



RESEARCH PAPER

Language Attitudes: Convergence and Divergence in the Political Speeches of Imran Khan

¹Nimra Saeed and ²*Dr. Durr-e-Nayab

1. PhD Scholar, Department of English, The Women University Multan, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of English, The Women University Multan, Punjab, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author** | durrenayab@wum.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The current study analyzes the convergence and divergence techniques employed in political speeches by Imran Khan and investigate a wide range of Khan's comments from his various election rallies, sessions conducted during his government and foreign conferences from the year 2018 to 2022 using Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). Drawing on qualitative content analysis, the study examines a purposive sample of political speeches delivered both domestically and internationally. Language used by Khan is very purposeful and clearly indicates language attitudes; convergence and divergence. Convergence is employed to show a sense of solidarity and unity whereas divergence is used for the sake of distancing oneself. Khan through his patriotic metaphors and Urdu language represents him as the leader of the common people while he employs divergence to distance himself from the foreign powers. This shows clearly how these language attitudes create versatile yet contextual ideologies in the politics of South Asia.

KEY WORDS Convergence, Divergence, Political Speeches, Language Attitudes, Agendas

Introduction

In the political scenario, language is not only treated as a means of communication and negotiation with people. Rather is considered as a tool to exercise power and reflect certain ideologies. Language is used as a strong weapon to influence ideas, to create some truths and to motivate a large number of people. Politicians purposefully design and frame their speeches to attract people to showcase a sense of unity and emotional attachment with people by shifting from one language to another. In South Asia, language is all packed with certain ideologies and factors that determine the identity of an individual in different contexts whether they political, cultural, historical or religious. As an ex-cricketer to a famous politician and then coming as a Prime Minister of Pakistan from 2018 to 2022, Imran Khan represents a striking example of how languages work in political settings. His command on switching at once from plain and expressive Urdu language to refined English language is extremely overwhelming. He persuades the audience through his level of professionalism by giving respect to their cultural, nationalist and religious ideas (Giles, & Coupland, 1991, Sposky, 2004)

Communicative choices can be better understood through the language attitudes. Code switching, changing of tone according to varying context and the selection of lexical items often reflect the political and social dynamics which include patriotism, anti-American rhetoric, and popularity (Rahman, 2011). The use of Urdu language in the local speeches generally reflects a comprehensive, patriotic stance, while English language is often used for international forums or the audience with higher social status representing the convergence strategy (Bailey, 2007) On the contrary, divergence is used in criticism of

former political rules, global organizations or in reaction to the Western dominance. By employing divergence strategy, Khan distances himself and his political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), as a distinctive identity, using several metaphors, nationalistic references and repetition to gain support and popularity (Fairclough, 2001).

Language is not only always considered as a means of interacting but to represent the socio-political identities. In Pakistan, the linguistic choices are specifically loaded to show some political stance linking to social hierarchies, historically power dynamics and cultural ties. (Spolsky, 2004; Mahboob, 2009). In the political discourse, the leaders structure their speeches in such a way that shows their authority and power over the people, thus shaping the thoughts of people (Chilton & Schaffner, 2002).

In countries like Pakistan political speeches reflect a unique language view. The languages fluctuates between Urdu and English to show harmony and distancing oneself. Urdu, the national language is deeply coherent with unity and solidarity whereas English language is used to address the high social status (Mahboob, 2009). This fluctuation of different languages create several tensions between the concept of nationalism and the cosmopolitan modernity, that is further influenced by code switching and audience targeted devices.

The decorated style of Khan's speeches clearly reflects language not just as a technique for political policy but also as a tool for political division and alignment. Religious references, nationalist metaphors, and culturally loaded expressions are often used by Khan to address a large number of local people. On the contrary, he use more formal English based expressions to show his separation from the international forums and diplomatic contexts (Haq, 2021).

Thus, this research examines that attitudes of language are not arbitrary but conceptually loaded that reflect and reinforce certain linguistic choices, political dominance and nationality. This research aims to investigate how convergence and divergence strategies are carefully determined and appear as thoughtful political weapons in Khan's speeches. The speeches of different years from 2018 to 2022 represent how Khan professionally use language attitudes to fulfil his political legitimacy and public perception in a multilingual environment like Pakistan.

Literature Review

Many academic research have investigated how language is constructively changed in political communication, especially from the view of sociolinguistic theories that undermines the social importance of a language. Howard Giles gave the concept of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) in 1973 as it is one of the key theoretical frameworks for assessing political discourse. In accordance with CAT, based on the goal of acquiring acknowledgment, reducing social discrepancy, or claiming their sense of self, presenters frequently alter their communication style to either converge with or diverge from their people (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). While divergence stresses choices in order to strengthen separate social, intellectual, or political opinions, convergence involves adjusting one's speech to align with that of the audience, creating cohesion and interaction (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991).

In the similar vein another was conducted by Gasiorsek. The application of CAT has become particularly strong in the field of political discourse. In an effort to bring together a range of supporters and set themselves apart from political rivals or foreign forces, rulers

frequently take part in conversations. Consequently, the two dynamics of divergence and convergence develop into strategic instruments (Gasiorek, 2016).

In multilingual, postcolonial cultures like Pakistan, where linguistic practices are strongly connected with problems of class, national pride, religion, and identity, this dynamic is especially noticeable (Rahman, 1996). Political leaders must skillfully negotiate this landscape adopting language as an act of performance of identity building and ideological construction in addition to function as a means of transmitting information (Rahman, 1996).

Similarly, an excellent case study of the the implementation of convergence and divergence in political rhetoric may be found in Imran Khan's speeches. By exclusively incorporating Urdu, the national language, along with slang terms and culturally relevant parallels, Khan verbally converges with the general public in his home speeches, frequently. For instance, he regularly cited the Islamic idea of Riyasat-e-Medina (the State of Medina) in his 2018 election campaign speeches with the intent to suggest a kind of administration founded on welfare and justice (Shah, 2018).

On the other hand, Khan's foreign statements, like his 2019 speech at the UN General Assembly, explicitly show his divergence techniques. In order to separate Pakistan's character from Western myths about Islam and terrorism, he used conventional English, a higher register, and an aggressive tone there (Khan, 2019). He used powerful, passionate language to describe Pakistan as an independent, autonomous player against Indian and Western imperialism, while also rejecting Islamophobia and strongly attacking India's activities in Kashmir. Using deviation to construct an alternative international identity, his linguistic choices in this context stressed Pakistan's individuality and righteousness (Siddiq, 2020).

A large amount of research on South Asian political language underlines the significance code-switching and metaphor are to the development of political personalities. Political speeches, according to Fairclough (1995), are seldom neutral; instead, they influence reality, arouse strong feelings, and establish categorical oppositions like "us" vs "them." In a similar vein, Chilton (2004) observes that political discourse frequently employs modality and metaphor in order to influence audiences toward specific points of view. These interpretations usually take the form of diplomatic dichotomies in Khan's case, such as "corrupt elite" versus "honest masses," or "foreign masters" versus "sovereign Pakistanis." In terms of language, these framings have been reinforced by divergence methods that underscore political and moral distinctions and convergence strategies that merge Khan's persona into the greater objectives of the public. (Chilton, 2004)

Ahmad and Mahmood (2020), who researched Khan's populist style and noted that his speeches frequently utilize nationalist and religious discourses to strengthen political support, give greater evidence for support. During the 2022 Azadi March speeches, for example he frequently referred to "*ghulami na manzoor*" (rejection of slavery), which was a language strategy of convergence with ancient thoughts of colonial struggle (Ahmed, 2022). Khan successfully combined current political disappointments with deeply held nationalist views by evoking the general despair of colonial enslavement, creating an intense emotional connection with the cause he stood for (Ahmed, 2022).

Imran Khan's speech offers an example of how convergence and divergence are firmly established political approaches rather than just language alterations. He demonstrates a very intentional adaptation to different audiences and conditions through his rhetorical choices, which include code-switching, selective framing, the use of

metaphors, and the misuse of pronouns. The interplay of language, power, and identity across contemporary political leadership is demonstrated by Khan's linguistic versatility, whether he caters to Punjabi rural supporters, urban the millennial generation on social media, or foreign diplomats at the UN (Qureshi, 2021)

Another research was conducted on the convergence and divergence strategy. Understanding the trends of economic growth between nations requires an awareness of the principles of divergence and convergence. As smaller nations with fewer capital belongings grow quicker due to lower returns of capital, Mankiw, Romer, and Weil (1992) argued that income levels might increase across countries. Barro and Sala-i-Martin (1992), however, stated that divergence happens frequently when rich countries grow more quickly than poorer ones, which widens the economic disparity. According to their research, convergence is not always seen in all nations, though it is potential in theory. Understanding the underlying causes of economic inequality and the variations in progress around the world has enabled large part to this claim (Barro & et al., 1992).

Material and Methods

The speeches that have been chosen for evaluation give an in-depth knowledge of Khan's use of rhetoric devices and offer insight on how his language evolves based on the political and social situation. The present study is based on qualitative approach and follows an interpretivist paradigm, which underlines the subjective examination of linguistic items and the social and political context in which a language is used. Using the purposive sampling, the paradigm lines up with the purpose of understanding how Khan's use of language choices reflect his political agendas and the positioning of audience. The public speeches made by Khan from 2018 to 2022 are taken as the population of the study, especially during the political events like the general assembly speech at the UN, national addresses during crises such as Kashmir conflict and his electoral campaign and victory speeches. These speeches were taken from official government records, famous news broadcasts and PTI's official digital platforms to analyze code switching, lexical choices and usage of pronouns. As for as the framework is concerned, the research employed Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) by Howard Giles (Giles et al., 1991). While, analyzing the data, thematic discourse analysis method is used to focus on convergence (e.g., shared religious language) and divergence (such as Anti-Western approach, distancing from the foreign powers)

Results and Discussion

Imran Khan as the former cricketer, politician and Prime Minister of Pakistan, is famous for his convincing and purposeful use of language in his speeches. He employed divergence and convergence in his political journey every time he delivers a speech. This section aims to analyze the different language attitudes Khan uses between the local masses and the international powers, in different years from 2018 to 2022.

Convergence in Domestic Speeches

When addressing the local people Imran Khan deliberately uses convergence in Urdu language which is the national and most frequently spoken language in Pakistan. The use of language is a determined and firm rhetorical technique rather than only stating a language. Khan deliberately presents himself different, in front of the working and privileged class by speaking Urdu, especially when attending a public gatherings and a large number of political rallies, symbolically showcasing himself as a man of the people. By coming in contact with ordinary working people, especially the people of rural areas

and working class, he develops relationship with the extensive number of voters. This relationship helps him to develop his political agenda as well.

Khan's 2018 general election debate, in which he reflects his speeches with Islamic norms and patriotic themes shows a striking proof of convergence. Following his election victory, Khan evoked the Riyasat-e-Medina ideal in his widely broadcasted speech on July 25, 2018:

"Pakistan's future lies in becoming the Riyasat-e-Medina (State of Medina). This is not just a dream; this is our mission, to create a society based on justice, equality, and compassion." (Khan, 2018)

More than just a political commitment, this remark is an intellectual and religious demand meant to hit an emotional connection with a significant percentage of the populace. Khan refers to established religious principles by citing the Prophet Muhammad's ideal Islamic state, which encourages ideological and spiritual togetherness. By linking his political objectives to Islamic teachings, the Riyasat-e-Madina symbolism serves as an object of convergence, permitting him to establish an ideological and emotional bond with his audience.

Khan frequently employs informal and socially appropriate phrases like *"In sha Allah"* (God willing) and *"Hum sab ka haq hai"* (This is our right) in along with official references to religion. These gestures are significant cultural indicators that speak to the public, especially those who find themselves cut off from official structures or politicians, and these are not only linguistic instruments. Khan presents himself as one of the people who understands them and their religious beliefs, dreams, and hardships by incorporating such widely recognized sentences.

His expressions turn out into an emotional speech rather than a speech entirely made for the sake of politics. His word choice shows that he is communicating with the people as a common man and shows that he is with them in their mutual experience rather than addressing to them from surface level only. He ensures that his point of view goes the educational premises by intentionally avoiding too complex or academic terms, so people with a little expertise and education may comprehend and respond to his vibrant and intense speeches.

Divergence in International Speeches

Imran Khan shifts from the way when delivering his speeches with the international people, in comparison to his national politics. This difference is seen in his 2019 speech, in which he violently condemned the notion of Islamophobia and the politics of Western countries. His speech in 2019 at UNGA, shows his shift through traditional political rhetoric by criticizing the double standards of the Western countries, most specifically in terms of Muslim nations.

In 2019 speech, Khan stated:

"Today, we are facing a new kind of colonialism, a colonialism based on economic control and the exploitation of our resources. The situation in Kashmir is a manifestation of this imperialist mindset. The West, which claims to champion human rights, remains silent in the face of the suffering of Muslims in Kashmir and Palestine" (Khan, 2019)

The harsh tone of Imran Khan in 2019 represents his smart position as a leader who shifts from the conventional rules of the politics. By depicting the power relations as a new

kind of colonialism shows that such dominant parties are entirely based on the material gain and to exercise authority over the masses. He also emphasizes with his subtle language that foreign parties with their imperialist mind are ruling and suppressing the innocent people in Kashmir. The existing world situations, often ceases to deplore the dominant countries, but Khan questions openly about the human rights which are violated in Palestine and Kashmir and the silence of West on it. Instead of sticking strictly to Western liberal-democratic rules, Khan takes a postmodern attitude, making Pakistan an effective advocate for neglected and ignored Muslim groups.

Khan also departs by framing his speech within the context of Islamic solidarity. For example, when discussing the unfortunate situation of Muslims in Kashmir, Khan said:

"Kashmiris have been living under Indian oppression for over seven decades, and their cries for justice are being ignored by the international community. As a Muslim-majority nation, Pakistan has a responsibility to stand up for the rights of our Kashmiri brothers and sisters." (Khan, 2019)

This quote from Imran Khan's 2019 UNGA speech clearly incorporates religious and personal terminologies. By portraying Kashmiris as having suffered over 70 years of "Indian oppression" and fighting that Pakistan has a moral responsibility to uphold its "Kashmiri brothers and sisters," Khan deviates from the usual description of political dispute and utilizes an identity driven and religious narrative. In addition to quietly criticizing Western countries for their indifference, his volatile discourse and blatantly spiritual framing seek to weaken the secular, rules-driven international discourse. In order to create metaphoric distance from Western countries and conform to international standards, his speech thus reveals an intelligent ideological difference that promotes religious unity, moral obligation, and Muslim identity globally over conventional state politics.

Linguistic Analysis of Key Rhetorical Devices

Khan often employs specific rhetorical strategies in his seminars to promote both convergence and divergence. Code-switching constitutes one such tactic, in which Khan shifts between Urdu and English in accordance with the situation and the intended audience. For instance, Khan skillfully flipped between Urdu for his domestic audience and English when talking to supporters internationally during his 2018 election victory speech. He stated:

"This is a victory for the people of Pakistan, who have shown that they are tired of corruption. In sha Allah, we will create a Pakistan where justice prevails. Let me also assure our international friends that Pakistan will remain committed to peace and cooperation with all nations." (Khan, 2018)

With the goal to speak to both national and world audiences, Imran Khan's 2018 address carefully blended domestic and worldwide communication. Khan openly speaks to the public feeling by presenting the event as a "victory for the people of Pakistan," makes his leadership look sympathetic. The expression "tired of corruption" relates to the broad discontent of Pakistanis and promotes Khan's reputation as an activist who is devoted to fixing root causes of corruption. Furthermore, the spiritual and cultural values of the Pakistani people are apparent in his use of the phrase "In sha Allah," which has profound roots in the Islamic faith.

The term, translates as "God willing," not only communicates excitement but also ties in with the nation's common faiths, increasing the presenter's personal and spiritual connection with his followers. Khan interacts with the global community in an indirect way at the same time. He portrays Pakistan as a nation dedicated to world peace and cooperation by speaking in English and addressing to foreign leaders as "international friends." The language used reflects a friendly attitude and comforts other governments that Pakistan is dedicated to developing global relations.

"Together, we will make Pakistan a great nation. It is our responsibility to ensure that justice and equality are upheld for every citizen."(Khan, 2018)

Khan skillfully fosters both convergence and dispersion in his talks by making strategic use of pronouns, especially "we." He urges Pakistanis to feel themselves as part of a greater, shared goal by frequently employing inclusive language, which promotes an atmosphere of collective solidarity among them. For example, Khan's statement during his 2018 election speech, *"Together, we will make Pakistan a great nation,"* speaks directly to the audience's sense of community and reinforces the idea that every person has a part to play toward bringing about the prosperity of the country. By portraying the population as active players to his future goal, this pronoun usage encourages a sense of duty and ownership in the process of the development of nations.

Additionally, the use of inclusive pronouns also helps to foster convergence, since it connects individuals under a same goal. To appreciate the efforts of group, Khan's use of the phrase *"our responsibility"* urges his people to support his objectives of justice and equality. This strategy makes the audience feel immensely involved in the journey of change he supports by engaging them in a shared vision. In this sense, Khan's use of words show an intentional attempt to bind his people by reinforcing that they are all struggling toward the same national goals, boosting their sense of duty and relationships.

In his 2022 Azadi March speech, he said:

"We will not bow down to the corrupt elites and foreign powers who have been conspiring against the people of Pakistan." (Khan, 2022)

The use of pronoun "we" in the above speech reflects how Khan seeks to unite his followers and showcase them as a single force fighting against the "corrupt elites" and "foreign powers." The sense of a same struggle is emphasized by this rhetorical use, which results in a distinct line between the common people and those in authority. By portraying the elites as hostile forces working against the desires of the population, he uses this patriotic style to prove his morality and strengthen his value to those who have become fed up with the prevailing political system.

From the findings it is revealed that Khan's use of linguistic choices develop the social image and support for the people. He among a large audience developed a sense of unity and togetherness. He often emphasizes the shared beliefs and problems of his people in his speeches and make people feel their value and worth through his careful use of linguistic choices. This strategy, in turn confirms his identity as a leader who will bring change in the lives of people. He on the other hand, with the successful use of divergence and conflicting linguistic choices, departs himself from the powerful nations. He appeals to the people who got traumatized with the mundane politics and want a leader who will eradicate injustice and corruption for them.

Conclusion

The speeches of Khan reflect how language attitudes can build identities, impact the ideologies of public and exercise political power over them. He is able to maintain solidarity with his followers and distinctiveness from his enemies and dominant nations. He not only stressed the political situations of Pakistan but also focused on the language that shapes one's identity. Future research of such kind should focus the aspects in which Khan's utilization of language develops over time like his political changes.

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