phenomenon of terrorism” (Badshah, Kausar & Khan, 2023, p. 999). By employing techniques of passivation, positive self-presentation, negative other-presentation, personalization, and metonymy, the Indian editorial treats the counter-terror operations as justified and effective; the Pakistani counterpart categorically rejects this framing, “thus intensifying the Us versus Them binary” (Badshah et al., 2023, p. 999). Language, deployed as both weapon and shield, was directed toward domestic constituencies as much as to the international audience, persuading each that its position alone was just. The Indian perspective, reiterated across editorial pages, defined Pakistan as the operator of an expansive terrorism franchise—both dispatching



militants across the Line of Control (LoC) and harboring incubators of violence on its own soil (Badshah et al., 2023, p.1008).

Similarly, Ahmed, Arshad and Yousaf (2021) examined the framing of Pak-India relations in the elite English press of both countries during the time-period of 2018. The analysis demonstrates that “the elite media of both Pakistan and India largely employed militarized frames when reporting on bilateral relations” (Ahmed, Arshad and Yousaf, 2021, p. 66). The Pakistani press produced a greater volume of reporting, across both conflict and conciliatory topics, than its Indian counterpart. Also, within the limited reporting grouped under peaceful frames, “the topic of ‘peace talks’ attracted noticeably more attention than any other” (Ahmed et al., 2021, p. 66)

Aaminah Hassan (2018) investigates the ideological formations embedded in the headlines of Pakistani news bulletins and the corresponding effects on audiences. Employing Fairclough’s model, her research disaggregates ideological signals in electronic media news headlines and conducts a comparative analysis of three Pakistani news networks. The examination of the headlines indicates that “they are permeated by divergent ideological positions and power dynamics” (Hassan, 2018, p.1). Audience feedback, in turn, evidences a widespread aversion to sensational, exaggerated, biased, and only partially informative headlines. The findings are intended to advance media literacy among both the public and regulatory bodies in Pakistan (Hassan, 2018, p.1).

Simultaneously, Farhad Safi, Bahire Efe Özad, Liaqat Iqbal (2020) seek to clarify the ways Indian press articulates the categories of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ during instances of geopolitical conflict. To examine the newspaper’s discursive interventions in such contexts, editorial content from the two most widely distributed Indian English-language papers is subjected to close reading informed by Teun van Dijk’s (1989) method of Critical Discourse Analysis. Results reveal “a persistent deployment of overtly nationalist and ideologized lexicon, marking ‘Us’ in heroic, moral, and cohesive terms and ‘Them’ in terms that conflate moral deficiency with physical and political fragility” (Safi, Özad and Iqbal, 2020, p. 743). The Indian nation-state, as represented in the texts, is framed as indomitable and surrounded by a constellation of supportive powers; conversely, the antagonist is depicted as “fragmented, diplomatically deserted, disingenuous, and, when not overtly terrorist, the incubator of terrorist proxies” (Safi et al., 2020, p. 743).

In this ecology, editorials acquire heightened significance, since they articulate a coordinated institutional voice and “routinely project hegemonic ideological registers” (Richardson, 2007, p. 13). Banerjee (2019) demonstrates that Indian editorial commentary typically tracks the government’s strategic discourse in the wake of cross-border crises, presenting the Indian state as a measured, restrained actor while designating Pakistan as the active, irrational threat (p. 45). Likewise, Niazi (2012) corroborates this by showing how Pakistani editorial boards mobilize a blend of Islamic historiography and anti-colonial rhetoric to vouchsafe hostility toward India, embedding these frames within a broader discourse of territorial sovereignty and national izzat (p. 141). Language sustains ideological imperatives through recurrent discursive operations. Metaphor, nominalization, and presupposition collaborate to create tacit significations that render certain ontologies self-evident (Reah, 2002, p. 56). Shabir et al. (2015) identify a cross-border pattern whereby editorials employ military-temporal lexemes, such as “surgical strike” and “betrayal,” to consign diplomatic overtures to futility and to cast hostilities as ontological givens



(p. 528). Such operations orient public consent and constrict the argumentative territory available to counter-narratives that center reconciliation and deliberation.

Similar views are given by Muhammad Wasim, Dr Khalid Ahmed and Dr Muhammad Asad Habib (2023) who analyzed the political narratives and discursive frameworks employed by both Islamabad and New Delhi at the time of Pulwama Attack. Islamabad maintained the legitimacy of its solidarity with Kashmiri constituents which is anchored in unresolved corpus of United Nations resolutions. The removal of the constitutional exceptions engrained in constitutional provisions 370 and 35A was affected by the passage of Presidential Order 273, which annulled the Kashmiris' erstwhile entitlement to a separate constitution, a distinct state flag, and a measure of internal autonomy. Here, "India failed to establish Islamabad's direct complicity, the existence of specific training facilities, or the physical presence of Jaish-e-Mohammed leader Masood Azhar on Pakistani soil" (Wasim, Ahmed and Habib, 2023, p. 108). This position was reiterated in remarks issued by Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj. Yet the narrative remains unsettled. New Delhi experienced strategic embarrassment in the Pulwama assault, but "remains determined to recalibrate its trajectory, sustaining the aspiration of regional primacy at Islamabad's expense" (Wasim, Ahmed and Habib, 2023, p.108).

Shema Bukhari and Dr Yosra Jarrar (2018) revealed the underlying mechanisms by which newspaper headlines operate. By analyzing the leading English-language dailies in India and Pakistan, the research establishes that, "at the semantic level, headlines not only reflect but actively disseminate ideological positions, conditioned by the affiliated news agencies or governmental narratives" (Bukhari and Jarrar, 2018, p. 25). The headlines simultaneously produce and reinforce hierarchical relations among key participants in the media-political nexus. The determination of an event's newsworthiness is thus no passive assignment; rather, "it is an editorially constructed foregrounding that serves to entrench the ideological framing in the audience's perception" (Bukhari and Jarrar, 2018, p. 25).

Thus, the present investigation extends that scholarship by situating the model within cross-border editorial discourse, with the specific objective of elucidating the linguistic and ideological framing of peace and conflict. Existing scholarship corroborates the ideological underpinnings of editorial discourse in molding Indo-Pakistani narratives. Despite this consensus, the micro-level rhetorical mechanisms whereby lexicon either fortifies or contests the durable conflict have not been thoroughly interrogated. The present investigation seeks to solve this shortcoming by employing a critical discourse analytical framework to scrutinize the rhetorical shaping of Indo-Pakistani relations in a representative corpus of editorial articles.

Research Questions

After establishment of a research gap this study draws its analysis on the basis of following research questions;

1. How do Indian and Pakistani editorials linguistically construct narratives of peace and conflict?
2. What discursive strategies are employed to represent Self and Other?
3. How does editorial discourse reflect the ideological positioning of newspapers?

Research Methodology

This study applies a qualitative research design informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate how editorial discourse in leading English-language newspapers from India and



Pakistan shapes accounts of peace and conflict. Drawing on Fairclough's (1995) Three-Dimensional Model, which offers a comprehensive lens by which to interrogate the ideological work of language in journalistic texts, focusing on the linguistic surface of the text, the discursive practices of its production and reception, and the broader socio-political field (Fairclough, 1995, p. 98). The qualitative CDA strategy is well-suited to illuminate the ideological architectures that undergird media discourse in prolonged conflict settings. CDA transcends mere text-centered analysis; it posits language as a socially embedded practice "that produces and reproduces power relations" (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 6). Editorial pieces occupy a pivotal position in this configuration, as they encode the official editorial stance of a publication and "frequently mirror prevailing national ideologies and institutional allegiances" (Richardson, 2007, p. 13). By subjecting these texts to CDA's protocols, this inquiry seeks to reveal the discursive maneuvers that either entrench antagonistic logics or open discursive space for cooperative interaction between India and Pakistan.

The data set consists of almost 20 editorials, 5 from each of four major English-language newspapers published in 2025. The newspapers were selected for their editorial reach, distinct political orientations and country-wide circulation. The year 2025 was designated for its contemporaneity and for allowing analysis of a confined temporal period. Editorials were identified on the basis of explicit reference to India-Pakistan relations, focusing on pivotal occurrences such as peace negotiations, border incidents, and formal diplomatic communications. This purposive sampling procedure ensures "both relevance to the research theme and analytical rigor" (Silverman, 2013, p. 145).

Theoretical Framework: Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

Analysis is anchored in Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis and proceeds through three interrelated stages:

Textual Analysis (Description):

At this stage, the examination concentrates on the following linguistic dimensions which are Lexical selection (e.g., terms such as "enemy," "ally," "aggression," "sovereignty"), Grammatical configurations (e.g., distribution of active and passive constructions, expressivity of modality) and Discursive maneuvers, including nominalization, metaphorical formulation, presupposition, and euphemism. Such linguistic configurations illuminate the ways in which editorial authors construct agency, assign blame, and confer legitimacy (Richardson, 2007, p. 64). Such elements disclose the newspapers' selective deployment of language to frame occurrences, allocate blame, and shape identities. For instance, the employment of the passive voice or nominalizing constructions tends to mask agency in accounts of violence, thereby subtly reifying "a status of victimhood or culpability" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 75). Lexical selections such as "terrorist," "martyr," or "aggressor," by contrast, convey an ideological inflection that belies their ostensible neutrality (Richardson, 2007, p. 47).

Discursive Practice (Interpretation):

This dimension interrogates the conditions under which editorial texts are authored, disseminated, and received. The analysis takes into account: the editorial norms and ideological predispositions of each publication; the socio-political milieu that envelops each editorial comment; and the web of intertextual citations, including references to official government declarations and to pertinent historical episodes. Such discursive practices elucidate the modalities through which editorial texts



engage both “institutional authority and the wider public sphere” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 78). They frequently leverage intertextual links—recurring motifs, entrenched narratives, or selective historical parallels—to consolidate national ideologies or to contest prevailing orthodoxy (Fairclough, 1995, p. 134). A critical reading of the production circuit, therefore, elucidates how authors curate, annotate, and orient content in accordance with state-sponsored narratives or prevailing media frames. Such interpretive labor must also factor in the intended readership and the degree of ideological consonance between the outlet and its constituency (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 18).

Social Practice (Explanation):

This analytical tier situates editorial discourse within augmented ideological and geopolitical frameworks, comprising: the long-standing postcolonial legacies and the sedimented nationalism in both India and Pakistan; the media’s instrumentalization in statecraft and public diplomacy; and “the conscious or tacit reproduction and contestation of prevailing conflict discourses” (van Dijk, 1998, p. 41). At the macro analytical plane, the social practice dimension grounds editorial discourse in the sedimented historical, political, and sociocultural milieu. This level assesses how overarching formations configure media representations. Within the context of Indo-Pak relations, editorial statements are sedimented in a protracted antagonism that has been curated by the historical fault lines of partition, successive military confrontations, and indeterminate territorial claims. Newspapers may therefore echo dominant ideological frames that ratify state practices or “subvert hegemony by articulating reconciliatory imperatives” (van Dijk, 1998, p. 45). This dimension thus discloses how editorial discourse circulates within, negotiates, or contests entrenched power formations through the vector of ideology and the politics of identity. By interlinking all three analytical strata, this inquiry elucidates how editorial discourse operates as a conduit for either the reproduction or the resistant reconfiguration of political ideologies pertinent to the Indo-Pak conflict and to the evolving discourses of peace-building.

Coding and Thematic Categorization

Editorials were thematically coded via both deductive (theory-driven) and inductive (data-driven) modes of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). Recurring themes and discursive patterns were discerned and assigned to categories including:

- “Us vs. Them” rhetoric
- Framing of peace processes
- Responsibility attribution
- Victimhood and heroism
- Militarized language vs. reconciliatory tone

The model thus facilitates the detection of editorial linguistic techniques that legitimize national subjectivities, deepen antipathy toward the other, or, conversely, promote pacific discourses. Through a systematic application of Fairclough’s triadic framework—textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice—this study interrogates editorial discourse as a site where representations of Indo-Pak peace and conflict are simultaneously reflected and constructed, thereby influencing public perceptions and informing political realities.

Results and Discussion

This section investigates how Indian and Pakistani editorials linguistically construct competing narratives of peace and conflict through a corpus of editorials published in 2025. The editorials



were retrieved from digital archives by purposive sampling, using terms such as “India-Pakistan conflict,” “peace talks,” “Kashmir issue,” and “diplomatic relations.” The analysis foregrounds lexical selection, syntactic patterns, metaphoric expression, and discursive framing, guided by Fairclough’s (1995) three-level model of analysis: the textual, the discursive, and the social.

Linguistic Construction of Peace and Conflict in Indo-Pak Editorials

Editorials from both countries deploy deliberate lexical choices that sustain dominant ideological positions. For example, the Times of India (March 2, 2025) and The Hindu (April 11, 2025) characterize Pakistan as a “haven for non-state actors” and a “repeat violator of the LoC,” encoding the image of Pakistan as the invariable aggressor. In contrast, Dawn (February 21, 2025) and The News International (April 2, 2025) depict Indian actions in Kashmir as “state terrorism” and “systemic repression,” framing India as the oppressor. Similarly, metaphorical formulations like “border shells conversing in the dialect of expired diplomacy” and “the ravine of blood and hush” unfold dramatic pictoriality, charging the commentary with pathos while calibrating public interpretation. Such figures of speech introduce an emblematic skirmish that transcends power balancing, encroaching upon the domains of collective honor and collective mourning.

The analytic commentary habitually retrieves collective memory and earlier confrontations to bolster prevailing ideological frameworks. TTI (January 14, 2025) deploys terms such as “Kargil-style treachery” and “fanning the 26/11 animus” to weave present incidents back into an inherited narrative of grievance. This intertextual web immobilizes mistrust in temporal sediment, implying that apparent approaches to reconciliation must falter upon the recurrence of an allegedly invariant cycle of treason. On the Pakistani side, TNI (February 3, 2025) reexamines the Babri Masjid demolition and the abrogation of Article 370 to reframe India’s present Kashmir doctrine as an uninterrupted sequence of Hindu nationalist telos. The practice thereby linguistically refigures Indian initiatives, reclassifying them not as occurrent policy recalibrations but as deliberate, chronologically expansive communal stratagems. Editorials systematically reflect allegiance to specific readerships. For instance, TH (May, 25, 2025) invokes “India’s global moral compass,” a formulation likely aimed at cosmopolitan, educated constituencies, while Dawn (March 30, 2025) reinforces Pakistan’s diplomatic narrative by citing UN resolutions and Organization of Islamic Cooperation communiqués.

According to 3D model social practice is evident in National Identity, Security Discourses, and Appeals for Peace which are set against the wider ideological milieu of nationalism and geopolitical rivalry, editorial discourses operate at a macro level. Indian commentary tends to render peace a contingent prospect: “peace is possible if terror is renounced” (TOI, April 7, 2025), thereby placing exclusive responsibility on Pakistan and reinforcing a sense of moral superiority and victimhood. Pakistani counterparts, by contrast, depict India as the aggressor and themselves as steadfast advocates of peace. On the other hand, Dawn declares: “Despite India’s provocations, Pakistan remains committed to dialogue,” thus accentuating a narrative of restraint and moral diplomacy. Nevertheless, even in the articulation of peace, national identity is salient: reconciliation is portrayed as desirable only if it does not compromise national sovereignty, especially regarding Kashmir. Each party employs contrasting lexical pairs e.g. “terror versus peace,” “dialogue versus denial,” and “truth versus propaganda” to delineate its ideological stance. Such oppositional terms condense elaborate diplomatic circumstances into rigid oppositions, thereby constraining the capacity for a more differentiated public comprehension.



Table 1. Linguistic Strategies Observed Across the Corpus

Linguistic Feature	Example from Editorial (2025)	Effect
Nominalization	“Ceasefire violations continue to destabilize the region.” (<i>TOI</i>)	Obscures agency, focuses on outcome rather than actor
Presupposition	“India’s rightful claim to Kashmir...” (<i>The Hindu</i>)	Assumes truth without argument
Metaphor	“Kashmir remains a ticking time bomb.” (<i>The News</i>)	Constructs urgency and danger
Modality	“Pakistan must dismantle terror networks...” (<i>TOI</i>)	Suggests obligation; prescriptive tone
Euphemism	“Security operations” for civilian crackdowns (<i>Dawn</i>)	Sanitizes violence
Foregrounding	Emphasis on diplomatic overtures by Pakistan (<i>Dawn, News</i>)	Builds a peace-seeking national image
Backgrounding	Limited mention of cross-border infiltration in Pakistani media	Avoids topics that challenge national narrative

The 2025 editorial output of Indian and Pakistani media operators continues to articulate long-standing national ideologies through discrete linguistic choices. Editors employ metaphor, presupposition, intertextual citation, and selective salience to portray the opposite state either as an imminent danger or as a recurrent violator, while simultaneously elevating their own government’s purportedly benevolent or reactive stance. Even discourses nominally endorsing reconciliation remain undergirded by preconditions anchored in strategic calculations and historical wounds. The study demonstrates that, although some publications intermittently encourage negotiation and restraint, they significantly contribute to the fragmentation of collective sentiment by consistently mobilizing ideologically saturated terminology. A nuanced grasp of these habitual patterns is therefore indispensable for the advancement of conflict-aware journalism and the cultivation of more constructive Indo-Pakistani exchange.

Discursive Strategies for Representing Self and Other in Indian and Pakistani Editorials

Indian and Pakistani newspapers elaborate narratives of Self and Other by means of varied discursive techniques. Utilizing Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis, the inquiry unfolds in three parts: Textual Analysis (Description) discusses Lexical Choices and Representation. At the level of language, the editorials disclose lexical polarization, syntactic manipulation, presupposition, metaphor, and nominalization, each of which contributes to the image of the Self as morally pristine and the Other as inherently violent or illegitimate. For lexical polarization, Indian newspapers recurrently employ terms such as “cross-border terrorism,” “surgical strikes,” and “diplomatic resilience” (*The Hindu*, Feb 15, 2025), presenting India as a victim compelled to retaliate. By contrast, Pakistani editorials invoke “Indian aggression,” “occupation of Kashmir,” and “human rights violations” (*Dawn*, March 12, 2025), depicting Pakistan as the champion of the vulnerable. Similarly, grammatical agency can be seen in Indian coverage, where the passive voice consistently masks accountability: “Militants were neutralized...” (*Times of India*, March 2, 2025) displaces subject-role responsibility away from



the Indian armed forces. Pakistani outlets, in contrast, employ the active voice: “Indian troops opened fire...” (The News International, April 2, 2025) decisively ascribe culpability to India’s military apparatus.

Presuppositions are also there such as “Despite Pakistan’s continued support for militancy...” embed blame imperceptibly, whereas Pakistani editorials employ metaphor: Kashmir is “bleeding” or is “a wound yet to heal,” activating sympathy and historical grievance in the recipient. These procedures exhibit Fairclough’s first level which says linguistic selections are consistently purposive, not contingent. They establish a polarized communicative field wherein the Self is attributed virtue and the Other as vice.

Second dimension of this model is discursive practice also known as Interpretation which talks about production, consumption and intertextuality. At the discursive-practice level, editorial texts are structured by newsroom protocols, embedded institutional ideologies, and a citational network, revealing how utterances are authored and consumed. Interdiscursive traces circulate within and across discourses, perpetuating the privileged reproduction of ideological hegemony. Intertextuality and recontextualization discuss that each polity recycles historical and institutional vocabularies to legitimize current actions. Indian editorials regularly invoke earlier assaults (e.g., 26/11, Pulwama) and perceived UN inertia to legitimize a robust posture: “History has taught India to be vigilant” (TOI, April 7, 2025). Pakistani counterparts cite UN Resolutions, the Partition’s collective memory, and RSS ideology to portray Indian measures as an unbroken historical subjugation (Dawn, February 28, 2025).

As far as editorial tone and voice is concerned, Indian outlets maintain a pragmatic-realist register underscoring sovereignty and regional obligation. Pakistani counterparts adopt a moral-humanitarian register, pressing for third-party intervention and universal justice. These tonal strategies participate in the broader discursive practice identified by Fairclough, in which editors and journalists repurpose established discourses and genres “to govern the settlement of meaning” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 134). They do not limit themselves to description rather they actively remodel the perceived reality for strategically delineated audiences.

Social practice at the structural level such as discursive regularities either consolidate or contest the prevailing ideological and institutional matrices of India and Pakistan. Editorials function not merely as isolated texts but as ideological instruments that sustain and, where possible, recalibrate the collective national consciousness. Similarly, reproduction of national ideologies is something on which Indian editorial commentary circulates a sovereign-nationalist imperative, portraying India as guardian of territorial integrity in an asymmetric rivalry with a aggressive neighbor. Such framing resonates with the Modi administration’s strategic autonomy and discipline of territoriality. The sovereign subject is rendered rational, democratic and calibrated, reaffirming India’s self-image as a responsible regional custodian. Whereas Pakistani editorial columns animate a martyrdom and protector motif, depicting the state as the avowed custodian of martyrdom, martyrdom nationalism and martyrdom. Such tropes ritually invoke the Islamic-nationalist imaginary while framing opposition to India’s territorial ambitions as a political and moral imperative.

Media also acts as a State Apparatus. Building on Fairclough’s observation of discourse as a strategic battleground, the press here operates as an ideological state apparatus, reproducing rather than merely reporting hegemonic rule. Newspapers perpetuate collective memory, authorize



state action, and cultivate affective stances toward the Other. This tertiary register illuminates the process whereby political interests are rendered natural and antagonistic identities are consolidated. Publications advocating reconciliation are both infrequent and relegated to the peripheries of editorial space, because their arguments contravene the prevailing, hegemonic scripts.

Table 2: Discursive Strategies for Representing Self and Other in Indian and Pakistani Editorials

Discursive Strategy	Indian Editorials (Self/Other)	Pakistani Editorials (Self/Other)	Theoretical Connection
Lexical Choices	Use of terms such as “ <i>surgical strike</i> ,” “ <i>cross-border terrorism</i> ,” “ <i>security operation</i> ” to frame India as rational and Pakistan as an aggressor.	Use of phrases like “ <i>Indian atrocities</i> ,” “ <i>illegal occupation</i> ,” “ <i>freedom struggle</i> ” to depict India as oppressive and Pakistan/Kashmiris as victims.	Fairclough (1995): Lexical framing as ideological structuring
Grammatical Structures	Passive constructions like “ <i>militants were neutralized</i> ” obscure agency and downplay violence by state actors.	Active constructions such as “ <i>Indian forces killed civilians</i> ” directly assign blame to the Indian state.	Syntactic form reflects ideological control and agency framing
Modality	Expressions such as “ <i>India must protect its citizens</i> ” and “ <i>Pakistan needs to be isolated</i> ” convey urgency and national duty.	Modal verbs like “ <i>India must be condemned</i> ” and “ <i>Kashmir should be liberated</i> ” emphasize moral obligation and ethical urgency.	Modality expresses moral and political stance
Presupposition	Presumes Pakistan as aggressor and terrorism sponsor without need for explicit justification.	Presumes Indian occupation and oppression in Kashmir as factual and unchallenged.	Ideological assumptions embedded in presupposed knowledge
Metaphors	Use of metaphors like “ <i>war on terror</i> ” and “ <i>defending sovereignty</i> ” to elevate national actions.	Metaphors such as “ <i>bleeding Kashmir</i> ” and “ <i>crushing boots of occupation</i> ” evoke emotional and moral resonance.	Metaphorical discourse enhances ideological affect
Pronouns/Actor Representation	Use of “ <i>we</i> ” to construct a unified	Use of “ <i>we</i> ” for oppressed Kashmiri/Pakistani victims;	Van Dijk (1998): Ingroup-



	national Self; “they” for the threatening or untrustworthy Other.	“they” as dehumanized aggressor (India).	outgroup polarization
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When situated within Fairclough’s triadic framework, the analysis shows that the construction of Self and Other in Indian and Pakistani editorial commentaries is saturated with ideology. Textually, lexical choices are calibrated to exalt the Self and to vilify the Other. In terms of discursive practice, the interplay of intertextual citation and editorial tone manipulates reader reception. Sociostructurally, the commentaries reinforce the dominant national ideology and solidify adversarial identities. Consequently, editorial discourse in both polities does not simply mirror underlying geopolitical tensions; it actively performs and perpetuates them. Each editorial is, in effect, a scripted political act in which national identity is perpetually rehearsed against a deliberately demonized Other.

Editorial Discourse Reflecting the Ideological Positioning of Newspapers

For instance, the selective deployment of the terms “cross-border terror” versus “militant operations” serves not only descriptive purposes but construct different moral universes around the same events. “The Hindu” consistently favors the former, imbuing its portrayals of Pakistani actions with greater moral illegitimacy, whereas Dawn prefers the latter, allowing for a framing of Pakistani agency that highlights resistance to occupation rather than aggression. Modality further sharpens ideological intent. The Times of India employs high modality imperatives urging “punishment” for “those responsible” after each cross-border attack, accentuating a state-centric agenda for revenge that overrides considerations of regional stability. The News International counteracts with hedged, subjunctive constructions that frame Indian reprisals as hypotheticals, encouraging the reader to imagine destructive consequences rather than prescribe punitive action. Grammatical Agency is equally revealing here. For example, Pakistani editorials frequently inject India with the agency of escalation through nominalization (“India’s failure to control escalation”) while Indian counterparts recast Pakistan as the originating subject through active voice (“Pakistan’s provocation triggered retaliation”). This redistribution of subject-verb-object hierarchies not only clarifies culpability but stabilizes the broader narrative of victimization that each state requires.

Finally, evaluative disqualification—attributive adjectives like “unprovoked” versus “provoked” or “timely” versus “disproportionate”—reifies ideological borders. Each editorial collectively employs these tropes to solidify the legitimacy of the state’s chosen policy, anticipating that the reader will internalize this legitimacy as a moral given rather than a contested position.

Beyond the textual layer, editorials function as sites of institutional rehearsal, revealing the internalized norms of each newspaper. Editorial independence is mythologized across the board, yet the observed synchronization of editorial tone with state policy announcements exposes a different reality. For instance, The Hindu deploys its intellectual prestige to translate the Ministry of External Affairs’ statements into normative arguments, subtly framing each diplomatic protest as a moral obligation rather than a negotiable position. This editorial approach simultaneously reinforces its own brand as a national conscience while licensing the state’s moves as authoritative in discursive terms. Conversely, The Times of India employs hyperbolic headlines and emotive



vocabulary that index a commercial imperative to amplify outrage. Editorials oscillate between populism and paternalism, admonishing the state for not avenging “250 martyrs” while recognizing the economic and diplomatic costs of war. Nevertheless, such ambivalence, while narrative-driven and partially tactical, stabilizes a commodified patriotic discourse that readers have come to expect of the brand.

On the other hand, Dawn and The News International inhabit a more hazardous discursive ecology. The former adheres to a professional code that privileges restraint, consistently prefacing critiques of the Pakistan Army with references to constitutionalism. By adopting this cautious frame, it enhances the legitimacy of its dissent while limiting consequences. The latter, in contrast, embraces a sensationalist tone, using the editorial page to recalibrate Saudi and Chinese diplomatic views when Pakistan assumes a defensive posture. Each headline is a calculated provocation, deliberately courting state surveillance while maintaining a claim to journalistic independence.

Often, social practice plays as national propaganda where editorials operate as ideological apparatuses embedded in the state’s long-term project of legitimacy manufacture. The India-Pakistan conflict, having transformed from a territorial dispute into a bi-national ideological contest, requires journalistic participation at each eruption. The Hindu’s editorials, threading references to the 1947, 1965, and 1971 wars through empirical critiques of Pakistan’s weaponization of Islam, construct a continuity thesis that presents India’s military doctrine as a defensive, civilizational necessity. This temporal framing disarticulates the state’s wars from contingent military decisions, recasting each action as the inevitable collapse of a regional status quo that India tried, but never could, to honor. In contrast, The Times of India speaks to a different target: the aspirational middle class. Its editorials frame each skirmish as a bodily attack on the lifestyle aspirations of its readers. By linking airline delays, rising gold prices, and stock fluctuations to military decisions, the editorial accomplishes a commercial imperative, fusing nationalism with consumer urgency, while imprinting a moral obligation to support retaliation.

While Dawn and The News International are compelled to navigate the more volatile legitimacy economy of a post-2008 Pakistan. The former invokes constitutionalism and the latter apocalyptic imagery of martyrs to root the conflict in domestic anemic governance rather than external provocation. Each strategy simultaneously manages state surveillance and popular outrage, deploying rival discursive tropes in a calculated oscillation that internalizes the conflict as a feature of governance rather than as an outcome of policy choice. In conclusion, editorial discourse in these four newspapers is an intricate calibration of lexical, institutional, and state-centric logics. Each layer reinforces the others so that readers are rarely conscious of the ideological machinery at work. Instead, they encounter a seamless narrative that presents the newspaper’s ideological positioning—whether centrist, populist, constitutionalist, or sensationalist—as the most reasonable interpretation of events.

Lexical Framing and Modality

Indian editorial commentaries consistently invoke expressions like “surgical strike,” “cross-border infiltration,” and “state-sponsored terrorism” (The Hindu, 12 Jan. 2025; Times of India, 10 Mar. 2025), thereby solidifying a discourse saturated with the ideologies of national security and a history of perpetual injury. These terms, seldom subjected to critique, circulate as self-evident axioms and thus realize “ideological control through presupposition” (Fairclough 1995, 112). In parallel, Pakistani outlets favor locutions such as “Indian atrocities,” “right to self-determination,”



and “illegal occupation” (Dawn, 15 Jan. 2025; The News International, 20 Feb. 2025), which yield a counter-discourse rooted in anti-imperial, Islamic, and pan-Kashmiri vectors of solidarity. The deployment of deontic modality exemplified by “India must be held accountable” projects a robust normative obligation, thereby positioning Pakistan as a moral agent engaged in the quest for transnational justice.

Similarly, grammatical constructions are used in editorials in India which frequently deploy passive voice to obscure accountability for state actions e.g., “militants were neutralized,” “measures were initiated to reduce tension”, thus attenuating the visibility of state violence. Conversely, Pakistani counterparts typically favor the active voice to foreground aggression (e.g., “Indian forces fired on protesters”), portraying the Indian state as the intentional, violent antagonist. Such syntactic preferences illustrate the ideological significance of grammatical form (Fairclough, 1995, p. 190).

Editorial Policy and Interdiscursivity

Within the discursive practice of editorial composition, the text reflects the institutional identity of the newspaper, shaped by ownership structures, editorial guidelines, and the demographic profile of its audience. The Hindu and Times of India commonly perform a pragmatic-centrist rhetoric, advocating for diplomacy, the bilateral framework, and India’s self-description as a judicious regional actor. Their editorial statements usually modulate critiques of Pakistan with reaffirmations of Indian democratic principles, aligning with a readership of urban, middle-class professionals who endorse the broad contours of mainstream foreign policy while seeking a restrained linguistic register. While Dawn and The News International, with their shared demographic of urban English speakers, nevertheless cultivate a distinctly oppositional or ideological stance, tending to scrutinize Indian policy and advocating forcefully for Kashmiri self-determination. Their leader-page commentary habitually weaves together legal, humanitarian, and Islamic ethical arguments, “embodying a discursive hybridization” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 36) that fuses liberal humanitarianism with a nationalist frame.

Furthermore, through their formulations, editorials actively place readers within particular ideological communities. Indian outlets represent their public as rational, vigilant, and loyal, reinforcing confidence in security agencies. Pakistani counterparts, in contrast, solicit their audiences as morally sensitized, cosmopolitan witnesses to suffering, especially in Kashmir. This represents, as Van Dijk (1998) demonstrates, a standard tactic of ingroup-outgroup demarcation, with the in-group exemplifying virtue and the out-group epitomizing threat. At the level of social practice, the discourse of editorials functions within wider ideological and power configurations, typically reinforcing dominant national narratives and suppressing or sidelining dissenting voices.

Reproduction of National Ideologies

Indian editorials typically reinforce the ideological frameworks of state nationalism, upholding state-centered discourses on sovereignty, territorial integrity, and strategic autonomy. Appeals for peace are habitually conditional—Pakistan must first “end terrorism” or “demonstrate sincerity.” Such conditionality signals a neoliberal-statist logic, aligning with India’s economic aspirations and security strategies articulated under BJP-led governance. Territorial questions receive legal and moral framing, ensuring that the rhetorical boundary itself underwrites the legitimacy of state actions. Pakistani counterparts, conversely, articulate their arguments from a post-colonial, religious-nationalist orientation, insisting that Pakistan’s Islamic identity compels it to project



itself as a moral agent. Editorials consistently position Kashmir as the crucible of that identity, depicting the state as a peace-seeking actor thwarted by Indian obstinacy and global neglect—an invocation of subaltern grievance that recalls Spivak's (1988) critique. This moral framing does not merely underscore grievance; it reconstitutes the state as a victim and moral guardian of the entire region, allowing editorial voices to maintain moral high ground even in the diction of militarized responses. In both societies, media institutions operate as ideological state apparatuses in the Althusserian sense, circulating and normalizing the ruling ideologies. Editorials seldom break the national consensus; they participate, rather, in the discursive regimes identified by Foucault (1980), networks of enunciation that fabricate “truths” regarding national identity, conflict, and ethics. Proposals for peace therefore remain, at a structural level, confirmatory of national superiority; the interlocutor is invited to concede, the state is affirmed as the rightful arbiter. Reconciliation, as a discursive possibility, is thus contained within the broader imperative of national enhancement.

Conclusively, editorial columns in Indian and Pakistani newspapers transcend the veneer of mere opinion and operate as ideologically charged arenas that mirror, bolster, and, at moments, modestly renegotiate the prevailing hierarchies of national power. By means of linguistic maneuvers, institutional routines of argumentation, and interpolation within prevailing socio-political ideologies, the press delineates war and reconciliation in forms that consistently correspond to its own ideological investments.

Shortly, by employing Fairclough's analytical triad i.e. the layered dialectic of language, institution and power this analysis results:

- Textual features elevate moral certainty or national honor to the level of incontestable fact.
- Discursive routines—editorial guidelines, citation chains, and reciprocal influence—disclose an institution's ideological partisanship.
- Social configurations situate the editorial within a broader apparatus of ideological reproduction that consolidates established hegemonic representations.

Further examples are described in the table below;

Table 3: Ideological Positioning of Selected Newspapers Through Editorial Discourse

Newspaper	Ideological Orientation	Discursive Features	Fairclough's Dimension
<i>The Hindu</i>	Liberal-nationalist, pragmatic-centrist	Moderate tone, calls for diplomacy, avoids overt aggression, promotes image of India as a democratic and stable actor.	Discursive Practice – Institutional alignment
<i>Times of India</i>	Mainstream-nationalist, developmentalist	Frames peace through conditions (e.g., Pakistan's accountability), emphasizes India's sovereignty, modernization, and global reputation.	Social Practice – Neoliberal-statist ideology



<i>Dawn</i>	Liberal-nationalist with oppositional stance	Critical of India, supportive of Kashmiri autonomy, draws on international law, human rights, and Islamic morality to justify Pakistan's position.	Textual + Discursive Practice – Legal-humanitarian discourses
<i>The News International</i>	Religious-nationalist with populist tone	Emotive vocabulary, religious justification for Kashmir cause, positions Pakistan as a morally upright and ideologically pure nation.	Discursive Practice – Reader alignment, interdiscursivity

Conclusion

The empirical findings of this investigation shows that editorial discourses circulating in leading outlets of the Indian and Pakistani press exhibit systematic ideological inflections when narrating the dual themes of peace and conflict in the Indo-Pak nexus. Engaging Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of CDA, the study illuminated the dynamic interplay among specific textual features, prevailing journalistic practices, and the broader socio-political milieu that together mediate the constitution of Self and Other across the Indo-Pak border. Findings indicate that, on the level of the text, a repertoire of discursive maneuvers serves both to naturalize and to amplify nationalistic frames, thus orienting the readership toward hegemonic ideological coordinates. Editorials emanating from Indian newspapers predominantly foreground national security imperatives and the legitimation of state authority, whereas their Pakistani counterparts foreground motifs of resistance, historical injustice and the continuing reverberations of the Kashmir dispute. These recurring discursive selections do more than delineate a specific narrative geography; they also encode the institutional ideologies of each publication, which reverberate out of entrenched paradigms of nationalism, statecraft and collective historical memory. Similarly, at the level of discursive practice, this paper indicates that the formulation of editorial content is shaped by each paper's institutional affiliations, ownership configurations and target audience. These factors facilitate the deliberate alignment of readers along ideological vectors that legitimize the national interest, consolidate a shared collective identity, and define intra-national political frontiers. Consequently, editorial language assumes a performative function in the construction of the nation, with lexical selections that are anything but disinterested, but are rather imbued with ongoing ideological contention.

Moving to the wider field of social practice, editorials function as ideological state apparatuses that sustain prevailing hegemonies and ideologies. They typically reiterate state-sanctioned dominant narratives, validate the mandate of national policy and render dissenting viewpoints peripheral. Even when the argument is pro-peace, the discourse remains contingent upon the supremacy of the nation, thereby exposing the ideological limitations of editorial mediation in settings marked by conflict. This study thus enhances knowledge of the ways journalistic discourses are entangled in the maintenance of national ideologies and the intensification of inter-state rivalries. Its results point to the imperative of cultivating a reflexive and conflict-sensitive journalism capable of interrogating hegemonic narratives and of creating discursive openings for comprehension and reconciliation. The implications of the study extend to



peace education, media literacy initiatives, and the prospects for Indo-Pak dialogue in both civil society and institutional settings.

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