

THE DISCOURSE OF CONFLICT AND MEDIA PROPAGANDA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED US NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS

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Abstract

The phenomenon of agenda-setting and cognitive hacking is at the heart of the entertainment medium in general and news medium in particular. Mass media has the discretion to choose certain news stories over others. Consequently, it is the media that decide to pick and choose numerous issues and aspects of news. Keeping this in mind, the paper explores propaganda, persuasion, and the operation of power through language in the discourse of conflict. The paper examines the selected editorials of the two mainstream American newspapers i.e. the “New York Times” and the “Washington Post”. The time frame for the collection of data is from turn of the century October 9, 2001 to August, 22 2017. Data has been collected from the archives of the e-papers of the two selected newspapers. Non-probability purposive sampling has been taken into consideration to select the editorials in the light of selected themes such as war on terror, nuclear proliferation, Pakistan’s military, Pakistan and South Asia and the US-Pakistan relations etc. The research is based on the theoretical framework comprising of the works of van Dijk¹, Laclau and Mouffee² and McCombs³. The research findings indicate that in the discourse of conflict, there are various linguistic choices, sentence structures and peculiar expressions of language, which are utilized to propagate an agenda, and therefore one-sided account of certain instances become a norm. The study is a testimony to this fact, and that is why in the selected sample language has been exploited to depict a bleak, gloomy and negative side of Pakistan. Pakistan has been portrayed as a country which implicitly and explicitly not just supports but endorses terrorism. Moreover, the use of syntactic style, sentence construction, and the notion of central and floating signifier throw light on the expression of power through language.

Keywords: Media, conflict, propaganda, discourse analysis, agenda-setting, cognitive hacking

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Introduction

The US-Pakistan relations have been on a roller-coaster ride since its inception. The conundrum of the US-Pakistan relations is difficult to understand. Over the years, this relationship has become an epitome of apprehension, mistrust and speculation. In the aftermath of 9/11 the relations between the two countries took a new turn. This paper focuses on the portrayal of Pakistan in two of the most important newspapers of the US i.e. the “New York Times” and the “Washington Post”. Furthermore, it analyzes the linguistic features to discuss propaganda, agenda setting, cognitive hacking, one sided account and operation of power as far as the discourse of conflict is concerned.

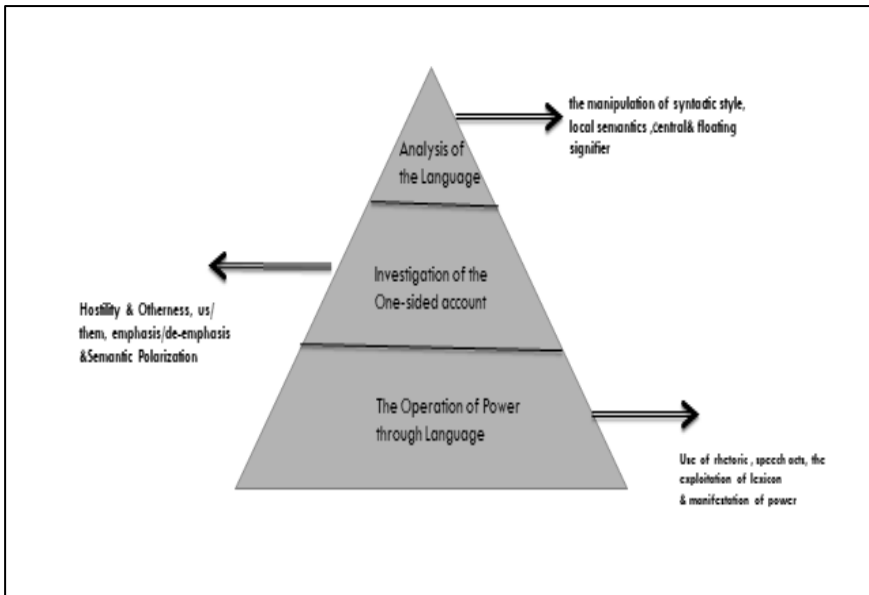
Nordlund⁴ writes language (whether spoken or written) is exploited as a tool to get a particular message or information heard around. There are always certain ulterior motives behind the message being conveyed. When the message is conveyed for the sake of formulating and shaping opinions then it is basically termed as propaganda. Propaganda is politically driven, and therefore it is clouded by subjectivity. The genre of news manipulates the language and sets agenda. Newspaper play a significant role in any society. Rogers as cited in Overbey⁵ assert that after his analysis of 223 publications he can safely infer that agenda setting theory could be witnessed in the selected publications. In some instances, it was an explicit depiction of agenda setting and vice versa.

Wadi and Ahmed⁶ emphasize that language and politics go hand in hand. Hence, the paper is weaved around the detailed analysis and evaluation of the language of the selected newspaper editorials.

Research Methods

The basic theoretical underpinnings of the paper would be Laclau and Mouffe, van Dijk⁷ and McCombs⁸. Works of McCombs basically revolve around the concept of agenda-setting and framing, whereas the works of van Dijk and Laclau and Mouffe’s focus on language. This research framework is going to help us to analyze the exploitation of propaganda and agenda, one-sided description and the operation of power through language in the bilateral relationship of USA and Pakistan.

In the light of the theoretical underpinnings following is the pictorial representation of the model that we have devised:



Selection of Sample. The researchers for the paper selected 07 editorials from the “New York Times” and the “Washington Post”, respectively. The editorials have been selected under non-probability purposive sampling technique. These two newspapers have been given preference because their archive e-papers were comparatively easily accessible. Moreover, as compared to the other American newspapers, they have a global readership.

Justification of Sample. Only those editorials were selected that serve the purpose of this study. The paper focuses on a few selected themes. Following are the themes:

- War on Terror
- Religious Extremism
- The US- Pakistan Relations
- Pakistan and South Asia
- Nuclear proliferation
- Pakistan’s Political instability
- Pakistan’s Military

Under these selected themes, in total 17 editorials were found. However, since it was beyond the scope of one paper to deal with 17 editorials, 07 editorials on the basis of being most relevant to the selected themes were shortlisted.

System of Analysis. Three categories have been devised for the analysis of the selected data. The detail of these three categories is as follows:

Category 1- Analysis of Language

- In this category, the researchers are going to look into “the manipulation of syntactic style, i.e., the use of pronouns”, syntactic categories and sentence construction, etc. to propagate certain agenda.
- van Dijk has described the concept of ‘local semantics’ which deals with the fact that meanings reflect political contexts. Similarly, Laclau and Mouffe have actually analyzed the concept of sign under the notions of central signifier and floating signifier. They have also worked on the ideas of element, time and discourse analysis and thus by merging local semantics, the concept of sign language can be analyzed to observe the manipulation that a language indulges in, consequently giving way to propaganda, agenda and persuasion.

Category 2- Investigation of One-sided Account

- For this category, agenda-setting and framing can be utilized. This can be studied under the concept of hostility and otherness.
- The selection of topics to highlight ‘us versus them’ which generally constrains political text and talk and its evaluation: Emphasis/De-Emphasis of Our/Their Good/Bad Actions”. ‘Semantic Polarization’, the concept given and expressed by van Dijk is critical to explain the one sided account.
- The concept of Super structures and textual schemata and how it is an instigator as well as a catalyst of the concept of agenda-setting and framing.

Category 3- The Operation of Power through Language

- Rhetoric (i.e., repetition, sentence forms, addition and deletion of something) is used to depict the operation of power through language.
- The utilization of certain expression structures and speech acts in the selected editorials to depict power and biasness through the use of language.
- The exploitation of ‘Lexicon’ to express the manifestation of power in the selected editorials of the “New York Times” and the “Washington Post”.

Media and Agenda

The paper deals with the concept of agenda-setting, so under this heading the reflection and exploitation of agenda-setting in media is being discussed.

Different theorists have defined agenda-setting in different ways. However, the following definition has been devised as an operational definition for the current study. Danesi⁹ states that “according to one theory, influential role played by the media in their determination of which issues are covered and their relative order of importance” (p.15). Media’s role to pick, choose and circulate numerous issues is quite vital.

This paves way for setting agenda and as a result of this news circulated through print and electronic media has a profound influence. Editorials are considered to be one of the most important aspects of any newspaper. They in a subtle manner cement certain ideology, an idea and circulation of an issue. McNair as cited in Ashraf and Chaudry¹⁰ states “editorials are the elements of newspapers which establish political character of any newspaper and also called voice of a newspaper”.

Zhu and Blood¹¹ define agenda setting “as the process whereby news media lead the public in assigning relative importance to various public issues”. Agenda setting is something which is quite prevalent and is reflected in media. Plascencia cites the work of Friel and Falk¹² who conducted research on agenda-setting by analyzing the US news media. For this research they selected the Israel-Palestine issue. They concluded that “the New York Times” was partial and its coverage was pro-Israel. To minus subjectivity from their research they analyzed and compared results with the reports of UNO and human rights organization. Friel and Falk¹³ as cited in Plascencia concluded “this coverage benefits Israel in several ways, giving it the pretense of a morally superior position in conflict and giving the country a substantial political advantage in the US”. Agenda-setting is specifically exploited in high politics issues; consequently, it is specifically witnessed during the coverage of war and conflicts.

Carler and Ahlin¹⁴ conducted research on the portrayal of Muslims in selected Argentinean newspapers. In this research, they give an example of an interview that was published in the newspapers, La Nacion and Pagina. They interviewed Jean-Francois a French philosopher. The first question from him was “Does it seem to you that Islam is a threat to the western world”? “To pose such a question, angled in this way, might very well leave the reader with the impression of Islam as a threat, irrespective of the answer from Mr. Revel”.

Agenda-setting is at the core of newspaper Discourse. van Dijk writes that a specific style is distinct to particular discourse. Leech and Short define style “as a way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose”. This notion of style applies to Newspaper discourse as well. Mozuraityte states “publicist style is used in newspaper. Denisova and Pozniakas cited in Mozuraityte throw light on the function of publicistic style that “it is to influence the public opinion”. The main feature of the usage of this

style is the combination of logical argumentation and emotional appeal to the audience. Therefore, newspapers follow a distinct style to gain attention of the readers. For this purpose, newspapers' language is at times dubious, at other times assertive and, thus this technique is exploited to formulate opinions.

van Dijk asserts "the sourcing and construct of the news is intimately linked with the actions and opinions of usually (powerful social groups), it is impossible to select and compose news without a conception of the target or intended audience". This assertion is very significant as this not only acknowledges but endorses the notion of agenda-setting. Therefore, it can be concluded that agenda setting, persuasion and propaganda are at the core of newspaper discourse. The role of media houses is critical as they can change the perspective of news with their style of reporting. Consequently, the masses look and think about an issue from the lens of news.

Agenda-setting is not just limited to news, in fact, it can be witnessed in the entertainment media as well. Bantimaroudis, Symeou and Zygliopoulos¹⁵ discuss an important sub type of agenda-setting which is cultural agenda-setting. They assert that agenda-setting can also be applied to various cultural representations such as arts and its different genres. They further write that people follow these cultural representations, especially the entertainment industry. Therefore, it can be concluded that the concept of agenda-setting can also be witnessed in the entertainment industry.

Ryan and Kellner¹⁶ in their book "Camera Politica: Politics and Ideology" write "Hollywood film from the 1960s to the present was closely connected with the political movements and struggles of epoch. Our narrative maps the rise and decline of 60s radicalism; the failure of liberalism and rise of the New Right in the 1970s, and the triumph and hegemony of the Right in the 1980s". This assertion further strengthens the view that the entertainment industry is based on the cultural and societal norms. The narrative is woven by the entertainment industry. This narrative is then reached to masses through films, dramas and poetry.

Balraj quotes Islam "characterization of Muslims is fundamentally related to 'the other'; Bollywood cinema also creates the stereotypical image of Muslim characters with peculiar forms of cultural symbols like 'beard' and 'caps' besides portraying the Muslims either as feudal landlords or terrorist villains and gangsters".

Hollywood and Bollywood movies have massive fan following. The plot and characterization of the movie leave a lasting impact on viewer's mind. The misrepresentation of Muslims in mainstream cinema gives a negative perception of Islam in general and Muslims in particular.

The influential role of media in shaping public opinion cannot be denied. From the above discussion it can be concluded that both genres, i.e., news and entertainment are significant and pivotal in setting an agenda.

Presentation and Analysis of the Selected Data

In light of the above devised theoretical framework, the researchers are now going to present and analyze the data. The selected titles and extracts from the editorials are mentioned in bold.

Analysis of the Titles. As far as the analysis is concerned, following are the selected titles that are being analyzed under this heading:

Title 1: “Anxious Days in Pakistan” (The New York Times, 9-10-2001)

Title 2: “Crippled, Chaotic Pakistan” (The New York Times, 01-07-2012)

Title 3: “The Pakistan Connection” (The New York Times, 06-12-2008)

Title 4: “Time to Put the Squeeze on Pakistan” (The New York Times, 12-05-2016)

Title 5: “Will the US squeeze on Pakistan”? (The Washington Post, 11-07-2011)

Title 6: “The Pakistan Nuclear Nightmare” (The New York Times, 07-11-2015)

Title 7: “Four steps to winning peace in Afghanistan” (The Washington Post, 27-04-2017)

Titles and headlines send a very loud and explicit message to the readers of the newspaper. Titles help to attract the attention of readers and propagate a particular agenda. The central signifier that binds these titles to the concept of agenda expressed through language is of the US-Pakistan relationship. There are numerous floating signifiers associated with the central signifier. The floating signifiers that govern this relationship are terrorism and war on terror, nuclear arsenal, mistrust, transactional relationship, Pakistan’s political instability, and the precarious situation of South Asia. “Four steps of winning peace in Afghanistan” has the central signifier of the US-Pakistan relationship. The floating signifier is that of war on terror. Moreover, by studying these titles in detail we can safely conclude that these editorials set a tone for a very bleak and dark depiction of Pakistan. The concept of framing and agenda setting has helped these two newspapers to focus only on the negative aspects of Pakistan. Another concept that is pivotal to analyze language is that of local semantics.

Local semantics in the light of political context gives, a different dimension to the existing word. For instance, the title “Nuclear Nightmare” when written separately has its different meaning which is altogether different from the meaning in terms of this title. The notion of local semantics depict that the different titles throw light only on the negative aspects associated with the

nuclear arsenal of Pakistan, e.g., “The Pakistan Nuclear Nightmare”. These mentioned titles are consequently showing Pakistan’s nuclear technology as horrific for the rest of the world as it is claimed that the country has strong ties with militants and extremists.

In this regard, there is another title “The Pakistan Connection” which has its own significance. This title again exploits the concept of local semantics where it once again tries to talk about the critical role of Pakistan in Mumbai attacks. On paper, it comes across as just another word but because of the political context the word “connection” has its own meaning. Lastly, titles having words “anxious”, “crippled”, and “chaotic” also have their own meaning in the light of local semantics. All of these vocabulary items are linked with the same central signifier, i.e., political fragility of the country in the light of its relationship with the US.

Hegemony as described by Laclau and Mouffe is a concept that relates to power but according to them, it takes certain opinions, arguments and persuasive techniques to translate this hegemony. van Dijk talks about superstructures and textual schemata. In his opinion, all the various types of discourse in general and newspaper discourse in particular has a typical structure that it follows. He further stresses that in the argumentative types of discourse, we have two different categories, one is the Premise category and the other one is a conclusion category. Moreover, he throws light on the typical structure of the news discourse which initially has a summary consisting of a headline and lead category. If we apply this description on print media, then we will realize that the newspaper editorial has a title and the body.

The vocabulary choices made in these titles depict this one-sidedness by exploiting the concept of hegemony and otherness. “The Pakistan Nuclear Nightmare”, in this title, the distinction of ‘us/them’ is quite explicit. Pakistan is considered a pariah in the nuclear country club. Similarly, in the light of the notion of good/bad, emphasis/de-emphasis Pakistan’s nuclear status is being questioned and scrutinized. The word “nightmare” has a very strong connotation and it sends the message across the board that Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal is a threat to the whole world. The title basically sets the tone of the editorial and the whole description uses propaganda and persuasion to portray Pakistan an irresponsible nuclear state. “The Pakistan Nuclear Nightmare” in this title the distinction of ‘us/them’ is quite explicit. Pakistan is considered as a pariah in the nuclear country club. In the light of the notion of good/bad, emphasis/de-emphasis, Pakistan’s nuclear status is being questioned and scrutinized. The word “nightmare” has a very strong connotation and it sends the message across the board that Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal is a threat to the whole world. As the concept of ‘us/them’ is augmented by the depiction of Pakistan as an insincere ally which double crosses the Americans and that is

why they must be reprimanded for this. Another title, “The Pakistan Connection”, is quite direct and therefore establishes and endorses the status of Pakistan as a state that supports and exports terrorism. The ‘good/bad’ aspect of otherness can be seen in this title and instead of throwing light on the sacrifices made by Pakistan in the war on terror; it is being linked to terrorism.

The linguistic choices and the lexicon of the titles of these editorials are a testimony to propaganda and agenda setting. Take for instance the title “crippled, chaotic Pakistan”, here alliteration is used and thus the readers get the idea that Pakistan is a country that has failed. Use of alliteration foregrounds certain aspect, and in the mentioned title repetition of ‘k’ sound puts emphasis on the notion of Pakistan being a dependent country in terms of its economy, politics and security. There are two titles from the selected sample which are from the two different newspapers published at two different times in which the expression of power through language is explicitly shown. The titles are “Time to put Squeeze on Pakistan” and “Will the US squeeze on Pakistan”, the word ‘squeeze’ explicitly and implicitly is self-explanatory that the US has an upper hand in this transactional relationship between the US and Pakistan is dependent and the culprit in this relationship, which keeps on behaving as a dubious and skeptic country. Therefore, these two titles show the operation of power through language.

Analysis of the Selected Extracts. Under this heading, the selected extracts from the editorials have been analyzed.

Extract-1

“Pakistan’s government has fiercely denied any role in the terrorist attacks on Mumbai that killed more than 160 people. We hope that is true. But there are strong signs that the terrorists were members of the Pakistani-based group Lashkar-e-Taiba, a former proxy of Islamabad’s powerful intelligence service that—despite being officially banned—continues to operate in plain sight in Pakistan”.(The New York Times)

By analyzing the syntactic style of this extract, we conclude that the central signifier is terrorism and this extract revolves around Mumbai attacks. With the central signifier the floating signifier is of India-Pakistan relations, which is based on animosity and enmity. This amalgamation of floating and central signifier hence sets an agenda which eventually propagates a particular image of Pakistan. Local semantics in the light of political context give different denotative and connotative meanings to the existing words such as proxy, hope and plain sight. These words in this political context have different

meanings and therefore bring Pakistan in a very negative light. Pakistan is seen as a very suspicious country whose actions are being questioned, and thus it is considered a country that endorses state terrorism. The statement “We hope that.....in Pakistan” is a testimony to the fact that an agenda is set for the propagation of a particular image of Pakistan.

Extract-2

“But the army continues its double game — accepting money from the Americans while enabling the Afghan Taliban — and the politicians remain paralyzed. Soon, most American troops will be gone from Afghanistan. And Pakistan will find it harder to fend off its enemies, real and perceived”. (The New York Times)

The preceding excerpt is yet another example of otherness and hostility. In this excerpt, Pakistan has been categorized as the other by showing its negative side of being an aid getter and aid waster respectively. One more important fact is that Pakistan Army and Afghan Taliban are being shown on the same side as them and Americans as us. To show Pakistan in the negative side of the Pakistani Army the argument has been developed by using the premises ‘but the Army continues its double game’ and it is followed by the conclusion ‘Pakistan will find it harder to fend off its enemies, real and perceived’.

Extract-3

“The United States can win the military confrontation in Afghanistan but lose the war if Pakistan, with its 142 million people and nuclear weapons, falls under the control of Islamic fundamentalists. That is why the latest actions of Pakistan’s president, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, require the closest attention of the Bush administration, which is dispatching Secretary of State Colin Powell to Islamabad later this week”. (The New York Times)

The central signifier in this excerpt is “War on Terror”. This war brought Pakistan and US very close to one another. The US has always questioned the intentions of Pakistani authorities and thus Pakistan is always seen and portrayed as a dubious ally. The floating signifier in light of the central signifier is that of extremism. This nuclear bomb of Pakistan is propagated as a huge advantage for these extremist forces. In addition to this, population is considered to be an asset and Pakistan is a densely populated country with youth bulge. These facts have been

distorted by utilizing the linguistic choices to prove that Pakistan with its nuclear arsenal and population bomb is a threat to the US and rest of the world. The linguistic expression 'closest attention' utilizes the notion of the expression of power through language. The linguistic choices show that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is not safe for the world. Through one sided account an agenda (i.e., Pakistani authorities have a soft corner for the militancy) is being highlighted.

Extract-4

"General Musharraf deserves American support for his willingness to help in the campaign against the Taliban and Osama bin Laden. That does not mean he should be given a free hand to support Islamic fundamentalist extremists in Kashmir, the northern Indian state where a Muslim uprising has been raging for years. Pakistan needs to stop supporting guerrilla fighters in the conflict". (The New York Times)

The central signifier in this excerpt are the US-Pakistan relations whereas the floating signifier is that of terrorism. The sentence structure and the linguistic choices for instance, "free hand", "Muslim uprising", "stop supporting" once again give one sided to all perspective these words by setting an agenda that Pakistan provides support to the terrorist groups. Therefore, this claim is made that these terrorist groups are not just based in Afghanistan but also in Kashmir. The last sentence is an example of one sided account. The construction of this sentence hence sees Pakistan and militancy as two sides of the same coin.

Extract-5

"Nearly 15 years after 9/11, the war in Afghanistan is raging and Pakistan deserves much of the blame. It remains a duplicitous and dangerous partner for the United States and Afghanistan, despite \$33 billion in American aid and repeated attempts to reset relations on a more constructive course". (The New York Times)

In this excerpt, the central signifier are the US-Pakistan relations and the floating signifier is the "War on Terror". The tough vocabulary choices such as "duplicitous" and "dangerous" say it all. The syntactic structure "Pakistan deserves much of the blame" speaks volumes about the agenda being propagated. Americans are shown in a very positive light by highlighting their efforts for peace. These efforts are translated both through financial and non-financial help. However, despite these efforts it is Pakistan that creates problems, and thus the failure in Afghanistan is because of Pakistani authorities and stakeholders.

Extract-6

“Any successful strategy must consider the regional context and, to some extent, Mr. Trump did that. He took a tough tone on Pakistan, which has long played a double game, taking billions of dollars in aid from Washington while giving safe haven to the Taliban and other militants; the president hinted that some aid could be withheld. Mr. Trump might have further angered Pakistan by urging India to provide more economic aid to Afghanistan; Pakistan is already unsettled by India’s \$1 billion investment in Afghanistan and will be unhappier still if that is increased”. (The New York Times)

The central signifier in this excerpt are the US-Pakistan relations and the floating signifier are Pakistan-India relations. This excerpt is again using the expression “double game” and is showing Pakistan as a country which deploys the way of dishonesty and deception. Moreover, one thing that is important is this editorial’s depiction of India. Both India and Pakistan have enmity, animosity and hatred against each other. However, Indians at various instances are shown as the country which is not a hawk and follows the policy of appeasement as compare to Pakistan. They are never depicted as a country which is apprehensive of Pakistan but it is vice-versa for Pakistan. The same perspective and agenda is being propagated in the above excerpt. The certain linguistic choices expressed in this extract are against Pakistan and one can conclude that the centre of terrorism and militancy is Pakistan.

Extract-7

“The network’s alliance with Pakistan is a manifestation of Islamabad’s unacceptable ambition to establish suzerainty over Afghanistan. If there is to be a stable Afghan peace, and a Pakistan that can be an ally of the United States, the Haqqani network must be defeated and dismantled. (The Washington Post)

One noteworthy point here is that the above excerpt is from the “Washington Post” but its subject matter is same as that of the selected editorial of the “New York Times”. This aspect shows that despite being two different newspapers the agenda of the two mainstream newspaper remains same. By keeping the belief of ‘otherness’ an agenda is being knitted around ‘us versus them’. The language of this extract once again talks about the damaging role that Pakistan plays by supporting the Haqqani network. This is yet another example of one sided account. Furthermore, through the use of expression ‘....can be an ally’

diction is being used to show the hegemony of the American authorities.

Extract-8

“We also are waiting for a forceful public repudiation of the militant groups from the Army chief of staff, Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, and his personal pledge that all ties between Pakistan’s military and the extremists will be severed. His silence is deafening.” (The New York Times)

In this example, the clear division between us/them can be witnessed. The passage opens with the pronoun ‘we’ so it sets the tone for rest of the description which has to be hostile and hegemonic. It is further followed by the pronoun ‘his’ which basically brings the concept of otherness between the civilian and military authorities that is why he is personally being addressed in these lines. The last line ‘his silence is deafening’ explicitly sends the message to the readers that the Pakistani stake holders are apathetic that they cannot even sympathize with the country that suffered at the hands of militancy and terrorism.

Extract-9

“But they refuse to cut ties with the Haqqanis and other militants, who give Islamabad leverage in Afghanistan and are the biggest threat to American efforts to stabilize that country”.
(The New York Times)

In this selected line, the argument has been established by giving premises and conclusion for it. The premises given here is Pakistan’s allegiance towards the Haqqanis which is strengthening the conclusion that this association helps Pakistan to work freely in Afghanistan. This argument gives readers an understanding of the scenario of this region. This eventually gives a very negative image of Pakistan. Similarly, editorial has used the pronoun ‘they’ for Pakistanis which once again establishes the ground for the debate of otherness, i.e., us/them and good/bad. With the help of this syntax Americans are on one side and Haqqanis and Pakistan are on the other side, i.e., the same side working against the interests of the Americans. One thing is notable here that the textual schemata of the news paves way for propaganda and agenda as it persuades the reader on a particular issue in the light of argumentation.

Extract-10

“Pakistan remains a dangerous country. It is threatened by a virulent insurgency, it has the world’s fastest-growing nuclear

weapons program, and its economy is in dire shape. Relations with the United States have grown so distrustful that the Obama administration has reportedly stepped up its surveillance of Pakistan's nuclear program, raised concerns about biological and chemical sites there, and questioned the loyalties of counterterrorism sources recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency". (The New York Times)

The central signifier are the US-Pakistan relations and the floating signifier is Pakistan's nuclear arsenal and its counter-terrorism forces. The opening statement of this passage is one part of the argument, i.e., conclusion and the remaining part is the premises of this conclusion. A very sweeping and negative statement is given in the beginning of this passage. This conclusion is followed by the premises and is hence highlighting the reasons for this conclusion. The US has always remained doubtful of the nuclear arsenal of Pakistan. If we further dissect this excerpt then we can conclude that initially the concept of declarative has been utilized and, thus Pakistan is declared a dangerous country. The word 'surveillance' has a very negative kind of connotation which shows the hegemony and power of the American authorities. This shows the operation of power through language.

Extract-11

"But Pakistan hosts the Afghan Taliban leadership and provides material support. The United States should address Pakistan's legitimate strategic concerns about threats emanating from Afghan territory, the burden of hosting Afghan refugees and the need for better relations with India. In return, Pakistan must take measures to constrain the Taliban, starting with withdrawing support and halting the Taliban's freedom of movement within Pakistan. If no progress is made, the United States and its allies should take tough action targeted against those involved in supporting Taliban and transnational terrorist groups". (The Washington Post)

The use of the two different modal verbs sends a loud and clear message regarding the agenda that is being set. With the US, the modality marker 'should' is being preferred while with Pakistan, the modality marker 'must' is being used. The use of different modality markers is also testimony of the operation of the power through language. 'Should' is more of a suggestion while 'must' is more of an obligation. The use of 'should' and 'legitimate' also comes under the one-sided account because it states that concerns of Pakistan are being

articulated out of proportion. Later on in the excerpt, again a modality marker 'should' is being mentioned which once again cements the idea of exercising power through certain linguistic choices. It can be concluded that Pakistan backs terrorism.

Extract-12

“At the moment, Pakistan is a pariah in the nuclear sphere to all but China; it has been punished internationally ever since it followed India’s example and tested a weapon in 1998. Pakistan has done itself no favors by refusing to join the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and by giving nuclear know-how to bad actors like North Korea. Yet, it is seeking treatment equal to that given to India by the West”. (The New York Times)

The notion of otherness is quite direct in these lines. The segregation between the nuclear responsible states and the nuclear irresponsible states has been made. Pakistan, according to this editorial falls in the latter category and, hence its nuclear arsenal is a threat to the world. Moreover, China is considered to be not in the good books of the US so Pakistan and China are seen in the same light; therefore, an explicit segregation has been made in this editorial. The US sees Pakistan and China as 'them'. The textual schema here is again peculiar that Pakistan should not be given an equal status in nuclear club because of the premises that it does not respect the norms followed by a responsible nuclear state. Therefore, the conclusion has been given that Pakistan must not be treated with the same yard stick as the Indians. With the help of emphasis/de-emphasis Pakistan has been portrayed as bad in comparison to India.

Extract-13

“These are unsettling truths. The fact that Pakistan is also home to a slew of extremist groups, some of which are backed by a paranoid security establishment obsessed with India, only adds to the dangers it presents for South Asia and, indeed, the entire world”. (The New York Times)

Although Pakistan has been known as an ally of the US in the War on Terror but the mistrust between the two has also exacerbated over the years. Pakistan, through the idea of 'otherness', is portrayed as the hub of extremism and as always the military is labeled as their biggest support. Extremists and military are considered to be a team, i.e., 'us' and the Americans and Indians are considered one, i.e., them. In addition to this premises and conclusions have been utilized to formulate the argument. The premises for Pakistan's support of

militants have been given that it is because of India that Pakistani authorities use all means to challenge India. In the light of these premises, the conclusion can be drawn that Pakistanis provide blind support to all the extremists. The linguistic choices such as ‘home to a slew of terrorists’, ‘paranoid’ and ‘obsessed’ are used for Pakistan’s security establishment and hence it cements the notion of its security forces playing the shady role in the war on terror.

Extract - 14

“In this region of the world, the current Afghan government is a rare and willing ally at the epicenter of the fight against the Islamic State and international terrorism. Its collapse would again create a haven for terrorist organizations that would threaten the United States and could destabilize nuclear-armed Pakistan”. (The Washington Post)

In this excerpt, the central signifier is the nuclear arsenal of Pakistan and the floating signifier is the regional politics of South Asia. The term ‘Nuclear armed’ has been stated with Pakistan just to show the apprehension regarding Pakistan’s nuclear program. Political unrest in Afghanistan would have detrimental impact on the whole region and not Pakistan.

Extract-15

“Pakistan’s double game has long frustrated American officials and it has grown worse. There are now efforts in Washington to exert more pressure on the Pakistan Army”.(The New York Times)

‘Exert more pressure’ is an example of ‘Commissive’ speech act as it is an example of threat. The construction of this sentence throws light on the fact that Americans have the right to use a threatening tone with Pakistani authorities. In this excerpt, language is again being used to express operation of power in the discourse of conflict. The central signifier are the Us-Pakistan relations and the floating signifier is the relationship between the security forces of the two countries. The once hand in glove relationship has now touched its nadir according to this editorial. One important point is that American authorities, i.e., civilian and security establishment are on the same page. However contrary facts are true for Pakistan. As according to them, Pakistan’s army is not being loyal to this war on terror. A deliberate dichotomy has been made between Pakistan civilian authorities and Pakistan Army under the notion of ‘otherness’.

Conclusion

The language of the selected editorials was analysed and the findings indicate that central signifier and floating signifier bring very different meanings to the used words. Similarly, the notion of local semantics with regard to political context gives a quite different dimension to language. The simple vocabulary items show an altogether different meaning because of these two important concepts regarding meanings. The agenda is created both in titles and extracts of the editorials because of the particular and specific perspective given to these words and syntactic structures.

The one-sided account is established because of the certain linguistic choices; that is discussed in the light of the concept of "otherness". This concept of 'otherness' focuses on 'emphasis/de-emphasis', 'good/bad', 'us/them' and superstructures and textual schemata. It is concluded that instead of portraying an impartial picture of Pakistan, a very negative picture is being shown to the world. The facts have been distorted to set an agenda and then that agenda is propagated. The concept of "otherness" in the discourse of conflict between the US and Pakistan or between the Pakistan armed forces and the civilians thus bring into light a biased depiction of Pakistan. There are certain instances where Pakistani authorities and terrorists are shown as one and this really dents the image of Pakistan both regionally and globally.

The operation of power through language has also been analyzed. Language has been exploited in such a way that hegemony is created and, thus the US authorities are the ones who have upper hand in this relationship. With the help of modality markers, different lexicons and speech acts power is reflected through language especially in the discourse of conflict. Modality markers such as "must" have been frequently exploited, which because of its intensity shows that Pakistani authorities are answerable before the US authorities and thus hegemony because of language is created in these editorials.

The paper gives a very detailed description and an insight into the concept of agenda-setting in print media. Language is the most important means to bring about a certain agenda into play. The choice of vocabulary, lexicon, syntax and numerous linguistic choices has been a significant tool to breathe life in the language. These tools can thus be used to propagate notions and ideas. The language of the selected editorials is a testimony to this fact. Hegemony through language is created by the selection of numerous linguistic choices. Persuasion and argumentation regarding numerous issues are also the result of the language. The current study in order to analyse language of the selected sample takes help from the works of van Dijk(1993,1995), and Laclau and Mouffe(1985) and McCombs(2005).

The findings depict that in the discourse of conflict between the US and Pakistan, the US newspapers editorials have utilized agenda-setting to portray a dismal image of Pakistan. The world has been forced to see Pakistan in a certain light and perspective.

Endnotes

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