

Voicing the Silenced: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Gender and Power in the Dialogue of Pakistani Drama Serial *Udaari*

Mariya Azim Khan¹, Aziz Ahmad², Ahmad Zia³

¹ Visiting Faculty, Department of English, University of Malakand, Pakistan,
Email: haya68072@gmail.com

² Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Malakand, Pakistan,
Email: azizahmad@uom.edu.pk

³ Visiting Faculty, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan,
Email: maz.hawk710@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63163/jpehss.v4i1.1174>

Abstract

Television dramas are ideologically potent locations of production. In Pakistan, drama serials reflect and uphold strong social concepts regarding gender and power. *Udaari* (2016) is a groundbreaking serial that touches upon the controversial topic of child sexual abuse and includes several female characters who must deal with highly unequal social conditions. Nevertheless, the dialogues of *Udaari* have not been discussed as a field of the construction of gender and power using language, despite its cultural importance. The study addresses this gap by using the three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis formulated by Norman Fairclough on the conversations held in the first ten episodes of the serial. At the textual level, the paper will focus on the linguistic elements such as modality, grammatical transitivity, forms of address, and conversational patterns to demonstrate how power is coded within the daily speech of characters. On the discursive practice level, the paper examines the subjective placement of both female characters as the agents or victims of power, which the serial narration and its representational strategies accomplish. On the level of social practice, the findings are related to larger forms of patriarchy, inequality of classes, and media discourse within Pakistani society. As the analysis shows, the language of *Udaari* works at two levels at the same time. It recreates patriarchal ideology using the naturalized, commanding rhetoric of its male antagonist. Also, it attacks ideology by providing female characters with instances of the veritable speech of linguistic resistance, and by making visible the processes of silence and manipulation, on which the ideology of abuse relies. This paper presents the argument that *Udaari* is not a storytelling device only. It is a place where gender relations are actively produced, fought, and at crucial times, changed.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Gender and Power, Pakistani Drama, *Udaari*, Fairclough, Patriarchy, Media Discourse, Transitivity, Modality

Introduction

Language is never neutral. In every word, in every sentence, every silence, there is a burden of social relations, power structures, and ideological assumptions. This is the main point of Critical Discourse Analysis, which is a branch of linguistic studies that focuses on how language is not only a tool of communication but also a place where power is used, negotiated, and reproduced. Gender and power are two issues that are entrenched within the daily dialogue in Pakistani society. They can be found in households, in the street, in legislation, in ways of doing things, and most importantly, in the narratives that society is reading to itself via popular media. One of these stories is the Pakistani drama serial, *Udaari*, which was aired in 2016. It is

a play that has the guts to address themes that the Pakistani mainstream culture has been holding as taboo. The most significant one is the sexual abuse of children in families. The serial is based on the lives of various characters, belonging to lower and middle-class cultures, and combines plots of poverty, gender discrimination, class inequality, and the strength of women, who decided to speak up against unfairness. Udaari received a lot of applause because it crossed a social taboo. However, the play is not only thematically daring but also full and abundant linguistic work. Ideological meanings are present in the dialogue, and they should be analyzed in a careful and systematic way.

This paper analyses the dialogue of Udaari through the theoretical approaches of Critical Discourse Analysis created by Norman Fairclough. According to Fairclough, language is a social practice. It is influenced by the social structures within which it is practiced, and it is also the source of social structures. In Fairclough's sense, discourse does not merely reflect reality. It is proactively constitutive of reality. It is made up of constructing identities, relationships, and limits of what is understood as normal, acceptable, or possible in a particular society. The analytical framework of the study is offered by Fairclough's three-dimensional model. The model focuses on the analysis of discourse at the text, discursive practice, and social practice. All of these three dimensions help the researcher to step beyond the narrow characteristics of language to the greater ideological connotations they bear.

This study is guided by three research questions:

- i. How do linguistic features in the dialogue of Udaari construct gender and power relations between male and female characters?
- ii. What discursive strategies represent female characters as agents or victims of power in the serial's dialogue?
- iii. How does the language of Udaari challenge or reproduce dominant patriarchal ideologies in Pakistani society?

The former poses the question of how the linguistic characteristics of the conversation in Udaari build gender and power relations between male and female characters. This question revolves around the textual aspect of the model by Fairclough. It focuses on grammar and vocabulary, modality, transitivity, naming, and conversational interaction patterns. The second question is the discursive strategy that makes female characters agents or victims of power. This question exists on the discursive level of practice. It studies the ways in which the play puts women into the narrative discourse and the power, resistance, and vulnerability of such a position. The third question is how the language of Udaari opposes or reproduces the primeval patriarchal ideology of Pakistani society. This question is at the social practice level. It puts the drama in the overall ideology surrounding Pakistani culture and poses the question of what the place of the drama in the landscape is.

The relevance of this study is what it shows about the relationship between the media language and the social ideology. The most popular types of media in Pakistan are drama serials. They reach out to millions of viewers in various classes, ages, and regions. Their use of language is not in vain. What the audiences can hear as dialogues, observe as relations of power, and also the ideologies that such relations have are all part of the discursive environment by which social norms are established and modified. When a play such as Udaari decides to put certain words in the mouths of the characters, it makes ideological statements. They either replicate the prevailing order or put it to the test. This paper maintains that Udaari does both. The culture of patriarchy is replicated in the language of its antagonist figure, Imtiaz, whose speech constantly naturalizes the male dominance and female subordination. Meanwhile, it subverts patriarchal ideology by providing female characters with some instances of actual linguistic opposition, as well as exposing the processes of silence, manipulation, and abuse that the culture of patriarchy relies on. Language is eventually utilized in the drama as a social critique device. It speaks out about what the Pakistani social discourse has long concealed. This way, it is engaged in the process of changing the common discourse concerning gender and class, as well as the safety

of children. The analysis presented below is based on the three research questions. In every part, the author relies on certain events and conversations within Udaari and interprets them using the analytical instruments that the given framework by Fairclough offers. It is aimed at demonstrating how language, even in its most trivial and most universal forms, is a potent conduit of social meaning.

Literature Review

Language, Power and Critical Discourse Analysis.

Language is significant in the construction of power relations in society. Critical Discourse Analysis scholars believe that discourse is firmly interlaced with ideology, power, and social systems. People and institutions can affect beliefs, attitudes, and social practices through language. Durmaz and Yogun (2022) discuss one of the images produced by an anti-gun ownership movement known as Mom Demands Action. The authors look at the way in which the image is able to convey meaning using discourse. They use the three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which is suggested by Norman Fairclough. In their work, they demonstrate the close interrelation of language and power. Wodak believes that CDA can be used to expose the connection between language and power. As defined by Fairclough, power functions in three aspects, namely power to, power over, and power behind discourse. The analyzed image in the study represents the power behind gun ownership and the control of political groups over the marginalized communities. It further relates the historical events in the United States to the contemporary gun laws controversies. The paper demonstrates that visual and language discourse can have a strong impact on the masses. Even creative messages of communication may impact people considerably. This shows the strength of words in the development of the perceptions of the people.

On the same note, Briones (2017) examines the media coverage of the Mamasapano incident in the Philippines that took place in 2015. The research applies Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate the news coverage of newspapers on the event. The analysis is based on internal textual characteristics like the meaning, identification, and linguistic structure. It also takes into consideration the external forces, such as the social practice of news reporting. The results indicate that power relation is constructed in the discourse between the Philippine Senate and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The government commissioned an investigation report, which MILF retorted by filing a report. MILF is introduced through words as a group that is cooperative and peace-seeking and ready to investigate the incidence and safeguard the rights of Muslims. This example demonstrates that media discourse may define what people think about political confrontations and power dynamics. Van Dijk (2008) also articulates that discourse is one of the major components in the preservation of social power. Based on his socio-cognitive theory, strong institutions are likely to dominate the discourse of the masses. These organizations are governments, media agents, and the political elite. They determine the way the social issues are understood by the population through being in control of discourse. As such, language is a significant means of upholding or opposing social statuses.

Discourse of Gender Representation in the Media.

Media discourse is also very instrumental in the development of gender roles in the minds of people. Popular culture, like television dramas, the news media, etc, usually reproduces social stereotypes by use of language and story lines. Kiani et al. (2023) focus on the language of the female characters of Pakistani Urdu dramas. Their analysis concludes that gender biased discourse tends to portray women as pathetic, submissive, and unconfident. This representation is achieved by the use of language and storylines. The authors examine two Pakistani dramas, Khaani and Meri Guriya, which are popular. They find that media talk often depicts men as powerful and women as weak and submissive. Nevertheless, the paper also mentions that there are female characters who go against these stereotypes. These characters are trying to struggle with the dominance of men, yet they are criticized and pressured by the patriarchal social standards. Abid et al. (2024) mention gender inequality existing in the Pakistani society as well.

In their research, they establish that there are words and phrases that are already linked to a particular gender. These language patterns have expectations regarding the manner of actions of men and women. In case, men tend to speak in a language that is characterized by confidence and assertiveness. Women have to speak more politely and softly. These distinctions prove that language is a source of social power relations and supports them. The authors conclude that these gender norms are shaped by media discourse.

Chaudhry et al. (2021) discuss the role of Pakistani dramas in depicting women in various roles. There are instances where women are portrayed as powerful and aggressive individuals. Nevertheless, they experience numerous challenges in societies dominated by men, even in such instances. The research gives examples of Pakistani dramas to explain this problem. In the play *Mannat*, the mother of the protagonist tells us that people are not aware of the sacrifice's women have to make in order to preserve their marriage. On the same note, in the play *Khaani*, the protagonist requests her mum to sue the murderer of her son. The mother denies it, claiming that they are not able to kill the strong and the rich man who committed the crime. These instances demonstrate the way gendered power relations are practiced in society and the way they are manifested in the media discourse. Noor et al. (2022) discuss Pakistani drama *Rangreza*. They find that the drama was very strong in depicting the dominance of men. Decision makers are revealed to be men, and women are supposed to follow them. There is a scene where the father mistreats her daughter. This exchange underscores the power and domination that the male characters have over the story. The research concludes that discourses usually support patriarchal systems in the media.

Social Power, Gender Ideology and Language.

According to many scholars, language is the manifestation of social structures, and it contributes to their preservation. The ideologies of gender are commonly entrenched in linguistic practices, literature work, and daily communication. Raghavendra (2025) maintains that language has always been an effective means of influencing social power relations and especially gender. The way gender roles are formed and comprehended depends on language. Literary authors like Margaret Atwood tend to theorize over the use of manipulative language to reinforce gender oppression. Likewise, Charlotte Perkins Gilman shows the power of language to silence and dominate women in the world of patriarchy. These literary examples reveal how discourse may support the systems of power. Butt et al. (2024) also argue that the role of language in the formation of power relations is significant. Their analysis looks at the slogans of the women's organizations that require gender equality. Such slogans break the current patriarchal conventions and authority. Some of the slogans are about when men and women should have equal rights, others criticize the damaging stereotypes that narrow the opportunities of women. The paper reports that in the Pakistani society, language tends to strengthen patriarchal ideals and excludes women (Shaheed, 2010). Nevertheless, it is also possible to empower women with the help of language to create awareness of harassment and discrimination. According to Reynolds (2024), language determines the thoughts, perception, and social surroundings of people. Patriarchal beliefs could be upheld or criticized by the words that people use. An example is that women are occasionally termed as bossy instead of being assertive. This language usage produces a bad image of the woman's leadership. Reynolds claims that when words are used wisely, they can change attitudes and bring about equality between the genders. One of the first linguistic studies on gender and language was created by Lakoff (1975). She states that the speech of women is usually full of polite words, stuttering, and indirectness. Lakoff argues that such aspects of language indicate a lower position of women in most societies. Her writing puts forward the idea that language perpetuates and represents gender inequality.

Gender Variations in Communication

The other significant field of study is the variation in communication styles between men and women. Researchers claim that there is a social expectation that affects the use of language

among people in their daily lives. Salsabila et al. (2024) consider the variations in the patterns of communication between men and women. An analysis indicates that males and females tend to talk and respond differently when dealing with social life. Cultural expectations are the factors guiding these differences. The terms that are related to strength and power, like strong or brave, are normally attached to the male gender. Women, on the contrary, are usually referred to as delicate or weak. These kinds of associations build the notion that men are strong and women are weak. The paper goes further to elaborate that men are also attributed to rationality and toughness. The female gender is normally associated with nurturing and supportiveness. These stereotypes indicate that a man is to be emotionless and a woman is to be caring and sensitive. Moreover, men tend to favor straight and to the point communications. Women are more cooperative in their use of language and are attentive to the emotions of others. Such trends demonstrate the influence of culture expectations on gender-based communication styles.

Research Gap

The current literature speaks volumes about how language is significant in building power relations and gender identities. Critical Discourse Analysis has been applied in many studies to study the role of language in disclosing the inequalities in society. The topic of media discourse of women and the reinforcement of patriarchal structures has also been studied in the past. Along with it, researchers have investigated the gender specificities in communication and the role of linguistic practices in forming social expectations. Nevertheless, the research that takes a closer look at the manner in which gendered roles and power relationships are created at once in Pakistani media in specific linguistic forms is still poorly researched. Numerous studies have been written about gender representation generally, without going into discourse-based analysis as to how the use of language creates perceptions of power between the male and female characters. Thus, it is necessary to conduct more studies to learn how the discourse of newspapers in Pakistan forms the gendered power relationships and how such images can shape social attitudes.

Research methodology

The research design adopted in this study is qualitative research based on the model of Critical Discourse Analysis by Norman Fairclough in his three dimensions. Here, the qualitative methodology is suitable since the study is not on the measurement of language but on the interpretation of language. The purpose is to learn about the way meaning, power, and ideology are created through dialogue. The main source of information on this research is the dialogue of the Pakistani drama serial Udaari. The serial is divided into twenty-six episodes, and this paper will use evidence based on Episodes 1-10. The choice of these episodes was because they introduce the main characters, lay the foundation of the main power relations, and hold the most prominent dialogues to discuss the relations between genders and ideological stance. The data was gathered by means of close and repeated watching of each of the selected episodes. Patterns of power, gender constructions, modality, transitivity, naming, and resistance patterns were identified and noted in dialogues. The object of analysis is the text of the drama. The interpretation of this data was then guided through the use of Fairclough's three-dimensional framework.

Theoretical Framework

The research paper will take a theoretical approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as elaborated by Norman Fairclough. CDA considers language as a social process, and it analyzes the relationship between discourse and power, ideology, and social relations. Fairclough believes that language is not neutral, but an essential part of society in relation to social identities, social relationships, as well as knowledge and belief systems (Fairclough, 1995, p. 131). Fairclough suggests analyzing discourse with the help of a three-dimensional structure,

according to which every discursive event can be discussed as (1) text, (2) discourse practice, and (3) social practice (Fairclough, 1995, pp. 133-134).

This model allows the researcher to study the linguistic aspects of a text and the social context in which it functions.

Discourse, Power and Ideology.

Fairclough puts stress on the fact that discourse is directly connected with power and ideology. Discourse power may present itself in various forms. It can be found in unequal relations among those engaging in the communication process or the ability of some groups of people to achieve power in the production, distribution, and interpretation of texts in society (Fairclough, 1995, p. 2). In contemporary societies, power is mostly exercised by the use of discourse as opposed to physical force. Language turns out to be a significant tool to convey ideologies and ensure social relations. Vocabulary, grammar, presuppositions, metaphors, politeness rules, and interaction patterns can have an ideological meaning (Fairclough, 1995, p. 2).

Fairclough also mentions that the numerous ideological assumptions are still concealed, as many of them are naturalized and made common sense in society. This is why individuals are not aware of how discourse influences their understanding of social reality (Fairclough, 1995, p. 133).

The Three-Dimensional Discourse Model.

The analytical framework of this study is the three-dimensional one by Fairclough. Both dimensions analyze discourse in a new approach.

Text (Description)

The linguistic aspect of the text is the first dimension. A text is a spoken or written language that is generated in a discursive activity (Fairclough, 1995, p. 135).

At the level, vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and interactional structures are analyzed. Fairclough shows the significance of grammatical structures like transitivity, which may determine who is depicted as active and who is depicted as passive in speech (Fairclough, 1995, p. 134). Likewise, turn-taking, questioning, interruptions, and requests are some of the interactional patterns that could demonstrate the difference in authority between the speakers. Imbalance of discourse rights (i.e., right to dominate the conversation or to interrupt other participants) is a symptom of the power relations (Fairclough, 1995, p. 47).

By analyzing the text, the scholars will be able to determine the role of linguistic options in the formation of societal identities and power dynamics.

Discursive Practice (Interpretation)

The second dimension looks at the way in which texts are created, circulated, and understood within society. These processes are what Fairclough called discursive practices (Fairclough, 1995, p. 142). Texts do not exist in isolation, but they are determined by the existing linguistic and cultural conventions referred to as the order of discourse that comprise socially constructed modes of speaking and representation of reality (Fairclough, 1995, p. 11).

Intertextuality or interdiscursivity, in which texts take some elements of other discourses and genres, is also a part of the practice of discursivity (Fairclough, 1995, p. 189).

Other models may use dialogues in media texts, e.g., dialogues can be based on the social or ideological discourses along with the entertainment discourse. As such, discursive practice analysis assists in clarifying how texts make reference to larger discourses in the culture.

Social Practice (Explanation)

The third dimension contextualizes discourse in the social and cultural frameworks. According to Fairclough, discourse is never independent of social practices and is constituted at different levels involving immediate situation, institutional, and broad societal levels (Fairclough, 1995, p. 97). At this level, the discourse is analyzed in terms of its role in perpetuating or disrupting

relations of power and domination. Social structure influences language, but on the other hand, language can influence and modify the same social structure (Fairclough, 1995, p. 131). This dimension will aid researchers to see the way texts are engaged in ideological processes in society.

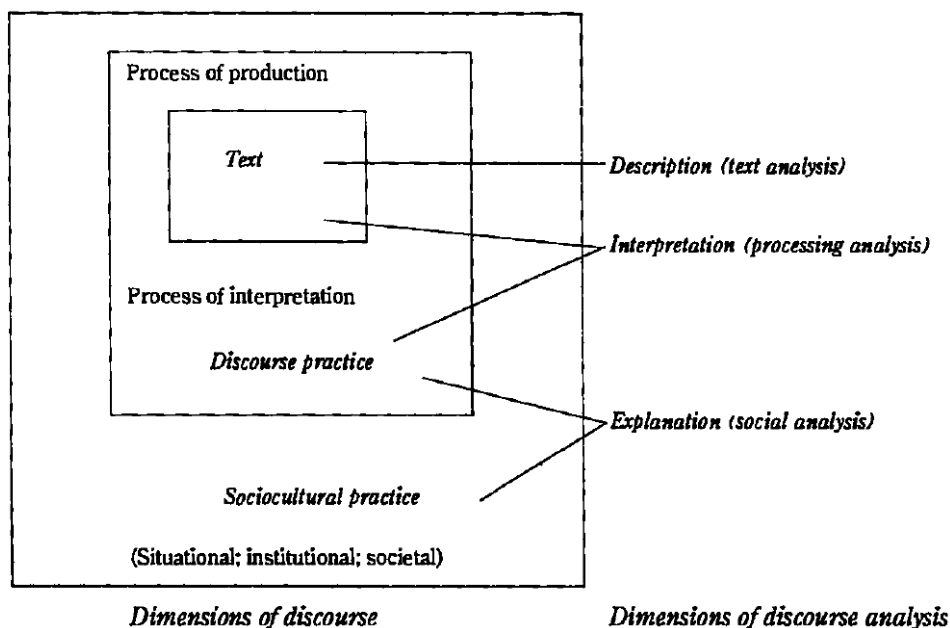


Figure 1 Fairclough (1995, p. 98)

Framework Applicability to the Study.

The three-dimensional model of discourse analysis presented by Fairclough is a complete approach to the study of media text discourse. The textual level is one that finds the patterns in linguistic texts, the discursive practice level is the level that describes how such texts are created and interpreted, and the social practice level relates the discourse to the broader social and ideological systems. Within the framework, the current research observes how dialogue in Udaari builds gender relations, depicts female characters against the power, and illustrates or argues against the mainstream patriarchal beliefs in Pakistani society.

Analysis

The given analysis will provide a discussion of the dialogue of the Pakistani drama serial Udaari in terms of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Norman Fairclough. The theoretical framework of this paper is the three-dimensional model by Fairclough. This discussion is structured based on three research questions. The answers to each of the research questions are provided with reference to certain episodes and conversations of the serial.

Research Question 1: Linguistic Features Constructing Gender and Power Relations

The initial research question is concerned with the way the real language of Udaari formulates gender and power. The textual aspect, which examines vocabulary, grammar, transitivity, modality, naming, and interaction patterns, is one aspect of Fairclough. All these characteristics indicate that a certain part of the characters is placed as superior and others as lesser. These patterns are constantly used in Udaari so that the male characters have a position of power and the women have vulnerability.

Naming and Address: Power in a Name

The method of naming the characters is one of the most immediate means of language. According to Fairclough, naming and addresses are strong sociolinguistic actions. They expose cultural hierarchies and power relations within culture. Imtiaz is the character who is presented in the first episode. His name is significant. Imtiaz is distinguished or better in Urdu. This name

is not by chance. In the very first episode, the viewer obtains a linguistic clue as to what this character thinks of himself. He puts himself in a high position. He treats others as less. His name is used as an indicator of the social status he boasts of.

This relates directly to the concept of naming and address as an aspect of the textual aspect of discourse introduced by Fairclough. Even the choice of a name for a character is a discursive act. It predetermines the expectations regarding power even prior to the utterance of a single word of dialogue. The female characters of Meera, Sajjo, and Zeebo do not have such connotations of superiority in their names, in contrast. Their names are commonplace and plain. Such unequal naming already contains a distinction in social status. Even the manner in which characters refer to one another when talking is significant. Imtiaz addresses women in authoritative, bossy tones. He does not ask. He tells. This is an authoritative language, which shows the authority that he has over women.

Modality: Who Can and Who Must

The status of certainty, obligation, or possibility as manifested in language is called modality. Modality is one of the indicators of power in discourse, according to Fairclough. High modality language involves the words must, will, and have to. This type of language conveys words of command, oblige and certainty. Low modality language employs the use of words such as might, perhaps, or could. It is doubtful, demanding, or gentle. The male character of Udaari Imtiaz speaks with high modality at all times when addressing women. In the sixth episode, when Sajjo asks him why he has come home late, he answers very straightforward and categorically. According to him, he is a man and will do whatever he wishes, as he is a man. The use of high modality is extreme in this statement. There is nothing to bargain, no defense, no right to reply. The reiteration of the word because he is a man puts the concept of gender as the power on its own. The fact that he is a male is put forward as a good enough reason to ignore any question or enquiry. His modality is also aggressive in the 9th episode when Arsh gets furious with Meera in a singing session. According to him, Madam ought to choose whether to sing or merely waste their time. Madam is used in a sarcastic way here. It takes away the dignity of Meera even as it seems to respect her. His words make him the person who determines the situation, and Meera the person who will have to prove herself.

On the contrary, female characters speak low modality language. They soften their speech. They are enticing, imploring, and reasoning. In the fifth episode, Meera does not directly refuse Imtiaz when he makes advances to her. She tells her that she admires him very much. This is the vulnerable language that indicates her weakness in the role. She cannot simply say no. She should get around some words that do not stand up against his authority. The difference in modalities patterns shows that there is an imbalance of rights to discourse. Fairclough clarifies that unequal rights in discourse are a direct projection of the relations of domination. People in authority talk authoritatively and decisively. The powerless become gullible, evasive, and courteous.

Transitivity: Active Power, Passive Victimhood

Transitivity analysis is the term that analyzes who does things to whom in the grammar of a sentence. It poses the question of who the active agent is and who the passive recipient is. In a bid to bring out debate on power in discourse, Fairclough identifies transitivity as one of the greatest tools in grammar. In the second episode, Imtiaz encounters Sajjo at night on the road. He informs her that it is not good for a woman to go out after sunset. The grammatical structure of this sentence is such that Sajjo is a passive subject of his judgment. She is not an active actor who returns home after a working day. She is even trapped in a roaming woman. The term roaming implies a negative meaning. It implies meaningless, unacceptable movement. This use of words makes Sajjo less agentic. Her inputs, her labor, and her purpose of being out there vanish from the sentence. Her only body and its transgression are her female body.

The sentence structure puts Imtiaz in the position of the observer, judge, and the definers. It is Sajjo who is watched, criticized, and determined. It is a typical transitivity pattern that

replicates the ideology of patriarchy using grammar. Imtiaz resorts to transitivity once again in Episode 2 to build himself as active and Sajjo as passive. He informs her that she is alone and that she needs a man. It is this kind of construction that makes Sajjo the object of lack. She is not an entire individual in herself. Her lack of a male presence characterizes her. Imtiaz makes himself the answer to this deficiency. He is the agent. She is the recipient. His speech grammar constructs the power relation directly. In episode 5, Imtiaz attempts to manipulate Meera, and the language is once again transitively active. He informs her that all she needs to do is make him happy, and he will make her happy completely. Imtiaz does have complete grammatical agency in this sentence. It is he who will act, reward, and provide. It is Meera who has to act. The imbalance in grammatical positions implies the imbalance in social positions.

Turn-Taking and Interruption: Control Over Conversation

Fairclough believes that conversational control, who can speak, who gets interrupted, and who can switch the conversational issues are some of the most important measures of power. Udaari has male characters who dominate the talks. Imtiaz fails to have an equal conversation. He addresses people but not to people. Sajjo is not allowed to voice her opinions, and she is sidelined whenever she attempts to question or object. He never lets a real discussion take place. His language seals up a discussion but does not open it. This conversation domination is power in itself. It is working on the floor that Imtiaz has control over what should and should not be said. In episode 9, when Zeibo inquires about why Imtiaz has shut the door, he responds in the form of a lie, but in a strict tone. He tells him that the rainwater will enter. This is not dialogue. It is a kind of manipulation in the guise of explanation. He applies the rhetorical approach of conversation to bring out her true interest. She asks. His response is negative, and he proceeds with the act. Her query is recognized but not listened to. This trend demonstrates that turn-taking may be utilized as a tool of power. People in authority respond on their own conditions. They refocus discourses. They apply conversational rules to be in control without having to seem controlling to a visible degree.

Research Question 2: Discursive Strategies Representing Female Characters as Agents or Victims.

The second research question explores the discursive practices with which female characters are made victims or agents of power. Udaari does not show female characters in one-dimensional, simplistic ways. The serial switches between displaying women as being silenced and victimized on one hand and as strong and opposing on the other. This is one of the most crucial features of the drama.

Sajjo: The Victim of Social Judgment

Sajjo is made one of the main female characters in the play. She is a widow, and she is striving hard to sustain her daughter Zeebo. Weaknesses are what characterizes her in society. She is poor. She is a widow. She is also in the laboring classes. She is a female who lacks a male guardian. The discursive mode of representation of Sajjo is an act of social victimhood that is created by the voice of others. Imtiaz is not the only person victimizing her with words. It is her sister as well, and an older one. The same happens in the second episode, when Sajjo visits her sister to consult her regarding the proposal of Imtiaz, her sister accuses her. She informs Sajjo that she is not a good woman. According to her, Sajjo is in a love affair with him. It is an effective, discursive approach. Sajjo has done nothing wrong. This is merely a marriage proposal that she has received. However, she is instantly built up as an ethically dubious woman. The position of the language of the sister makes Sajjo a victim not only to the patriarchy, but also to the moral policing that women face as a form of internalization. This is the normalization of ideology, as Fairclough puts it. The patriarchal attitude of viewing a woman who wants to be remarried as suspicious has become so common that other women replicate it without doubting it. Sajjo is victimized twice, therefore. She is victimized by the men who want to dominate her and the social conventions that other women impose on her.

Meera: Between Victimhood and Resistance

The most complicated female character in the drama is Meera. Throughout the analyzed episodes, she switches roles of victim and agent. This two-sided positioning is embodied in the discursive strategy shifting. Meera, being a victim, is placed by the group of her class, her sex, and her career. In the first episode, she is addressed by her lover concerning their relationship. He says that he loves her and that is why one day he will marry her, and that they are very different in terms of class and status. This statement, which claims to be a declaration of love, in fact, boosts the inferiority of Meera. He indicates her class even when making love. He both asserts love and declares social distance in his words. Meera is placed where she is allowed to be accepted in a class with a difference rather than as a partner.

Meera becomes a victim of harassment in the haveli where her family is performing in Episode 2. One of the young men of the elite class insults her and tells her that she has no right to be in that attitude, as she is a singer who belongs to the lower classes. This language de-personalizes Meera and gives her a new identity in her class. She is not a person to him. She is a social category. But Meera displays resistance also. She reacts when the elite man harasses her. She instructs him that he should make his mother and sister dance. This is a sharp retort. It employs the same logic of class and gender that was turned against her, but she turns it the other way. She refuses to be silent. This scene demonstrates that Meera is an actor in a position to retaliate through words. This is a resistance to discursive strategy. Fairclough observes that language does not simply reproduce power. It can also challenge it. The keen reaction of Meera is a little gesture of language defiance in the text of the serial.

Milli defends Meera in episode 8, where Arsh insults her in the middle of their music session and rejects her. When Milli mentions that another girl of their own kind is in the position of Meera, Arsh cannot even imagine talking to her that way. The comparison exposes the bias of discrimination on the basis of classes. It is called the injustice. It is also another discursive agency, not this time Meera, but another girl character who contests the mainstream discourse on her behalf.

Zeebo: The Voicing of the Most Silenced

The child victim of the drama is Zeebo. The most disturbing discursive strategies are those that surround Zeebo in the serial. They expose the manipulation and grooming language that has been used to silence a child, even before abuse is done. In episode 5, Imtiaz picks Zeebo up from school. He initiates the grooming process by means of language. He persuades her that she must concur with all that he says and does, and in the exchange, he would provide her with all that she desires. This conditional model is of great importance. It is presented as a reward system. But it is, in reality, a policy of domination. The language makes Zeebo realize that her obedience is the cost of nurturing and presents. It is repeated in Episodes 6, 7, and 9 in this discursive tactic. The precise wording is repeated several times. In Episode 6, Imtiaz requests Zeebo to rub his back and affirms the same: accept everything and have everything she desires. He introduces secrecy in the plan in the 7th episode. He also informs her that they will go to the fair, eat whatever she desires, and they will not inform her mother about it. An important aspect of the discourse of abuse is secrecy. It alienates the child from protective relationships. The scene in episode 9 is explicit and frightening. Imtiaz lies and then threatens the closed door when Zeebo asks about it. He informs her that should she raise her hand; he is going to kill her with a big knife and cut her tongue. The last level of the grooming strategy is this language of threat. First, he rewards. Then he isolates. Then he threatens. The discursive process of abuse passes through these phases in a deliberate manner.

The opposition of Zeebo is slight yet exists. According to her, he is mutilating her hand. Even at that time, she protested using language. But his brutal threat falls like a bullet on her voice. This contrast is used in the drama to demonstrate how utterly adult power, language, and violence can suppress the voice of a child.

Female Resilience as Discursive Agency

Although the victimization embodied in the entire drama, *Udaari*, equally places women strategically as part of the opposition at the discursive level. This is best understood in the 10th episode where the child abuse is protested through a general meeting. One of the female characters is called Muneera, and she addresses this conference. She deals with child sexual abuse directly. She describes that families become silent when abuse occurs since it preserves relationships as well as social status. She refers to this as the worst image concealed behind the beautiful picture of blood relations. Her speech is powerful. It calls its silence that safeguards offenders. It publicly violates that silence.

The next question that Muneera puts across is a rallying call. She inquires whether they will not raise their voice in the present time, or when they will do so. This question is a discursive mobilizing move. It makes the audience, both inside the drama and the audience watching it, take action. It makes women and society not passive victims, but human beings who can decide whether or not to speak or remain quiet. This discursive displacement is the major one in the ideological project of the drama. *Udaari* does not just present victims as women. It also depicts women as the ones who are able to label injustice and insist on a change. This is how the drama reacts to the patriarchal silence. It employs the voices of female characters to question this discourse that is silenced in them.

Research Question 3: Language Defying or Replicating Preminent Patriarchal Ideologies.

The third research question covers the widest level of analysis. It questions whether the language of *Udaari* ends up questioning or replicating the ideology of patriarchy. The social practice aspect, as developed by Fairclough, places discourse in the wider social and ideological framework of society. This level goes beyond personal scenes and characters. It poses the question of what the drama reveals about the Pakistani society in general. The answer is not simple. *Udaari* does both. It replicates the ideology of patriarchy via the actions and words of some characters. And it defies patriarchal thought in both the direction of the narrative and the voices of the female characters in the drama. It is this dual role, which in itself is included in the power of the drama as a cultural text.

Reproduction of Patriarchal Ideology Through Language

The patriarchal ideology is reproduced in *Udaari* the most consistently, through the speech of Imtiaz. His conversation is a prolonged play of male entitlement. In several of the episodes, his speech develops gender as an excuse to be in control. His pronouncement in the sixth episode that he is a man, and he will do whatever he wants because he is a man is a direct ideological view. Assumptions are not obscured. It announces them openly. Gender is the reason. Gender is the authority. Gender is justification. Such, Fairclough refers to this as ideological common sense. Imtiaz is not a supporter of his authority. He merely postulates it as natural and intuitive. Imtiaz's speech about women's movement and behaviour is also an expression of this ideological stand. In the 2nd episode, when he informs Sajjo that women should not be out after the sun sets, he is replicating a common patriarchal opinion on the position of women. Women belong inside. Men are a part of the outside world. This is not the opinion, but a moral fact. Language gives the impression of common sense.

According to Fairclough, the strongest ideological assumptions are those that seem common sense. They do not get questioned, as they appear to be natural. The language of Imtiaz is reeking with assumptions. They are made natural by the cool, assertive manner in which he presents them. In episode 8, when Meera and her mother visit Lahore to have their life enhanced by singing, Imtiaz informs Sajjo that he had always said that they were not good women. This is a prime illustration of how patriarchal ideology employs women's movement and ambition on their own feet. A woman who seeks non-dependence and progress is put in an immoral perspective. Her deeds are interpreted as a demonstration of her ill character instead of her strength and pertinacity. This ideological framing is very strong since it is presented with this

conviction. Imtiaz does not accuse. He ascertained a judgment which he had seemingly never doubted. The language makes him seem wise and morally superior when, in fact, he is neither.

Class as an Ideological Layer

The issue of gender ideology is not the only one Udaari touches upon. It also deals with the ideology of classes. The drama is heavily connected with the two. Poverty enhances victimhood in women. The reproduction of gender oppression by the class consciousness takes certain forms. In Episode 1, when the uncle of the Meera informs the family about the wedding at the haveli, Meera's mother of Meera becomes excited. She tells her that they will not only get money but also food. This short, straightforward sentence embodies the desperation of poverty. But it also demonstrates how social behaviour is determined by class. The family is at the mercy of high society. This addiction brings about susceptibility. It leaves them in areas where they are exploited and abused. At the beginning of the first episode, Zeebo requests that her mother, Sajjo, get her a new school bag. Her old one is torn. Sajjo assures her that she will receive it upon receipt of her monthly salary. This is a minute yet a momentous moment. A child is forced to wait until the need for a basic school. The family is not able to spend even a small amount without planning. This is class reality. It is presented without melodramatic statements. The language is ordinary. However, it is even the banality of such suffering, which is a social remark.

In the second episode, the show shows that the harassment of Meera at the haveli shows the intersection of class and gender. The high-society boy feels justified in bullying a singer, as she belongs to a low-society. When the old man of the haveli comes in, he manages the situation by giving money. He does not discuss injustice. He pays for it. This economic solution is very eloquent in terms of class ideology. Money is transformed into a tool of power. Justice is not discussed. It is purchased. The class dimension is explicit in the observation made by Milli in episode 9. She narrates to Arsh that had Meera been a part of their own, he would never have addressed her in the manner that he did. This quote identifies class as the foundation of the unequal treatment directly. It is a critical act. It pushes the ideological assumption aside and puts it in the foreground of the discussion. In episode 1, the mother informs her that her friends are able to afford singing since they are the children of wealthy families, whereas she is not. This is the definite statement of the limitation of classes. It is passed on to a daughter by a mother. This is what makes it especially ideologically interesting. The limitation is internal to the family. A mother is one who puts class restrictions on the dreams of her child. This demonstrates that the reproduction of the ideology of a particular class is not only possible by outside social pressure but also by internal self-restriction.

Challenging Patriarchal Ideology Through the Drama's Discourse

Udaari is not merely the mirror of the Pakistani patriarchal society. It critiques it. The play contests the mainstream ideologies in several discursive ways. Such strategies are the most evident at the narrative choice level, characterization, as well as the voices that women are provided with at crucial points. The play provides Meera with instances of actual linguistic opposition. One of such moments is her quick reaction when she is harassed by the man at the haveli. She employs words to protect herself and attack his right to exist. She is not passive. She fights back with words. This image is going against the patriarchal norms of women staying quiet and obedient. The ideology, also, is questioned in the drama as presented by Milli. Milli is a woman character whose voice is to the power. She identifies the wrongs that she observes. She questions Arsh on how he treats Meera. She identifies class bias. The drama uses her voice to express criticisms that the lesser female characters are unable to make on their own behalf. However, the greatest threat to patriarchal ideology is in Episode 10. The mass media meeting on child abuse is a disruption in the mainstream discourse. The speech by Muneera is a break in the silence that the culture of patriarchy gives to the victims and witnesses of abuse. She identifies the issue by its name. She calls it by its name. She rejects the placid complacency expected of the social order. According to Fairclough, discourse may be a place of conflict.

Language can embrace and alter dominant ideologies, subvert them, and cut them up. Udaari aims to disrupt the discourse of silence on child abuse and female victimhood by using the discourse of open speech and the media. The play itself is a discursive action. It gets into the discourse of Pakistani people and tells them: this is being done. Look at it. Name it. Challenge it. The question that Muneera poses, which is when they will raise their voices, not now, is answered not only to the people in the scene but to the people who are watching the serial. It is an action call that is structured as a question. It is an effective rhetorical technique. The question structure is not as direct as a command. However, it means that the listener now has to make a selection. This is a discursive empowerment. It makes the audience people who can act morally.

The Media Discourse in Social Practice.

At the social practice level, Udaari should also be perceived as a media text that has been involved in the greater discursive scene of the Pakistani society. Fairclough suggests that media texts are co-constructed and a reaction to the order of discourse present in the social context of the text. The play is based on the tradition of entertainment, social realism, and activism. The play was created to address a particular social silence: the silence of child sexual abuse within Pakistani society. This purpose can be seen in the drama itself in the conference scene of the 10th episode. The character Muneera is the one who is articulating what the drama is doing. She identifies the silence, states the reasons why it exists, and demands that it be ended. This is what intertextuality is. The activist intent of the drama is expressed in one of the characters in the fiction. It is not only the choice of a drama serial to deliver such a social message that it is a discursive one. Drama appeals to people in a way that academic or journalistic writing does not. It appeals to emotion, narrative, and identification to draw the viewers. The drama reveals what otherwise remains a secret because of the way it depicts the grooming process in detail, how abusers think, and how victims remain silent. The visibility in itself is power. It interferes with the concealment social practice that facilitates abuse.

According to Fairclough, discourse is constituted by social structures and can also constitute social structures. Udaari is engaged in this radical possibility of the discourse. It is not just a representation of Pakistani patriarchal society. It intervenes in it. It offers vocabulary for things that are normally unexpressed publicly.

Conclusion

The paper has evaluated the discourse of the Pakistani drama serial Udaari on the three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis developed by Norman Fairclough. The analysis of the serial language on the text, discursive, and social practice levels has revealed that dialogue is not merely a means of storytelling but a potent channel of constructing, challenging, and, sometimes, changing the gender relations, power structures, and even the ideology. At the textual level, the analysis showed that there are overall and apparent linguistic patterns that replicate asymmetrical gender relationships. The male villain Imtiaz employs high modality language, active grammatical forms, commanding address structures, and conversational domination to enforce his power on the female characters. Women characters, on the other hand, are placed in passive grammatical constructions, diffused forms of speech, and imposed silence. These do not happen to be incidental characteristics of the dialogue. They mirror the ideological world the drama presents, a world where gender is employed as a tool to be controlled and where the voice of women is muted. On the discursive practice level, the review revealed that women characters are not portrayed as mere victims. The play passes through victimhood and resistance. Meera retaliates through words. Milli identifies injustice literally. Even when the situation becomes the most dangerous, Zeebo makes a protest. And Muneera lifts the veil of silence of people about child abuse with a speech that not only addresses the imaginary audience, but also the real one. These are the instances of female discursive agency, which are the core of the meaning of the drama and the social role as well.

At the social practice level, Udaari is involved in an ideological battle. It replicates the patriarchal suppositions of the Pakistani culture via the naturalized language of its antagonists. It also disputes those viewpoints, revealing the processes of abuse, giving names to the silences that sustain injustice, and showing women as able to resist and to change. There is no passive language in the drama. It intervenes. It unsettles. It is speaking where there has been much anticipated silence. In the end, this paper supports the main argument of Fairclough that language is a place of power and struggle. Udaari shows that drama as an expression of the discourse of the people possesses the power of both repeating and reforming the social order. The drama adds its voice to a Pakistani nationwide conversation slowly, awkwardly, yet fruitfully, to find new terms to describe old injustices.

References

- Abid, A., Siddique, A. R., & Ahmad, M. (2024). Exploring Discourse Markers in analyzing gender discrimination in Pakistani drama serials: A Corpus-Based Study. *Sindh Journal of Linguistics*, 3(1), 55–69. <https://doi.org/10.58921/sjl.v3i1.82>
- Briones, R. R. Y. (2017). A demonstrative analysis of news articles using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. *SHILAP Revista De Lepidopterología*. <https://doi.org/10.33508/bw.v5i1.1117>
- Butt, S. K., Ahmad, S., & Jahan, M. (2024). Language power, and gender politics: A Critical Discourse analysis of woman Empowerment Slogans as Tools for Social change. *Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review*, 2(4), 157–173. <https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11/article/view/54/61>
- Chaudhry, A. A., Ali, R. I., & Aslam, Z. (2021). Women Representation in Pakistani Television Dramas: A Critical Discourse analysis. *Global Language Review*, VI(III), 103–112. [https://doi.org/10.31703/glr.2021\(vi-iii\).11](https://doi.org/10.31703/glr.2021(vi-iii).11)
- Durmaz, Z., & Yoğun, M. S. (2022). A critical discourse analysis of a visual image in Norman Fairclough's CDA model. *Uluslararası Eğitim Araştırmacıları Dergisi*, 5(1), 25–33. <https://doi.org/10.52134/ueader.1101763>
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse analysis: The Critical Study of Language* [E-book]. Longman. <https://www.felsemiotica.com/descargas/Fairclough-Norman-Critical-Discourse-Analysis.-The-Critical-Study-of-Language.pdf>
- Kiani, S., Umar, L., & Sultan, A. (2023). Gendered Language: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Pakistani dramas. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11(4). <https://doi.org/10.52131/pjhss.2023.1104.0698>
- Noor, T., Khattak, M. K., & Khan, S. U. (2022). The representation of women: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Pakistani drama. *The Discourse*, 8(2), 41–58. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369093480_The_Representation_of_women_A_Feminist_critical_Discourse_Analysis_of_Pakistani_Drama
- Raghavendra, A. (2025). Language, gender, and power dynamics in English literature. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development*, 9(2), 1279–1282. <https://www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd79775.pdf>
- Reynolds, S. (2024, November 5). *The Power of Words: Shaping Gender Equality through language*. Girl2Leader. Retrieved March 8, 2026, from <https://girl2leader.org/the-power-of-words-shaping-gender-equality-through-language/>
- Salsabila, I. N., Umam, A. F., Nurjanah, A., Wahyuningsih, O., & Lestari, A. a. D. (2024). The Role of Gender in Language and Communication: A Linguistic Perspective. *Eduvest - Journal of Universal Studies*, 4(1), 260–269. <https://doi.org/10.59188/eduvest.v4i1.1061>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2008). *Discourse and power*. Palgrave Macmillan.