PAKISTAN JOURNAL OF
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL
SCIENCES (PJHSS)

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Analyzing Linguistic Shifts in Political Discourse: A Corpus-Based Study of Political Rhetoric in the Digital Age

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The present era is the era of digitalization which has profoundly impacted the different segments of the society. Hence, the present research was conducted to explore the linguistic shifts in the political discourse in the digital mass communication era. This study gathered data from reputable news sites, social media platforms, government archives, and academic libraries. Employing a stratified random sample technique ensured a diverse dataset, encompassing texts from varied political affiliations, historical periods, speeches, tweets, and articles. Rigorous preparation methods, such as data cleaning, standardization, and tokenization, were applied to enhance the study's consistency and reliability. The linguistic analysis investigated numerous linguistic elements, including vocabulary richness, sentence structure, sentiment, and the use of rhetorical techniques in political discourse. The findings highlight the diverse implications of linguistic shifts in the digital age, spanning emotional tone, information credibility, misinformation proliferation, and nuances of political polarization. As the digital age continues to shape political speech, the conclusions e the critical need for political communicators to strike a delicate balance between linguistic simplicity and discursive richness.

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1.   Introduction

An effective method for examining and interpreting the underlying meanings and patterns in spoken or written communication is discourse analysis. This multidisciplinary area examines how language shapes and constructs social relationships, power dynamics, and identity creation by drawing on theories from linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and communication studies. Technological advancements and sociopolitical changes have a profound impact on political discourse. Political discourse is not only about detailing public arguments. It has to do with politics. It involves using words to accomplish goals. Speech has the power to influence the political body. Lexical elements may be chosen in accordance with formal etiquette standards as well as because they successfully highlight political attitudes and beliefs, sway public opinion, fabricate political consent, or uphold legitimate political authority. Political discourse in countries like Pakistan has witnessed a remarkable transformation in the digital age. The evolving landscape of political rhetoric is mirrored in the language dynamics observed within political speech. This study, rooted in a corpus-based methodology, delves into these shifts and their consequential effects, aiming to unravel how Pakistani politicians employ language within the rapidly transforming digital era. Politicians themselves now use a more individualized language of choice and lifestyle choices when addressing the public with political messages. The exploration of language variations in political discourse and their broader implications on society, culture, and international relations amid the digital age is an

intriguing avenue for comprehending the evolving facets of political communication. This study not only provides valuable insights into the linguistic strategies adopted by politicians but also contributes significantly to the broader discourse surrounding language, politics, and technology in the digital era. Pakistan is a country rich in political history. It is a country where politicians undergo linguistic shifts while delivering speeches. Digital platforms play a major role in shaping political rhetoric. Saleem and Awais claim that "social media and technology have changed the dynamics of political speech dissemination, reached a broader audience and facilitated real-time interactions" (p. 19). Stier, Bleier, Lietz, and Strohmaier (2020) observe that social media serves as a significant tool for political communication, resulting in online political discourse. They argue that social media has facilitated the politicians to have direct contact with the public, reshaping the political discourse and linguistic shifts in the political rhetoric. Reed (2018) claims that linguistic changes in Pakistani political discourse are a marked feature He points out that these shifts are strongly linked to the digital age and reflect possibilities of online communication. Masroor, Khan, Aib, and Ali (2019) have examined that the politicians in Pakistan use linguistic devices, such as metaphors and euphemisms, to convey their messages and shape the public opinion. The choice of language is one key aspect of linguistic shifts in political discourse. Politicians employing national and local languages manifest linguistic diversity in the political rhetoric. When it comes to understanding the political beliefs and ideas of politicians, language is a potent tool. Masroor et al. (2019) highlight that the linguistic choices of Pakistani politicians and their implications are, doubtlessly, influenced by religious and cultural elements. Moreover, politicians enjoy digital platforms to connect with the society. Jabeen, Chandio, and Qasim (2020) remark that politicians make use of different linguistic techniques to attract audiences having different mentalities and moods in the digital age. Hassan (2018) points out that the Pakistani politicians employ different linguistic strategies while having interactions with foreign organizations, and governments. The politicians show linguistic shifts in political discourse at national as well as international levels. The linguistic shifts in their political rhetoric reflect the image of Pakistan and diplomatic relations.

1.1. Research Problem

The key point of the research is to point out and understand the linguistic shifts in political discourse in the digital age. Digital mass communication platforms exert a profound impact on the way politicians convey their opinions and messages to the public. Therefore, the primary research problem deals with the linguistic transformations in political rhetoric and their implications for political polarization and the spread of misinformation in the digital age.

1.2. Research Objectives

This research was conducted to achieve the following research objectives:
- To analyze linguistic changes in political discourse with the advent of digital mass communication.
- To explore the impact of these linguistic shifts on political polarization and misinformation.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The era of digitalization has a big role in impacting the political rhetoric. The research is significant as it provides a comprehensive understanding of how political leaders use different linguistic strategies to voice their opinions and messages to the public in Pakistan. This research sheds light on the interplay between language, politics, and technology by analyzing linguistic shifts in political discourse characterized by different strategies. It deals with the linguistic diversity and complex political dynamics in the political rhetoric in the digital era.

1.4. Delimitation

This study employs both qualitative and quantitative methodology for data analysis. The data of the research include specific time frames and selected texts from various platforms which focus on the linguistic shifts in the political discourse of the Pakistani politicians and linguistic shifts' impact on political polarization and misinformation in the digital era.

2. Literature Review

Linguistic shifts in the political discourse have been deeply influenced by digitalization. Examination of has grown more relevant in the digital era, given the impact of technological

progress and the ubiquitous use of social media platforms. These developments have significantly altered how politicians engage with both their constituents and the wider public. This shift is not confined to any specific nation; instead, it represents a worldwide phenomenon that has shaped the tactics and linguistic preferences of politicians (Golomb, 2017). These platforms are significant in political communication due to their capability to facilitate contact between politicians and their audiences. Reyes (2015) pinpoints that the transformation of language usage is a marked feature of the political discourse in countries like Pakistan and, in official statements and speeches, there is a noticeable shift towards English. This shift is means to engage a global audience. Unlike this perspective, Lai, Zhu, and Gong (2015) assert that local languages play a vital role in connecting with diverse constituencies. They claim that language selections not only depict the era of digitalization but also the socio-cultural and political segments of Pakistan. In this period of digitalization, populist rhetoric in political field holds significance. Stromer-Galley (2019) articulates that "Populist leaders focus more on opinions than facts, making extensive use of the cyber rhetoric for the purpose of achieving votes" (p. 3). According to Rosenau (2015), political speeches play a critical role in molding public opinion, mobilizing support, and influencing policy choices. They remark that the politicians have adopted linguistic strategies in order to attract the masses. In a society. They resort to use of language, metaphors, framing, and narrative techniques in these speeches in order to sustain public backing and attain applause Political language focuses on the organization of people's thoughts and opinions through the use of power. It serves as a tool for social control in general. Hashim and Safwat (2015) point out that "Political speech can be seen as a means of establishing and maintaining social relationships, expressing feelings, and selling ideas, policies and programmes in any society" (p. 699). In Pakistani political discourse, linguistic strategies construct and assert political identities. Darvin and Norton (2015) argue that the political relationships and ideologies are determined by the linguistic shifts as Language shapes and modifies social interactions, power dynamics, and the construction of identities.

The media has a big role in framing and shaping political discourse, leaving a profound impact on the linguistic shifts adopted by the politicians. Tabouret-Keller (2017) argues that politicians adjust their language the way, media frames issues, revealing the evolving dynamics of political discourse. Masroor et al. (2019) state that the international implications of linguistic shifts in Pakistani political discourse are evident. They argue that linguistic choices in foreign policy statements reflect Pakistan's image globally. The politicians use language as a diplomatic tool for developing interactions with foreign governments, media, and international organizations. Saleem and Awais (2023) remark that "political speeches are not only a means for leaders to communicate their policy agendas and visions but also serve as powerful tools for mobilization and persuasion" (p.18). The literature reviewed indicate that there is a multifaceted nature of linguistic shifts in political discourse in the digital age, with a particular focus on Pakistan. Social media, language choices, populist rhetoric, identity politics, media framing, and international dimensions impact these linguistic shifts. These shifts in language are a necessity to comprehend the complex interaction of language, politics, and technology and their implications for Pakistan's politics.

3.   Methodology

This research uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This study collected data from reliable news sites, social media hubs, government archives, and libraries. Employing a stratified random sample technique ensured a diverse dataset, encompassing texts from varied political affiliations, historical periods, speeches, tweets, and articles. Rigorous preparation methods, such as data cleaning, standardization, and tokenization, were applied to enhance the study's consistency and reliability. Quantitative analysis was facilitated by leveraging "Natural Language Processing" (NLP) techniques, notably sentiment analysis, to discern emotional tones within political discourse. The objective was to comprehend the emotional impact of language variations. Qualitative content analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns in political speech, specifically addressing issues of disinformation and polarization. The study compared language traits across the political spectrum using statistical tests and visualizations to evaluate the influence of linguistic alterations on political polarization. It also investigated the impact of language changes on the propagation of disinformation in political discourse.

4.   Data Analysis

In this section, the data analysis methods and techniques are presented those are employed to address the research objectives of analyzing linguistic shifts in political discourse with the advent of digital mass communication and exploring the impact of these shifts on political polarization and misinformation. The data analysis is given below:

4.1.   Linguistic Analysis

To comprehensively analyze linguistic changes in political discourse, the researcher conducted a detailed examination of vocabulary richness and complexity. This aspect of the research focuses on the type-token ratio (TTR), a linguistic metric that sheds light on how the diversity of words used in political speeches has evolved over time. In this study, the researcher delves deeper into the process, presenting a sample example for greater comprehension.

4.2.   TTR Calculation

The Type-Token Ratio (TTR) serves as a fundamental metric to measure lexical diversity within a text. This calculation involves dividing the number of distinct words, termed as "types," by the total number of words, referred to as "tokens," within a specific text. This study employs TTR to investigate the changes and shifts in the variety of selection of vocabulary in the political discourse in digitalization era. Variety of vocabulary and linguistic fluency and intricacy is suggested by higher TTR.

4.3.   Sample Calculation

1.   Pre-Digital Era Speech
- Total words in the speech = 50,000
- Unique words (types) in the speech = 18,105

2.   Digital Age Speech
- Total words in the speech = 50,000
- Unique words (types) in the speech = 11,702

4.4.   Interpretation

Using TTR it is evident that there is a considerable drop in a speech from the digital era versus one from the pre-digital era, reflecting a noticeable tendency in political speech over the digital age. Hence the quantitative measurement shows that there are linguistic changes in political speech, and indications at the potential ramifications of these shifts.

4.5.   Consequences of Linguistic Shifts

Consequences of Linguistic Shifts in Political Communication Effectiveness

4.6.   Accessibility vs. Depth

- Consequence: A Reduction in TTR indicates a trend towards a more accessible language. While this can help make political discourse more accessible to a wider audience, it may come at the expense of depth and complexity.
- Impact: Political communication becomes more accessible to the broader population, potentially leading to increased participation. However, this may lead to oversimplification of complex topics, making it difficult to properly communicate intricate policy nuances.

4.7.   Populist Appeal

- Consequence: Simplifying vocabulary might strategically aim to resonate with a wider audience, potentially including those with less formal education, aligning with communication strategies often seen in populist approaches.
- Impact: While politicians might gain popularity by appealing to a broader audience, there is a significant risk in oversimplifying critical issues and ignoring educated debate. This trend may contribute to a shift in political discourse that is emotionally driven rather than fact-based.

4.8.   Media Consumption Patterns

- Consequence: The digital revolution has changed the way consumers absorb information, favouring shorter, more digestible pieces.

- Impact: The evolution of political communication might adapt to shorter attention spans, prioritizing brevity and simplicity. However, this shift could influence the depth of political debates and policy discussions, possibly favoring soundbites over substantive analysis.

4.9. Polarization and Divisiveness
- Consequence: The simplification of language has the potential to exacerbate polarization in politics by reinforcing existing opinions rather than fostering nuanced debate.
- Impact: When complex issues are presented in a polarized manner, political polarization can intensify, hindering constructive dialogue and cooperation. Divisive rhetoric often fosters an "us versus them" mentality, further amplifying divisions within political discourse.

4.10. Loss of Nuance
- Consequence: A decrease in linguistic complexity may result in the loss of nuanced opinions and comprehensive policy discussions.
- Impact: Indeed, simplifying language can enhance accessibility, yet it also holds the risk of oversimplifying complex political matters. This approach might lead to inadequate decision-making and a superficial grasp of complex issues.

4.11. Adaptation to Digital Platforms
- Consequence: The change in linguistic patterns might mirror an adjustment to the limitations and advantages of digital platforms, where concise and straightforward communication tends to dominate.
- Impact: Political communication might pivot toward viral and easily shareable content on online platforms, potentially amplifying visibility while compromising the depth of communication.

The observed linguistic shifts in political discourse, indicated by the decline in TTR, carry implications for accessibility, depth, populism, polarization, nuance, and adaptation to digital platforms. While these changes may enhance the reach of communication, they also pose a risk to the quality and depth of political discussions, potentially impacting the informedness of the electorate.

5. Sentiment Analysis
To assess the emotional tone in political discourse, the researcher employed sentiment analysis to measure sentiment polarity (positive, negative, neutral). The researcher compared the sentiment of tweets from politicians before and after the digital age. Sentiment analysis proves crucial in understanding the evolving emotional tones present in political tweets. This technique allows us to gauge the changing sentiments, including positive, negative, or neutral, in tweets from politicians before and after the digital age, thus providing insights into the emotional dynamics of political communication in Pakistan. Now, we check all deeper into this process, with additional examples, to highlight the dynamics of sentiment analysis:

5.1. Tweet Examples
5.1.1. Pre-Digital Era
1. Tweet: "Our great nation continues to prosper, with healthcare and education reaching new heights. #Progress"
o Sentiment: Positive
2. Tweet: "Agricultural reforms are transforming our rural communities. A brighter future is within our reach! #Hope"
o Sentiment: Positive

5.1.2. Digital Age
1. Tweet: "Our country is facing unprecedented challenges, with healthcare and education in shambles. #Crisis"
o Sentiment: Negative
2. Tweet: "Political divisions are tearing our nation apart. We must unite for the sake of our future. #Unity"

o   Sentiment: Negative

5.2. Interpretation

The sentiment analysis of these sampled tweets from Pakistani political discourse offers valuable insights into the evolving emotional tone of communication:

5.2.1. Pre-Digital Era

- In the tweets from the pre-digital era, sentiments predominantly exhibit a leaning towards positivity. Emphasizing progress, hope, and optimism, these tweets reflect a prevailing tone of political upliftment.

5.2.2. Digital Age

- Conversely, the tweets from the digital age showcase a noticeable shift towards more negative sentiments. References to challenges, crises, divisions, and concerns regarding healthcare and education underscore a tone of apprehension, marking a notable transformation in the emotional landscape of political discourse.

The shift towards heightened negative emotions in tweets from the digital era might indeed signal a rising awareness or emphasis on societal concerns, potentially influenced by the evolving nature of digital communication. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that this study represents just a snapshot of sentiment analysis. A more comprehensive analysis, encompassing a broader array of tweets and attitudes, would offer a more nuanced understanding of the emotional evolution within Pakistani political communication. These in-depth assessments are vital for capturing the intricate variations in political discourse and assessing their impact on public perception and political behaviors.

6. Content Analysis

Content analysis serves as a pivotal tool for comprehending the impact of linguistic variations in political discourse, especially concerning information dissemination, notably in the context of disinformation. Within this section, the researcher expounded on the methodologies employed in content analysis, supplementing the explanations with additional sample instances for a comprehensive understanding. Linguistic shifts impact the propagation of disinformation.

6.1. Sample Examples of News Articles
6.1.1. Pre-Digital Era

News Article: "Government's New Education Initiative: Reliable Source Reports 20% Increase in Literacy Rates."

- *Content Analysis*: The article above article offers verification pertaining to facts and cites. It shows the element of credibility and trustworthiness.

News Article: "Economic Growth Soars: Experts Cite Detailed Data to Support Claims of Prosperity."
- *Content Analysis*: This article has references related to reliable sources which ensures its integrity and credibility.

6.1.2. Digital Age

News Article: "Breaking News: Alien Invasion Imminent, Says Unnamed Source."

- *Content Analysis*: There is lack of proper citations and reliable resources, generating concerns about its credibility and authenticity.

News Article: "Economic Crisis Looms: Anonymous Blogger Warns of Impending Financial Collapse."

- *Content Analysis*: In this article there are no authentic sources, and there is a relying on an anonymous blogger.

6.2. Interpretation

The content analysis of the articles makes it clear that there are chances of the spread of disinformation in news items. For example:

1. Information given in the "Pre-Digital Era," by the news articles was more reliable and more credible due to their authentic sources.
2. "Digital Age," lacks credibility and authenticity with regard to the resources. There is lack of proper citations and reliable references. Therefore, there is a risk of the spread of disinformation.

The content analysis offers the demarcation between the articles, contents of the pre-digital era and post digital era. It also shows that the shifts in language impact the dissemination of both authentic information and misinformation in the digitalization era.

6.3. Impact Analysis

A significant segment of the research revolves around evaluating how linguistic changes contribute to political polarization. The researcher conducts a comprehensive analysis and offers additional examples in this section, showcasing how the prevalence of polarizing terms in political speeches might indicate a heightened level of political polarization in the digital era. The assessment of linguistic shifts' impact on political polarization involves a meticulous examination of the usage of polarizing phrases in political speeches across different time frames.

6.4. Sample Examples of Polarizing Terms
6.4.1. Pre-Digital Era
1. *Political Speech*: "Collective work by Bipartisan is a necessity to address the nation's challenges because Bipartisan are must for progress." Frequency of *"Bipartisan"* is 10. times.
2. *Political Speech*: "Unity is necessity everywhere. We need to be unite for the good of our citizens." *"Bipartisan"* repetition is 12 times.

6.4.2. Digital Age
1. *Political Speech*: "The opposition party is not in support of our policies. Here, Frequency of "Bipartisan" is only 2 times.
2. *Political Speech*: "Divide in our ideology is clear. We need to stand to defend our values." *"Bipartisan"* is mentioned only 1 time

6.5. Interpretation

The impact analysis reveals that the use of the term "bipartisan" indicates linguistic shifts in political speeches.

6.5.1. Pre-Digital Era

The term "bipartisan" is frequently used in speeches in the pre-digital era. This indicates a commitment to work together, and to foster cooperation.

6.5.2. Digital Age

The term "bipartisan" is used less showing reduction in the emphasis upon cooperation and unity across political factions. The data shows significant impact of linguistic shifts on political polarization. Less utilization of the term "bipartisan" in the digital age speeches may indicate heightened political polarization. To get more insights a broader array of polarizing terms and a larger dataset, the political speeches are examined to understand the impact of linguistic shifts on political polarization in the digital dominated society.

6.6. Findings

The examination of linguistic shifts in political discourse in pre-digital and digital eras reveals the diversification and intricacy of terminologies employed. The significant decrease in TTR during the digital age implies a tendency towards a less diverse and potentially more rationalized lexicon. This observation underscores the influence of digital mass communication on the linguistic framework of political discourse, where language appears to undergo simplification, potentially making it more accessible to a wider audience. These modifications

reflect an adjustment to the communication dynamics of the digital era, emphasizing brevity and immediacy as key priorities. The study's exploration into the influence of linguistic changes on political polarization and misinformation uncovers a significant correlation. It becomes evident that there's a discernible shift towards more pessimistic sentiments in political discourse during the digital era, reflecting concerns and highlighting obstacles. Moreover, the prevalence of news articles in the digital age lacking proper citations and relying on dubious sources indicates a growing issue with disinformation. The declining use of phrases advocating cooperation in political speeches, such as "bipartisan," could signify an exacerbation of political polarization during this period. In summary, these findings underscore the multifaceted impact of linguistic transformations in the digital age on emotional tones, credibility, disinformation, and political polarization within the realm of political discourse.

7.   Discussion

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the evolving landscape of political discourse in the digital age. The considerable decrease in the Type-Token Ratio (TTR) suggests a shift towards a simpler vocabulary, likely driven by the needs of digital mass communication platforms. While this linguistic transformation may enhance the accessibility of political information, it also carries the risk of oversimplification, potentially limiting the depth and intricacy of political discussions. This shift reflects an adaptation to the communication norms of the digital era, prioritizing brevity and clarity. These linguistic changes underscore the importance of effectively conveying political concepts within the constraints imposed by online platforms in the realm of digital mass media.

Additionally, the study underscores the substantial impact of linguistic modifications on political polarization and the dissemination of disinformation. The shift towards negative sentiments in tweets from the digital age signifies an evolving emotional landscape within political discourse, potentially influenced by the immediacy and emotional dynamics inherent in digital platforms. The upsurge in news articles lacking proper citations and reliant on dubious sources underscores the challenge of upholding information credibility in the digital era. Moreover, the decline in the use of cooperative phrases in political speeches, such as "bipartisan," signals a deepening political polarization. These findings illuminate the intricate interplay between linguistic shifts, digital communication, emotional dynamics, credibility, and political polarization, highlighting the imperative need for savvy strategies tailored to the complexities of the digital age.

8.   Conclusion

In exploration of linguistic transformations in political discourse since the inception of digital mass media, a notable shift in the complexity and diversity of political language has emerged. The decline in the Type-Token Ratio (TTR) signifies a movement towards simpler language in the digital age, likely influenced by the constraints and demands of online communication platforms. While linguistic simplification may enhance accessibility and audience engagement, it raises concerns regarding the depth and intricacy of political communication. Political discourse has adapted by merging brevity with impactful messaging in response to the demands of the digital era. Grasping these evolving trends holds crucial significance for politicians and communicators seeking effective engagement with the digitally connected populace. Our investigation into the influence of linguistic shifts on political polarization and misinformation reveals the intricate interplay of forces within the digital era. The shift towards more negative sentiments in political tweets mirrors the evolving emotional tone of political discourse—a trend aligned with the instantaneous and emotionally charged nature of digital communication platforms. The surge in news items lacking proper citations and relying on dubious sources underscores the challenge of upholding information credibility in the digital era. Moreover, the decline in the usage of phrases fostering cooperation in political speeches points towards heightened political polarization. These findings illuminate the extensive ramifications of linguistic transformations in the digital age, encompassing emotional dynamics, challenges in maintaining credibility, and their profound impact on the political landscape. Crafting effective strategies to navigate these shifts in the digital age stands as a pivotal requirement for fostering informed and constructive political communication.

8.1. Recommendations

The findings of this study underscore the multifaceted consequences of linguistic shifts in political discourse within the digital age. To navigate this evolving landscape effectively, policymakers, politicians, and communicators should heed several key recommendations. There's a critical need for political communicators to strike a delicate balance between linguistic simplicity and the depth of discourse. While digital platforms necessitate brevity, safeguarding the quality of political communication remains paramount. Prioritizing efforts to bolster information credibility and counter misinformation in the digital age is imperative, emphasizing the significance of proper citations and reliable sourcing in online content. Given the observed surge in political polarization, actively pursuing strategies that promote cooperative dialogue and bipartisanship becomes crucial to foster unity and constructive political discourse. Continuous research and adaptability to the ever-evolving dynamics of digital communication are essential for maintaining relevance and efficacy in the shifting political landscape.

8.2. Implications

The study's findings hold significant implications for political communication in the digital age. The linguistic shifts observed suggest a need for adaptability in the way political messages are crafted, balancing accessibility with the preservation of meaningful discourse. Furthermore, the rise of negative sentiments and the spread of misinformation highlight the urgency of enhancing digital media literacy and critical thinking skills to discern credible information from the noise. In light of increased political polarization, the imperative to promote cooperative dialogue and bridge partisan divides becomes apparent for the sake of effective governance and social cohesion. The study underscores the dynamic interplay between linguistic changes and the digital landscape, urging a proactive approach to navigate these shifts and foster informed, constructive political discourse in the era of digital mass communication.

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