



**BALUCHISTAN CRISIS:A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PAKISTANI
AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA**

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Abstract

Crisis in Balochistan, the largest province of Pakistan by area, is a major concern in Pakistan since its inception. It raises important issues like national security, political marginalization, and human rights. In this context, this study aimed to examine how Pakistani and international print media represented Balochistan crisis using various linguistic and ideological strategies. In this study, the researchers employed a qualitative research design and used Norman Fairclough's Three-dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Eight news articles were analyzed from English media outlet Dawn, The News (representing Pakistani media), BBC, and Al Jazeera (representing international media), published between 2023 and 2025. The results revealed that Pakistani English media largely reflected the official state narrative that highlighted Baloch groups as terrorists and foreign agents. On the other hand, international media focused on human rights concerns, enforced disappearances, and political exclusion of the people of Balochistan. In a nutshell, the findings demonstrated that media discourse was far from neutral and played an important role in shaping public opinion and legitimizing power structures. Therefore, it stresses the need for balanced journalism that includes the voices of the marginalized communities and avoids one-sided portrayals.

Keywords: Media discourse, Balochistan conflict, Critical Discourse Analysis, power, framing, Pakistani and international media.

Introduction

Media discourse plays an important role in shaping public opinion, creating shared perceptions, and backing or confronting dominant forces (Fairclough, 1995). Hence, media becomes a site of ideological struggle, using selective words, metaphors, and stories to promote certain political view (Van Dijk, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). However, in conflict reporting, media becomes a powerful agent that can legitimize state actions or amplify resistance voices depending on who controls it and how it is guided (Fowler, 1991; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Balochistan has been a site of a prolonged conflict involving separatist movements and military operations (Sareen, 2019). Furthermore, the demands for greater autonomy, control over natural resources, and repeated allegations of state repression have further aggravated the conflict (Yousaf, 2019; Ahmed, 2013). In this context, media discourse of the crisis varies between Pakistani and international outlets. Pakistani media often align with the state's official narrative. On the contrary, international media tend to highlight human rights violations and state repression. Therefore, examining how Pakistani and international print media frame the Balochistan conflict is crucial to reveal hidden, state's interests, and global power dynamics that shape media discourse. This study applies Norman Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional



model of Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate how Pakistani (Dawn, The News) and international (BBC, Al Jazeera) newspapers reported on the Balochistan conflict between 2023 and 2025.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the linguistic and discursive elements used by the selected Pakistani and international media outlets when discussing the Balochistan crisis.
2. To investigate how the selected media discourse reveals potential bias, state interests, and power relations.

Research Questions

1. What linguistic and discursive features do the selected Pakistani and international media employ to portray the Balochistan crisis?
2. How does media discourse reveal bias, state interests, and power dynamics in the representation of Balochistan crisis?

Literature Review

Media discourse has a crucial impact on shaping how the public understands events, defines social realities, and negotiates power dynamics (Fairclough, 1995). Specifically, during times of conflict, media discourse plays a foundational role in shaping, legitimizing, and contesting ideological authority. By deciding what to report and how to report it, media outlets shape public opinion and can impact government policies, either supporting dominant powers or give voice to the opposition (Van Dijk, 1998).

Furthermore, media rarely function as impartial observers during conflicts. News coverage is frequently shaped by national agendas and institutional ideologies, resulting in selective and strategically constructed narratives (Philo, 2008). Herman and Chomsky's (1988) Propaganda Model emphasizes that news media often act as instruments of state ideology, shaping content to uphold elite interests. This becomes especially evident in conflict coverage, where state narratives take precedence, alternative perspectives are sidelined and the choice of terms, such as "terrorist" versus "freedom fighter" reveal the media's ideological stance (Allan & Zelizer, 2004).

Several scholars believe that in politically charged environments, the media not only reports on conflict but participates in it through framing strategies. According to Entman (1993), framing means selecting some aspects of a situation and making them more salient to back a particular point of view. This can be seen in the language that media uses and images that portray one victim and the other aggressor. For instance, research on the Iraq War (Kumar, 2006) and the Palestinian Israeli conflict (Barkho, 2008) shows that Western media mirror the political interests of some countries by shaping how viewers understand those conflicts. Furthermore, recent studies like Al-Mahfouz (2023), in his study of discourse analysis of Western coverage of the Gaza crisis, discovered that media outlets have focused to minimized Palestinian suffering while highlighting Israeli security concerns. Likewise, Suwarno and Sahayu (2024) gave an overview of victimhood and aggression in the 2023 Israel and Palestine conflict.

Additionally, the political crisis in Bangladesh has been explored by using Van Dijk model (Ikram, J, & I, 2024). They observed that some outlets presented the ruling Awami League in a positive way and sidelined opposing voices. -Hence, their study revealed how word choices,



and selective quoting shaped opinions and reinforcing specific global power dynamics. The findings of their research are important for our current study, which deals with how Pakistani and international media portray the domestic conflict in Balochistan.

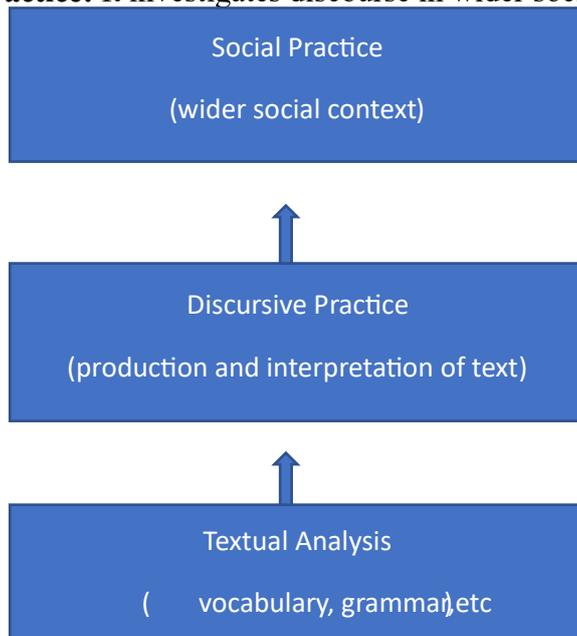
Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers an important framework through which one can examine how language reflects and reinforces societal inequalities. CDA views discourse as inherently political and embedded in the social structures rather than neutral (Renkema, 2004). Moreover, CDA is concerned with the linguistic form of discourse and also with how it is shaped by and how it contributes to social and political forces in society. (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Thus, one can say that CDA is important in social and political crisis, where language is used as a tool for the justification and legitimization of violence (Machin & Mayr, 2012). In the study of print media discourse Norman Fairclough (1995) introduced a three-dimensional model that is of great importance. His model consists of three levels of analysis:

Textual Analysis: It focuses on linguistic elements of a language such as vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. It shows how word choices shape meaning and ideology within the text itself.

Discursive Practice: It investigates how texts are created, consumed, and interpreted.

Social Practice: It investigates discourse in wider social, political and historical context.



By using this Model, researchers can explore how media discourse contributes in shaping public opinion. It is an important and powerful tool for analyzing how media give coverage to conflicts (Fairclough, 2015). Recently and historically, this model has been effectively used to have a deep insight of ideological and linguistic framing within media. For example, Khalid and Jabeen (2023) applied Fairclough's model to highlight how Western and Russian media used various strategies to justify their own stances in the global politics. So, we can use it for the analysis of Pakistani and international print media portraying the crisis in Balochistan.

Research Methodology

This study took an exploratory route to gather data and utilized a qualitative research design, drawing on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).



Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative research design. It used Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA. Furthermore, the study aimed to identify biases, state interests, and power relations reflected in media discourse. Thus, by using CDA the study focused on the deeper ideological and sociopolitical meanings constructed through language in reporting Balochistan's conflict.

Data collection

A total of eight news articles published between 2023 and 2025 were selected through purposive sampling from four major media outlets: Dawn and The News (representing Pakistani media), and Al Jazeera and BBC (representing international media). These sources were chosen due to their wide readership and influence in shaping public opinion.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the selected newspaper articles was guided by Fairclough's three-dimensional Model which includes: Textual Analysis, Discursive Practices, and Social Practices

Delimitations of the Study

There are certain delimitations that frame the scope of this research study, listed below:

1. The study is confined to English-language media, specifically four selected media outlets: Dawn and The News from Pakistan, and Al Jazeera and BBC are from the international media.
2. The selected data comprise a total of 08 news articles published between 2023 and 2025. Articles outside this time frame were excluded to maintain temporal consistency.
3. Only news articles were selected for analysis; editorials, opinion pieces, and reader commentaries were not included to ensure a uniform genre for discourse analysis.
4. The study focuses solely on the linguistic and discursive representation of Balochistan conflict.

Findings and Discussion

In this study, the researchers used Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis is an analytical framework. The aim was to examine critically how Balochistan crisis is discursively constructed in print media. And to uncover the underlying power dynamics and ideological view points. The analysis was structured around three key levels:

Textual Analysis, which focused on word choices, headlines, and tone to uncover how meanings were constructed.

Discursive Practice, which examined how the articles were created and the types of sources they referenced.

Social Practice, which placed the text within the broader social and political landscape.

Here are the findings and analysis for each article:

Title: The Baloch Liberation Army emerged as a key perpetrator of terror attacks in Pakistan in 2024

Date: March 12, 2025

Source: Dawn.com

Textual Analysis

The article refers to groups like the BLA using terms like terrorists, assailants, and perpetrators of terror attacks, as well as phrases like outlawed Baloch insurgent groups and brazen attacks. On the flip side, security personnel who have been killed are labeled as martyred, which paints



them as victims or heroes. By labeling the BLA as a banned terrorist nationalist outfit, the article simplifies the complexity of their political demands.

Discursive Practice

The report leans heavily on state-run media sources, such as Radio Pakistan, and military statements from ISPR as its main information sources. There is a noticeable absence of voices from the Baloch community or independent observers, which means alternative perspectives are missing. This creates a very narrow, security-focused view of the conflict

Social Practice

The article illustrates how the Pakistani media often align with state narratives by focusing on terrorism while conveniently ignoring issues like political marginalization and economic exploitation. This type of reporting not only helps to rationalize ongoing military actions in Balochistan but also diminishes public support for the Baloch people's demands.

Article 2: Dawn (Pakistan)

Title: Baloch rights activist Dr Mahrang Baloch booked in terrorism case
Date: April 6, 2024
Source: Dawn.com

Textual Analysis

In this report of Dawn, the language that is used against Dr. Mahrang Baloch showing her as anti-national and linked her to the BLA, a terrorist group according to state narratives. Using terms like *terrorism*, *sedition*, and *anti-state conspiracies*, to criminalize her actions. The article presented the state's version of events, leaving little space for alternative point of view.

Discursive Practice

At the level of discursive practices the article relied heavily on official sources like the FIR (first information report), police officials, and legal documents. This one-sided perspective reinforces the dominant narrative that portrays Baloch activism as a threat to national security, effectively normalizing the criminalization of Baloch voices.

Social Practice

Consequently, this kind of coverage illustrates how the Pakistani state employs legal tools and media narratives to stifle political dissent in Balochistan. By arresting peaceful activists like Dr. Mahrang on terrorism charges, it discourages public support for their cause.

Article 3: The News (Pakistan)

Title: Security forces eliminate 12 terrorists in Balochistan, KP operations
Date: May 29, 2025

Source: The News (thenews.com.pk)

Textual Analysis

Language in the article is highly emotive using terms like neutralized, eliminated, Indian-sponsored terrorists, and sent to hell to describe the killing of militants. Security personnel are framed as martyrs and heroes. On the other hand, the attackers are framed as foreign-backed enemies. Terms like *Fitna al Hindustan* and *Khawarij* reinforce religious and nationalist framing. The language used presents military as protectors and militants as outsiders.

Discursive Practice

The report draws exclusively on the official press release from ISPR (Inter-Services Public Relations). It shows that how state institutions directly influence the narrative. There is no voice representing the Baloch's perspective. There is no independent verification of the facts presented. There is no effort to question or investigate the official version. The article reflects uncritical acceptance of the state's version of events and reproduces its discourse. This silences



alternative perspectives or local grievances and portrays the situation only through a national security lens.

Social Practice

Such reporting shows how Pakistani media support the state's view of Balochistan conflict as a war against terrorism and foreign enemies. The article shifts focus away from domestic political and human rights issues by associating Baloch insurgents with India. Such reporting makes it harder for the public to understand the root causes of the conflict. It discourages open debate.

Article 4: The News (Pakistan)

Title: ADC martyred as terrorists strike Balochistan's Sorab

Date: May 30, 2025

Source: The News (thenews.com.pk)

Textual Analysis

The article uses strong terms like *terrorists*, *proxies backed by India*, and *martyrdom* to describe the events. The attackers are consistently linked to banned Baloch groups and foreign enemies (especially India). In contrast, state officials like ADC Hidayat Buledi are framed as national heroes who died for the country. The language glorifies security forces while condemns the attackers without exploring their motives. Descriptions such as cowardly attempt, unmatched courage, and direct challenge to the writ of the state reinforce a black-and-white view of the conflict.

Discursive Practice

Reporting relies heavily on quotes from state officials and military representatives. It does not include voices from local people, civil society, or the Baloch community. There is no attempt to investigate the state's claim, for example calling BLA a "proxy of India" without any proof. This one-sided approach support the official view and leaves no room for an alternative perspective. The absence of journalistic neutrality signals a media environment where reporting often aligns with national security interests.

Social Practice

Such coverage reflects how Pakistani media often frames conflict in Balochistan as a security issue or foreign conspiracy. It shifts focus away from local issues and justifies military operations by blaming India. This kind of reporting helps the government control the narrative and makes it harder for Baloch voices to be heard. It also labels local resistance as criminal rather than political.

Article 5: Al Jazeera (International)

Title: Pakistan preparing major offensive against Balochistan separatists

Date: November 20, 2024

Source: Al Jazeera

Textual Analysis

This article uses neutral language compared to Pakistani print media. Instead of labels like *terrorists*, terms like *separatist groups*, *armed rebellion*, and *outlawed groups* are used, which shows the political and ethnic side of the conflict. Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) is identified as the biggest of such groups. The article uses a balanced tone by presenting both government view that civilians have been targeted and BLA claims of resisting unfair exploitation of Balochistan resources.

Discursive Practice

This portrayal includes information from multiple sources like Pakistani government, Chinese and Iranian officials, and news agencies like Reuters. It highlights international concerns and



quotes government's justification for military operations. Unlike Pakistani media, this article does not only the state narrative. Instead, it shows how Balochistan's conflict is seen in global geopolitical terms, linking it to economic projects, foreign nationals, and regional alliances. There is an effort to maintain journalistic distance by not endorsing either side too strongly.

Social Practice

This type of reporting reflects how international media connects Balochistan conflict to global politics, including China's Belt and Road Initiative and Iran's security concerns. It also shows how separatist movements are part of ongoing struggles over resources and representation. While Pakistani media often presents Baloch resistance as criminal, Al Jazeera presents it as part of a longer historical and political conflict. This reporting challenges simplistic portrayals and invites global readers to consider underlying causes such as economic injustice and marginalization.

Article 6: Al Jazeera (International)

Title: Resolving the Baloch issue is in Pakistan's political and economic interest

Date: January 22, 2024

Source: Al Jazeera

Textual Analysis

The article uses neutral language. Instead of calling Baloch activists terrorists, it refers to them as *protesters*, *relatives of missing persons*, or *Baloch community members*. It highlights words like *enforced disappearances*, *extrajudicial killings*, and *marginalization*, focusing on human rights and political grievances rather than security threats. The language clearly sympathizes with the Baloch population by portraying them as victims of state neglect and violence. The use of expressions like *lost his cool*, *delegitimize the Baloch protestors*, and *violence the police unleashed*, signal criticism of the state's behavior.

Discursive Practice

This article is written by two external contributors, which allows for a more critical stance than state-aligned media. It includes references to data from human rights organizations (e.g., HRCP, Voice for Baloch Missing Persons) and points out flaws in official narratives. The article gives voice to the Baloch perspective which is often missing in Pakistani media. It highlights peaceful protest, legal resistance, and calls for equal rights. By doing so, it challenges the dominant discourse that frames all Baloch dissent as violent or anti-state.

Social Practice

Such reporting reflects a global, human rights-centered approach to Balochistan conflict. It emphasizes that long-term peace and development in Pakistan require political reform and addressing local grievances. It also critiques the Pakistani state's history of treating the Baloch conflict purely as a security issue. This article encourages political dialogue, legal justice, and equitable resource distribution.

Article 7: BBC

Title: Pakistan: Marching for the thousands who disappeared in Balochistan

Date: February 2, 2024

Source: BBC News

Textual Analysis

Language in this BBC article highlights human suffering through personal stories, such as Sammi Deen Baloch carrying a photo of her missing father. Phrases like *forcibly disappeared* and *vanished without a trace* humanize the victims and evoke empathy. The article avoids state



or military jargon and uses terms like *protesters*, *activists*, and *rights groups*. Hence, it reflects a neutral or slightly sympathetic tone towards the Baloch cause.

Discursive Practice

The article draws information from a range of sources, including activists, victims' families, and neutral journalists. Unlike Pakistani news outlets, it provides space to voices critical of the state, such as Mahrang Baloch and Taha Siddiqui. This balance of perspectives allows readers to hear both the human rights narrative and the state's viewpoint. Furthermore, it leans toward highlighting abuses and injustices faced by the Baloch people. The BBC uses a rights-based discourse that aligns with international human rights frameworks, offering a platform often missing in domestic media coverage.

Social Practice

The publication reflects concerns over enforced disappearances and repression in Balochistan. It shows how international media can challenge state narratives and bring global attention to local resistance. The focus on women leading protests challenges stereotypes and reveals the growing grassroots movement in Balochistan.

Article 8: BBC

Title: A life spent waiting – and searching rows of unclaimed bodies

Date: March 22, 2025

Source: BBC News

Textual Analysis

The report uses a strong storytelling technique to highlight the human cost of Balochistan conflict. A serious tone is maintained throughout the story. Descriptions of burn marks on the chest, bodies found in unmarked graves, and chipped cups makes the suffering of Baloch families feel personal. The use of real names and powerful quotes (e.g. "Silence is not an option," "I miss you so much, Baba") frames the story in the victims' voices. The article avoids official language like anti-state or militant crackdown and instead focuses on terms like *disappeared*, *traumatized*, and *grieving families*, linking the story to human rights issues.

Discursive Practice

This BBC report relies heavily on voices of the victims and their families, especially women and children. They are positioned as narrators. The article has minimal official commentary. It includes minimal official commentary, but their commentary has been opposed directly by providing evidence from community. The article questions the credibility of states narratives. The article is based on draws on investigative reporting, field interviews, and historical references. Balochistan crisis has been presented as a long-term structural conflict rather than a security issue.

Social Practice

This article challenges Pakistani state's security-centric narrative by highlighting enforced disappearances as systemic and longstanding. The emphasis on women's resistance and the lasting trauma across generations shows that the conflict is now seen less as an armed rebellion and more as a human rights issue. By documenting the life stories of Saira, Mahrang, and Masooma, the article presents the Baloch struggle within broader frameworks of women's activism, memory, and the fight for justice.

Conclusion

In this study, the researchers took a closer look at how both Pakistani and international media frame the Balochistan conflict, using linguistic and discursive strategies based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. By analyzing eight articles from outlets like Dawn, The News, BBC, and Al Jazeera, the researchers found some striking



differences in how these media sources tell the story of the crisis. On one side, Pakistani media aligned with the official narrative of the state. These media outlets used language that is emotionally charged and securitized. They label Baloch groups as terrorists while military personnel as martyrs and heroes. This discourse framing approach reinforces a dominant national security agenda that delegitimizes the opposing view and legitimizes the state's perspective. Regarding sources, these reports draw heavily upon official statements like ISPR and government statements. They largely neglect the perspective of the Baloch community. Furthermore, the opposing Baloch voices are framed as a threat to national integration. Thus, the political grievances of Balochistan are dismissed.

On the other hand, the international media outlets such as BBC and Al Jazeera provide a more balanced view of the crisis. These international media outlets are focused to present the human rights concerns in Balochistan by bringing the experiences of victims, Baloch activists like Mahrang Baloch and the voices of Baloch community through narrating their stories. Moreover, they contextualize Balochistan crisis within a broader social and political framework, addressing factors like exploitation of Balochistan natural resources, political and social marginalization of Baloch community, vertical and horizontal inequalities in Balochistan.

Moreover, these findings reveal that media discourse is by no means neutral. It is shaped by power dynamics, national interests, and ideological orientations. In many cases, Pakistani media act as a vehicle of state's narratives and thus, they contribute to the marginalization of opposing voices. Contrary to Pakistani media, international media provide alternative framework and give space to the voice of the oppressed.

To conclude, this study highlights that language plays an important role in shaping public opinion about an issue. More importantly, it draws attention to need for ethical responsibility of journalism to portray such complex situation with accuracy. This research offers a deeper insight into the ideological influence of media in areas like Balochistan.

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