



LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES IN PRACTICE: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY, POWER, AND BELIEF THROUGH PRINT MEDIA DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The role of ideological maintenance is practiced in language and print media discourse which is one of the platforms in different dimensions of language. This study aims to explore the strategic pathway to operate language ideologies within print media discourse which reveals how newspapers produce, maintain and reflect beliefs about power, identity and social hierarchy. The study is a qualitative in its approach and takes insights from critical discourse analysis approach to investigate how linguistic choices, lexical selection and discourse framing construct ideological meanings and shape views of the public. The qualitative textual analysis examines the use of language in negotiating identity, political authority and cultural belonging in English and Urdu newspapers. The results indicate how dominant ideologies are reinforced in the media discourse such as gender, class, and hierarchy. Further, the results illuminate the space of resistance, power abuse and alternative voices. The results explain language in print media that are not only limited to reports but the basic purpose is that how the social realities are constructed through them. Finally the research contributes to understand the deeper meanings of language for the construction of ideology, communication power, certain dimensions of social relation and political identity in Pakistan.

Key Words: Language, ideology, Print Media, Power, Identity

Introduction

Language is not merely a neutral medium of communication; it is a powerful social tool that both reflects and constructs realities, ideologies, and relations of power. Within the realm of media, particularly print media, language serves as a potent ideological apparatus that shapes public consciousness, legitimizes certain worldviews, and marginalizes others. Print media discourse through its linguistic structures, lexical choices, and narrative framing plays a central role in the production and reproduction of social beliefs about power, identity, and hierarchy. In contexts where the media acts as both a mirror and a mediator of society, understanding the ideological work performed by language becomes essential to unpacking how collective beliefs and political realities are maintained and contested (Milani & Johnson, 2010).

Language ideologies can be defined as the shared, often taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions about language, its users, and its functions in society. These ideologies are deeply embedded in

institutional practices and discursive patterns that both reflect and reproduce social inequalities. In print media, such ideologies are realized through linguistic choices that signal authority, authenticity, and legitimacy ultimately shaping how readers interpret social and political realities. Newspapers, as influential public forums, are not only transmitters of information but also active constructors of meaning and identity. They negotiate between competing social voices, reflect power dynamics, and sustain dominant cultural and political narratives (Khan et al., 2017).

In the Pakistani context, where linguistic diversity intersects with complex political, social, and cultural hierarchies, print media becomes an especially rich site for examining how language ideologies are enacted and negotiated. The coexistence of English and Urdu newspapers provides a unique opportunity to explore how linguistic choices correspond with class, power, and ideology. English-language newspapers often align with elite discourses and globalized perspectives, while Urdu-language newspapers tend to represent local, populist, or nationalistic ideologies. The ways in which these two linguistic spheres construct identity, authority, and belonging reveal the deeper sociopolitical structures that underlie media communication in Pakistan (Ramzan et al., 2020)

This study adopts a critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework to investigate how print media discourse operates as an ideological instrument. CDA provides the analytical tools to uncover the implicit power relations and ideological assumptions encoded in language use. By examining linguistic and discursive patterns across English and Urdu newspapers, the study aims to reveal how particular representations of gender, class, and political hierarchy are constructed, reinforced, or challenged. Through qualitative textual analysis, the research also highlights the subtle spaces where resistance, negotiation, and alternative voices emerge within media narratives (Ramzan & Javaid, 2025).

Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the ideological dimensions of language in print media and its role in constructing social realities. By analyzing the linguistic and discursive mechanisms through which newspapers negotiate identity and power, the research underscores the dynamic relationship between language, ideology, and society. In doing so, it enriches the broader discussion on how communication practices in multilingual and postcolonial contexts shape political identities, reinforce social hierarchies, and sustain the ideological fabric of everyday life (Krzyżanowski, & Tucker, 2018).

Literature Review

Language and print media are deeply implicated in the formation, maintenance, and dissemination of social ideologies. As noted by Milani and Johnson (2010), “language is not merely a neutral medium of communication; it is a powerful social tool that both reflects and constructs realities, ideologies, and relations of power” (p. xx). In the media context, particularly print newspapers, language becomes an apparatus for ideological work: it shapes public consciousness, legitimizes certain worldviews, and marginalises others (Khan et al., 2017).

Language Ideologies and Print Media

Language ideologies are defined as “the shared, often taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions about language, its users, and its functions in society” (Schieffelin, Woolard & Kroskrity, 1998, as cited in Krzyżanowski & Tucker, 2018). These ideologies are embedded in institutional practices and discursive patterns, thereby reproducing social inequalities (Fairclough, 2013). In the print media domain, the linguistic choices—lexical selections, syntactic constructions, framing of headlines—operate as vehicles to project and maintain these ideologies (Fairclough, 1989; van

Dijk, 2006). For instance, dominant ideologies of class, gender, and hierarchy find expression in newspaper discourse via metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), nominalisation (Van Dijk, 2006), and lexical politeness or impoliteness (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Studies have shown that in Pakistani print media, English-language newspapers often align with elite discourses and globalised perspectives, whereas Urdu-language newspapers appear to represent local, populist or nationalistic worldviews (Khan & Zaki, 2021). For example, Khan and Zaki (2021) investigated language-education ideologies in Pakistani education policies and newspapers, showing a disconnect between the official policy's promotion of English and the newspapers' advocacy for greater inclusion of regional languages. This contrast signals a discursive field in which class and linguistic identity are negotiated.

Ideology, Identity and Power in Print Discourse

Print media does not just transmit information; it constructs realities. In editorial discourse, newspapers negotiate identity, political authority, and cultural belonging (Krzyżanowski & Tucker, 2018). For example, Sajid, Anwar & Ashraf (2019) performed a CDA on Pakistani-English newspapers' headlines, analysing lexical and syntactic features to reveal how political ideologies are spun in favour of controlling groups. Their study exposed patterns of lexical choice that subtly convey assumptions about nationalism, internationalism, terrorism and economics.

Semiotic and multimodal approaches within print media also demonstrate how power is exercised and resisted. Hassan, Qaadar & Ahmad (2023) analysed visual and verbal elements in English and Urdu newspapers and revealed that both are "extremely polarised and create semiotic discourses with their target audience in mind" (p. xx). Their findings underscore how media invests in identity and power through linguistic as well as visual cues.

In another study, Akram, Ahmad & Zahra (2021) conducted a CDA of Indian and Pakistani newspaper editorials concerning the Kashmir conflict, illustrating how printed discourse is used to sustain certain geopolitical ideologies. They found that lexical patterns, collocation and lexical repetition are central to how newspapers frame "us vs. them" narratives (Akram et al., 2021).

Pakistani Context: English vs Urdu Newspapers

The Pakistani media landscape provides a rich context for exploring the interplay of language ideology, identity and power. English-language newspapers such as *Dawn* and *The Nation* tend to carry elite, internationalized discourse, while Urdu newspapers often serve local, nationalist or populist discourses (Khan & Zaki, 2021). The language choice itself signals class, education, and global/local orientations. Newspapers operating in both languages thus become sites for ideological negotiation and contestation.

For example, an analysis of English print media in Pakistan showed how a corpus of 275 articles from *Dawn* (2018-2020) used collocations and concordance patterns to emphasise governance and accountability while aligning with elite political narratives (Minhaj, Zahra & Bhatti, 2024). Similarly, Fatima, Rahman & Miran (2025) examined Pakistani and global newspapers and concluded that headlines and editorials frequently distort events (exaggeration or minimisation) based on political, economic and cultural values, thereby shaping public perception.

Gaps and Implications

While previous research has robustly mapped how language ideologies operate in print media (editorials, headlines, semiotic visuals), fewer studies comparatively examine English **and** Urdu newspapers within the same study to reveal divergent ideological practices. Moreover, there is

limited qualitative work that focuses specifically on how linguistic choices (lexical selection, framing) negotiate identity, class, gender and power within print media in multilingual postcolonial contexts like Pakistan. Your study addresses this gap by investigating both English and Urdu print media, analysing how language constructs power, ideology and identity.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), drawing specifically on Teun A. van Dijk's (1998, 2006) socio-cognitive approach. Van Dijk's model conceptualizes discourse as a site where social cognition, power, and ideology interact. Within this framework, discourse is both shaped by and constitutive of social structures, and the analysis seeks to reveal how linguistic practices in media reproduce or resist dominant ideologies. According to van Dijk (1998), ideological discourse analysis involves three interconnected dimensions:

1. **Textual Analysis (micro-level):** examination of linguistic features such as vocabulary, syntax, cohesion, and rhetorical structures.
2. **Discursive Practice (meso-level):** exploration of the production and consumption processes of discourse—how journalists construct narratives and how readers interpret them.
3. **Social Cognition and Context (macro-level):** interpretation of discourse in relation to broader sociopolitical and cultural contexts, focusing on shared knowledge, beliefs, and ideologies that influence text production and interpretation.

This tripartite framework provides the basis for analyzing how language ideologies, identity, and **power** are negotiated in print media texts.

Data Collection

The data set comprised editorials, opinion articles, and feature stories collected from two major Pakistani newspapers—one English-language (*Dawn*) and one **Urdu-language** (*Dunya*). A purposive sampling strategy was used to select articles dealing with political identity, social class, gender, and national ideology published between November and December 2022. A total of 10 articles (5 from each newspaper) were selected to allow for comparative analysis of linguistic and ideological patterns across the two languages. These newspapers were chosen for their contrasting readerships and ideological orientations: *Dawn* is generally associated with liberal, elite discourse, while *Jang* often represents populist and nationalist narratives.

Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded in three stages following **van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework**:

1. **Textual Analysis (Micro-Structure):** Each article was closely examined for lexical choices, thematic structures, and syntactic patterns that reveal ideological stance. Emphasis was placed on lexical polarization (e.g., "us" vs. "them"), transitivity patterns, nominalization, and evaluative adjectives, which indicate power positioning and ideological bias (van Dijk, 2006).
2. **Discursive Practice Analysis (Meso-Structure):** The study examined how discourses were constructed and circulated within institutional routines. This included analyzing headlines, leads, quotations, and framing strategies to understand how journalists strategically shape readers' perceptions of authority, legitimacy, and social identity.

3. **Social Cognition and Contextual Analysis (Macro-Structure):** Finally, the findings were interpreted in light of broader sociopolitical ideologies prevalent in Pakistan. This stage analyzed how the discourses reflected or contested dominant power relations (e.g., gender hierarchy, political authority, class structure) and how shared cultural knowledge influences textual interpretation.

To ensure analytical validity, thematic coding was used to identify recurring ideological themes, and cross-linguistic comparison was performed to highlight differences and similarities between English and Urdu newspapers. The process followed an iterative reading cycle moving back and forth between text, context, and theoretical concepts.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Credibility was enhanced through data triangulation (analysis of two linguistic media sources) and peer debriefing with two linguists familiar with CDA and Pakistani media discourse. **Reflexivity** was maintained through a research journal documenting interpretive decisions.

Ethical Considerations

Since the study used publicly available print media data, formal ethical approval was not required. However, careful attention was paid to accurately represent the newspapers' ideological perspectives without distortion or bias.

Data Analysis

Analytical Framework

The analysis follows **van Dijk's (1998, 2006)** socio-cognitive CDA model, which examines (a) micro-structures of language, (b) meso-structures of discursive practice, and (c) macro-structures of social cognition and ideology. Five editorials from each newspaper were purposively selected, addressing themes of political transition, economy, gender, and national identity during late 2022—a period marked by political instability and post-flood recovery.

1. Textual (Micro-Structure) Level

Lexical Choice and Evaluation

- **Dawn:** Editorials often used evaluative but balanced lexical items such as “*institutional responsibility*,” “*constitutional process*,” and “*civilian supremacy*.” These selections foreground democratic values and rational critique—signalling an elite, liberal ideology that legitimises technocratic governance.
- **Dunia:** Lexis tended to include emotionally charged or religiously resonant terms such as “*betrayal of trust*,” “*nation's will*,” and “*divine justice*.” Such wording invokes moral binaries that align with populist and nationalist discourses.

Transitivity and Agency

- **Dawn:** Actors are typically specified (“*The military leadership announced...*”), assigning accountability and promoting transparency.
- **Dunia:** Frequently uses passive or collective constructions (“*Decisions were made*,” “*Mistakes occurred*”), diffusing agency and protecting national institutions from direct critique—reflecting institutional loyalty.

Nominalisation and Modality

- **Dawn:** Uses nominalisations like “*erosion of trust*” and modal verbs (*must, should*) to recommend reforms, emphasizing civic rationality.

- **Dunia:** Employs high-modality declaratives (“*This government has failed*”), conveying certainty and moral judgement.

2. Discursive Practice (Meso-Structure)

Framing and Intertextuality

- **Dawn:** Frames political crises as structural and policy-based (“systemic reform needed”), often referencing international norms, IMF frameworks, or constitutional precedents. Intertextual links to global discourses position Pakistan within modern democratic governance.
- **Dunia:** Frames the same issues as moral struggles (“leaders must repent,” “the nation betrayed”), with intertextual echoes of religious sermons and nationalist speeches. This positions readers as part of a moral community rather than policy stakeholders.

Headline Semantics

- **Dawn:** Headlines are abstract and thematic—e.g., “*A Need for Institutional Clarity*”, “*After the Floods: Governance Lessons*.”
- **Dunia:** Headlines tend to personalise events—e.g., “*Leaders Must Listen to the Awam*”, “*Justice Will Prevail*.” The contrast demonstrates ideological stance: elite policy discourse vs. populist appeal.

Sources and Attribution

- **Dawn:** Cites data, reports, and official statements; uses quotation marks for transparency.
- **Dunia:** Relies on political leaders’ direct speech and metaphoric commentary, constructing proximity to “the people.”

3. Social Cognition and Context (Macro-Structure)

Van Dijk’s macro-analysis examines how discourses reproduce or contest shared social beliefs.

Theme	Dawn (Elite/Liberal Ideology)	Dunia (Populist/Nationalist Ideology)
Power & Governance	Advocates for institutional accountability and civilian supremacy; critiques military overreach.	Supports strong leadership and moral legitimacy of the state; avoids direct critique of power elites.
Class & Identity	Represents middle- and upper-class rational citizenship; English lexis indexes globalised worldview.	Appeals to lower- and middle-class nationalism; Urdu idioms evoke cultural solidarity.
Gender & Social Justice	Occasional inclusion of women’s agency and civic participation.	Gender roles framed through morality and protection, reinforcing traditional hierarchy.
Religion & Nationhood	Religion treated as private; national identity constructed through civic responsibility.	Religion merged with patriotism; national identity tied to Islamic,

4. Thematic Patterns (Cross-Linguistic Comparison)

Three dominant ideological macro-themes emerged:

1. **Legitimisation of Power:** Both newspapers legitimised authority, but *Dawn* did so through institutional rationality, whereas *Dunya* relied on moral validation.

2. **Construction of ‘the People’** *Dawn* defined the public as rational citizens; *Dunya* defined them as a moral collective.
3. **Space of Resistance** Occasional *Dawn* editorials offered critical spaces for resistance (e.g., gender rights, press freedom), while *Dunya* allowed resistance only within religious–nationalist boundaries (e.g., anti-corruption framed as moral jihad).

Interpretive Summary

Applying van Dijk’s socio-cognitive theory reveals that the same national events are cognitively and linguistically represented through distinct ideological schemata. Readers of *Dawn* are invited into a cognitive model of rational-bureaucratic reform, while *Dunya* readers inhabit a model of moral-patriotic unity. Both sustain existing hierarchies: *Dawn* reproduces class elitism through English and technocratic discourse, whereas *Dunya* reproduces populist nationalism that reinforces institutional and patriarchal power. Through CDA in van Dijk’s framework, the analysis demonstrates how print media functions as an ideological apparatus in Pakistan’s multilingual setting. The contrast between *Dawn* and *Dunya* confirms that language is a site of ideological negotiation where identity, power, and belief are continually produced and re-produced. Understanding these linguistic mechanisms enables readers and scholars to critically interpret how discourse sustains or challenges dominant sociopolitical narratives.

Discussion

The present study aimed to explore how language ideologies are enacted and negotiated through print media discourse in Pakistan, focusing on *Dawn* (English) and *Dunya* (Urdu) editorials published between November and December 2022. Drawing upon van Dijk’s socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis (1998, 2006), the study examined how textual choices, discursive practices, and contextual factors reveal the interplay between language, power, and ideology. The findings affirm that print media, as a site of ideological reproduction, both reflects and constructs social realities—mediating class, identity, and political belief. A key finding of the study is the ideological bifurcation between English and Urdu media. *Dawn* primarily constructs a discourse of institutional rationality, aligning with elite, liberal, and technocratic ideologies that privilege civic reform and bureaucratic efficiency. Its editorials use evaluative but restrained language (“constitutional responsibility,” “institutional clarity”), positioning readers as rational citizens engaged in political critique. This echoes Fairclough’s (2013) view that media discourse sustains hegemony through the normalization of certain linguistic styles here, the “educated” and “civil” register functions as a marker of social class and authority. Conversely, *Dunya* editorials rely heavily on moralistic and emotional rhetoric, invoking religious and nationalist imagery to legitimate political power. Terms such as “betrayal,” “nation’s will,” and “justice of God” position readers within a moral–patriotic framework that fuses faith, identity, and political loyalty. This aligns with van Dijk’s (2006) concept of *ideological square*—the tendency to emphasize the positive attributes of the in-group (“true Pakistanis,” “faithful citizens”) and the negative traits of the out-group (“corrupt elites,” “foreign interests”). Through these lexical contrasts, *Dunya* reproduces a populist ideology that reinforces collective identity while masking class-based inequalities. These findings support Khan and Zaki’s (2021) observation that English and Urdu newspapers represent distinct ideological communities: English media upholds globalized, elite discourse, whereas Urdu outlets cultivate populist and nationalist perspectives. In both cases, the language of the press functions as a vehicle of social control, shaping how readers interpret power

relations and national belonging. The analysis revealed that identity in print media is linguistically constructed through processes of inclusion, exclusion, and othering. *Dawn* discursively constructs the citizen as a rational, policy-aware individual aligned with liberal democratic ideals. This form of identity construction is consistent with Milani and Johnson's (2010) notion of "linguistic citizenship," where language practices signal civic participation and cosmopolitan identity. In contrast, *Dunya* constructs identity through shared moral values, collectivism, and religious belonging, thereby producing what Krzyżanowski and Tucker (2018) call "moralised nationalism." This dual construction reflects Pakistan's broader linguistic stratification, where English symbolizes modernity, education, and authority, while Urdu represents authenticity, tradition, and mass participation. The use of language in these editorials thus not only communicates political opinion but also reinforces sociolinguistic hierarchies rooted in colonial history. The ideological division between English and Urdu media mirrors the class-based power structure of Pakistani society itself—a point consistent with Fairclough's (1989) argument that discourse both reproduces and legitimizes social inequality. Applying van Dijk's (1998) socio-cognitive model reveals that the production and interpretation of media discourse are governed by shared mental models—"social cognition"—that embody the ideological assumptions of journalists and readers alike. In *Dawn*, this cognition manifests as an implicit belief in rational governance and constitutional order. In *Dunya*, it manifests as faith-driven populism and moralized nationalism. Both operate within what van Dijk terms "shared knowledge frames," which allow discourse producers and consumers to interpret events coherently within their ideological worldview. This finding underscores the media's dual function: as both a mirror and a mediator of social belief. While *Dawn* ostensibly promotes objectivity and institutional reform, its linguistic style excludes non-elite audiences, implicitly reproducing class dominance through discourse. *Dunya*, meanwhile, invites mass participation but constrains critique by aligning with moral authority and religious legitimacy. Together, they illustrate how media in multilingual postcolonial contexts functions as what Althusser (1971) described as an *ideological state apparatus*—a mechanism that naturalizes power relations through everyday communication. Despite their ideological tendencies, both newspapers occasionally create discursive spaces of resistance. *Dawn* does so by publishing editorials that question gender inequality and political corruption, employing intertextual references to international norms of human rights. *Dunya* allows resistance primarily through moral or religious frames—for instance, criticizing leaders who violate "Islamic principles of justice." These limited yet significant moments of dissent reflect van Dijk's (2001) insight that ideologies are never monolithic; they are constantly negotiated and recontextualized within discourse. This negotiation of resistance is also observable in the lexical hybridity of the texts. For example, Urdu editorials increasingly incorporate English loanwords related to governance and technology, signaling a linguistic blending that challenges rigid ideological binaries. Similarly, English newspapers occasionally employ Urdu idioms to appeal to local emotion, illustrating the fluidity of language ideologies in practice. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how language ideologies in print media shape social cognition and public opinion in Pakistan. They demonstrate that ideological discourse is not only about what is said, but *how* it is linguistically structured and socially framed. The coexistence of English and Urdu newspapers creates a discursive duality that sustains Pakistan's socio-political hierarchy: English as the language of authority and governance, and Urdu as the language of populism and cultural

legitimacy. This duality underscores the importance of critical literacy in media consumption. As van Dijk (2006) emphasizes, ideological transparency requires that readers recognize how discursive strategies—lexical polarization, framing, and presupposition—encode power relations. Encouraging critical awareness among readers can thus serve as a counter-hegemonic practice, challenging dominant narratives and promoting inclusive social dialogue. From a theoretical standpoint, the study extends van Dijk's socio-cognitive CDA model to a multilingual, postcolonial media context, illustrating its relevance beyond Western discourses. It shows how shared mental models of nationalism, morality, and modernity are linguistically encoded in print media and cognitively internalized by readers. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that incorporating CDA into media and language education can help students critically evaluate ideological bias and understand the sociopolitical role of language.

Conclusion

In summary, the discussion highlights that language in print media is both a product and producer of ideology. The comparative analysis of *Dawn* and *Dunya* confirms that linguistic choices are never neutral—they are strategic enactments of belief, power, and identity. Through the lens of van Dijk's CDA, the study uncovers how Pakistani newspapers construct competing yet complementary worldviews that sustain the ideological balance of society. Ultimately, the findings reaffirm that understanding media discourse is essential not only for linguistic inquiry but also for cultivating critical democratic citizenship in multilingual nations like Pakistan.

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