

A Pragmatic Investigation of Major Pakistani Political Parties Discourse of Social Media: A Study of Internet Meme

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Abstract

This study investigates the pragmatic features of internet memes used in representation of different Pakistani major political parties on social media. Language is traversed with opportunities to negotiate meaning. The study delves into pragmatic strategies in meme captions, including implicature, speech acts, presupposition, and politeness strategies. We selected four political internet memes (2020–2022) from social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter. The analysis illustrates the ways in which pragmatic devices employed in memes, including the use of indirect speech acts, satire, irony, and presupposition, influence political discourse. The study concludes that meme captions are functionalized mainly by brevity, implicit meaning, humor and humor-based pragmatics, and by puns and sarcasm, in order to criticize political figures and events. The results indicate memes act as an effective tool of ideological positioning and persuasion to the public. Future studies could have multimodal dimensions, which will also include visual influences (color, font, and imagery), contributing to a broader understanding of political discourse in the context of Pakistani internet memes.

Keywords: Internet memes, pragmatics, implicature, satire, political discourse, speech acts

Introduction

Social media has a great impact on political discourse and it is an essential vehicle for the transmission of political information and the engagement of its audience and debates (Doris, 2014). The accessibility of internet is rising and social media such as Facebook and Twitter are currently integral to social and political discourse (Riaz, 2010). In a world of viral videos, 140-character tweets, and sharing platforms for everything from cat pictures to fan art, internet memes stand out as a popular modality of digital representation, merging playfully with political commentary and a serious critique of Western mass appeal culture. Memes are pragmatic tools that communicate latent meanings, social commentaries, and ideological messages. They wield the tools of humor, sarcasm, and satire, making them powerful actors in the shaping of political narratives. The notion of memes was originally introduced by Richard Dawkins in 1976, describing cultural units able to propagate through imitation (Chielens & Heylighen, 2005). Memes have now developed into a force in their own right, in

terms of tools of political communication, constitutive of narrative and by extension rhetorical strategies, such as implicature, presupposition and indirect speech acts.

Political campaigners and media cells systematically generate and disseminate memes to attract netizens, propagate ideologies, and sway public perceptions (Heiskanen, 2017). Practically speaking, all of these memes have something else that justifies their utility as devices of persuasion, criticism, and propaganda. The goal of the study is to explore the pragmatic features of the political memes in Pakistan, how meaning is constructed through the linguistic choices (ambiguity, humor, indirectness and irony) and how it shapes political discourse.

Research Objectives

- “To Investigate the Pragmatic Strategies Involved in the Political Internet Memes of Major Pakistani Political Parties on Social Media”
- To describe the contextual aspects in political internet memes’ captions, addressing speech acts, implicature, presupposition, and politeness strategies.

Significance

Hundreds of internet memes serve as the data for your experiments, thousands of articles were made and there is yet even more memetic content to analyze, through the different forms of digital communication, social media is being used as a platform for memes sharing, which gained a remarkable attention from researchers making it one of more analyzed forms of digital communication. The importance of meme analysis as a political language is reflects virtual political discourse — a form of participatory citizenship — through the use of humor and satire, as well as the art of indirect messaging. The pragmatic approach to memes engages with changes in meaning construction beyond the literal interpretation of memes dependent on speech acts, implicature, presupposition and politeness strategies. In fact, knowing the pragmatic facets of political memes is actually crucial, as they do not only form political narratives but also fuel public perception. Scholars have pointed out that linguistic and semiotic features are closely interrelated in meme analysis (Jewitt, 2014). The purpose of this study is to analyze the pragmatic characteristics of political internet memes to disclose how Pakistani political parties employ them as a tool for persuasion, critique, and positioning themselves ideologically.

Research Questions

1. How are pragmatic strategies of meaning construction on social media manifested through political internet memes of major Pakistani political parties?
2. What pragmatic features are used in the captions of political internet memes by key Pakistani political parties on social media?

Literature Review

Internet Memes in Politics: A Literacy of War

Internet memes have been established as a significant form of digital communication with the advent of social media. Memes as cultural artifacts are vehicles of these messages that function via humor, satire, and implicit meaning, and are generally embedded in the sociopolitical context of a given society (Borzsei, 2013). According to Davison (2012), memes, which contain both verbal and visual elements, are multimodal constructs and have gained rapid popularity thanks to their catchiness and relatability. Memes, for their speed of exchange in online environments, play an important role in the dynamics of shaping public discourse and of political communication (see for example Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017).

Richard Dawkins (1976) first coined the term "meme" in his work *The Selfish Gene* as a cultural unit of transmission that spread through imitation (Chielens & Heylighen, 2005). Eventually, the concept grew and digital memes emerged as an avenue for public voice, channeling the expression of criticism and support for political ideologies (Heiskanen, 2017).

Academics have studied memes as tools for political propaganda, digital activism, or ideological positioning (Canning, Reinsborough, & Smucker, 2017).

Strategies of Pragmatic Internet Memes

Not just funny, memes also apply some pragmatic approaches (implicature, presupposition, speech acts, and politeness strategies) to produce indirect meaning (Zubaidah & Ardelia, 2018). Media strategists and political actors alike employ IS memes to shape narratives, bias public perception, and delegitimize rivals (Moussa et al., 2020). Research on meme pragmatics has shown, for example, that sarcasm, irony, and hyperbole are central to political messaging. According to Shifman (2014), internet memes serve as "participatory digital artifacts" that offer users the ability to reinterpret and reconstruct content in line with their ideological perspectives. For abstract S. Studies have demonstrated that political memes have underlying presuppositions in them, which serve to present specific worldviews (Szablewicz, 2014).

Political Internet Memes as a Tool for Ideological Hegemony

There is a persuasive element in the political meme; these memes prepare gradual pragmatic cues that manipulate public perception. Political parties know how to leverage social media to share memes that support their ideology, deride their opponent leaders, and inspire their supporter base (Beskow et al., 2020). Not only do memes simplify intricate political topics into, for lack of better words, bite-sized and shareable content, but we are conditioned to believe in their effectiveness. Twiralization: Meme Distribution Studies have found that memes were central to shaping political debates, influencing electoral campaigns, and foster online activism (Canning et al, 2017).

Research on the use of memes in Morocco's 2018 boycott campaign showed that memes on the internet act as vehicles for social justice and resistance to dominant power structures (Moussa et al., 2020). In a similar fashion, Pakistani political internet memes mimic political battles between the country's major political players, employing sarcastic humour, parody and sarcophagus lexicon to engage audiences. This way of looking at the meme brings its pragmatist properties to the fore and makes it a very strong medium for political debate.

Research Gap

Political communication has been revolutionized by the advent of social media. A number of studies explored various views on political internet memes, in memetic war, digital activism, ideological impact and visual semiotics (Moussa et al., 2020). Moreover, studies have also examined the importance of humor, satire, visual representation in political memes (Qazi et al., 2022). Little research, however, has specifically addressed the pragmatic analysis of political memes, especially with reference to Pakistan, despite the escalating academic interest in internet memes. With the exception of a few broad overviews of the internet meme phenomenon, existing internet meme studies primarily focus on internet memes in terms of their cultural significance, humor strategies, and political impact, whereas their pragmatic aspects (including speech acts, presuppositions, implicatures, and politeness strategies) have received relatively little attention. Pragmatic analysis provides a deeper insight to examine the implicit constructed meaning in language usage of memes, the transformative symbol of public perception, and the meta-cognitive belief that enables political ideologies (Yue, 2019). With social media becoming an evermore important vector for political communication, the question of how pragmatic strategies inform the shaping of political narratives in respect of memes constitutes a pivotal one. The present study addresses this research gap by performing a pragmatic analysis of political internet memes in Pakistan, examining how language in meme captions encodes hidden meanings, rhetorical strategies, and ideological stances. Analyzing the pragmatic features of political memes would add to our understanding of their discursive functions and persuasive potential for online audiences.

Research Plan and Conceptual Framework

This study qualitatively arranges a contemporary study through the analysis of political internet memes about the political parties of Pakistan circulating in the popular social media. This study seeks to investigate the explicit strategies, implicit attitudes and communicative purpose of the language used in the captions of the meme.

Theoretical Framework

First, to justify the theoretical framework upon which the study is built, and central to the analysis, the study relies a lot on Pragmatics with emphasis on Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), Implicature Theory (Grice, 1975), and Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). These pragmatic theories aid in understanding the way that memes serve communicative functions as persuasion, criticism, satire or humor.

Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969):

Analyzes meme captions as assertives (statements), directives (commands or suggestions), commissives (promises or threats), expressives (emotions), and declarations (changing social reality).

1. Implicature Theory (Grice, 1975):

Lundberg analysis of memes reliance on indirect meanings, sarcasm and irony, and presuppositions as a way to engage the audience. Political memes hidden messages interpretation according to the Cooperative Principle (i.e., Maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner)

Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987)

Recognizes face threatening acts (FTAs) in a political meme and how the language in the caption either ridicules, critiques, and is congruent with the political ideology.

Data Collection and Sampling

This study utilized purposive sampling as the technique to select four political memes with captions which were taken from social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter) during 2020-2022. We focus on the selection criteria:

- Relevance for political parties of Pakistan
- Pragmatic devices (sarcasm, humor, satire or political criticism)
- Likes, shares and comments metrics in social media platforms

Data Analysis

The collected memes were analyzed with pragmatic tools to explore:

Through Language: Unless your memes are solely visual, you may use language to perform assertions, criticisms, warnings, or humor.

Talk Implicature: Problems of these behind meaning, satire and sarcasm you can challenge to literal.

Politeness and Face-Threatening Acts: Analysing whether memes employ politeness strategies or use verbal insults to attack political figures.



Linguistic and Pragmatic Analysis of the Meme

Sentence Structure and Word Phrases

The meme is in three parts:

“Vote for me” – an absolute imperative commanding the audience to action (vote)

"I mean, look at me." – Yet another command, this time about how the speaker looks.

"Come on." You can initiate from the beginning with an enormous prize in mind.

Speech Act Analysis

- Directive Speech Act: The statement "Vote for me" acts as a directive, guiding the audience to take a specific action.

- Expressive speech act: By saying, "Look at me," the speaker conveys an attitude or opinion that their appearance is a valid reason for votes, as is what comes out of their mouth.

The two ‘speech acts’ I would like to analyze are:

- Commissive Speech Act: “Come on” could be understood as a persuasive device that motivates a debate should the audience act without any substantive reasoning provided.

Reconsideration of Implicature and Pragmatic Meaning

The meme implies that physical attributes are a fully adequate basis for providing political support, ignoring the merits of any achievements or policies.

- **Implicature (Grice, 1975):** Saying “Look at me” suggests the speaker believes their appearance alone assumes political credibility to an emotional or surface-based voting (in line with Shanahan (2008) and Chong & Druckman (2007)).

- 'Come on' increases the urgency, telling you to act NOW not THINK.

Politeness and Face-Threatening Acts

- The meme subverts reasoned choice, reducing political agency to a visceral reflex.

- It can be seen as a sort of implicit mockery or critique of political followers who choose a leader over policies.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

- The meme shows how political discourse on social media tends to become not political but virality-based content based off of funny video snippets that confuse real life with fake. Propaganda through memes that were popular in the election.

- The language and the structure of sentences invoke the idea that political charm is greater than discussions of policy.

- It also calls out followers’ blind loyalty by implying they vote based on perception over political engagement.



Analysis of the Meme — Linguistic and Pragmatic

Word Groups and Sentence Structure

The meme has three captions:

“Ma, do I need to speak Oordoo to run this country?” Query: end of a sentence with an inquiritive tone.

“If I can do it, so can you!” Positive sentence implying encouragement

“Once more, the foes of peace and prosperity are before us.” – An incomplete statement, a statement about a statement.

- The verb phrase “so can you” denotes ability, or possibility.
- Use of the word “Oordoo” as opposed to “Urdu” is telling, insinuating an incorrect or foreign way to pronounce the language.

Process Types and Transitivity (Halliday, 2014)

- Relational Process: The term 'have' in 'do I have to speak Oordoo' denotes the idea of necessity or obligation.
- Material Process: “Standing” in “enemies of peace and prosperity are standing” is an act.

Vocabulary — Semantic Meaning

- “Ma” — Roman Urdu for mother, creating a mother-son relationship.
- “Oordoo” Misspelling for Urdu, hinting at a language problem.
- “Enemies, peace, prosperity” – Ideologically laden, defining the parameters of a nationalist narrative.

Speech Act Analysis

- Interrogative Speech Act: The son (Bilawal Bhutto) solicits advice from his mother (Benazir Bhutto).
- What Directive Speech Act: response of mother "If I could do it, so can you! announcing words of encouragement, or advice.
- Assertive Speech Act: The last caption makes a political claim regarding national security.

Pragmatic approaches and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

- Lingua Insecurity: This meme points out how Bilawal Bhutto cannot speak Urdu properly even though he is in the communications business in Pakistan (the national language is Urdu).
- Political Dynasty Representation: The dialogue between mother and son suggests that political leadership has passed down from one generation to the next rather than given through hard work.
- **THE SATIRICAL TONE:** The meme jokingly wonders whether language ability is a requirement for leadership, implying that elite politicians are not well-versed in the local linguistic and cultural roots.
- Power and Ideology: Without identifying the adversaries, the last caption "Once again, the enemies of peace and prosperity are ahead of us" indicates how political figures have a tendency to rally support through generic, political rhetoric.

Context / Implications on Society

- The meme underscores the disconnect of elite politicians with the rest of us, especially regarding language and identity.
- It lambastes the persistence of dynastic politics, as inept leaders wrestle with the national language while still in power.
- It suggests that Bilawal Bhutto may also, like his mother, has trouble speaking but nevertheless wishes to rule.



Linguistic and Pragmatic Analysis of the Meme

Sentence Structure and Word Phrases

What the meme has is a single declarative sentence:

“Simple, Motorway, Metro Bus, tour for Saudia.

- It is an affirmative sentence; It is also sans subject; One can say so, infer that Nawaz Sharif's attitude towards governance.
- It appears as a list designed as a formulaic response where more nuanced national problems could be condensed into a two-dimensional narrative.

Transitivity and Process Types (Halliday, 2014)

- The sentence does not go about transitivity directly.
- The material process (actions) is stealthily implied in "Motorway, Metro Bus, tour of Saudia" — for it gives grounds to projects and progress.
- “Very simple” implies an ideational process whereby complex socio-political problems are recast as issues for which the solutions are obvious.

Knowledge of Vocabulary and Semantics

- “Motorway” — Used with infrastructure projects to suggest, or maybe pitch, that road-paving is a pretty big deal
- Metro Bus — All public transport projects and large scale mass transit solutions.
- “Tour of Saudia” — Implies political exile, foreign connections or diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia.

This semantic frame indicates that Nawaz Sharif shows these three points as panaceas for the problems of Pakistan but the meme indirectly shows his bigotry.

Speech Act Analysis

- Assertive Speech Act: The phrase portrays political projects as obvious solutions.
- Indirect Criticism: The meme confines Nawaz Sharif's governance contributions to these three things, which implies a narrow political vision, repetitive political narrative.
- Implicature: “Very simple” dismisses inflation, economic instability, the failure of governance.

Theoretical framework: Pragmatics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

· Construction of a Political Narrative:

- The meme blames the Sharif rule on three ‘projects’, indicating a narrow policy agenda.
- The list's omission of economic policies, education, or healthcare makes a point about his governing priorities.
- **Power and Ideology:**
- The warning of Saudi interference recalls Sharif's exile and his corruption and implies dependence on foreign powers.

· **Satirical Undertone:**

· In its own way, the meme employs reduction ad absurdum — simplifying a (somewhat) complex issue down to several new projects — to point out the repetition in politics and broader myopia.

Social Context and Getting the Bigger Picture

- Meme from Pakistani political and economic instability.
- It criticizes the political elite for focusing on visible infrastructure rather than systemic issues like economic crisis, inflation or corruption.
- Tour of Saudia is a thinly-veiled allusion to political asylum and Nawaz Sharif’s past with Saudi Arabia — it indicates some detachment from ruling at home.



The Analysis of the Meme Linguistically and Pragmatically
Words in Sentences and Word Phrasing

The meme has two captions:

“Wave to them, son.” – This is an imperative sentence, which gives a directive or command from one participant in the dialog to the other.

“They paid your Oxford fee”

No complex phrasing present in the captions, just direct and simple syntax to get the message across.

Process Types and Representational Forms (Halliday, 2014)

- “Wave” (Material Process)—This signifies a physical action, thus representing the son (Bilawal) waving to the public.
- “Paid” (Behavioral Process) — Implicates monetary transaction or indebtedness, place the onus on the public to ensure Bilawal was educated.

Words and Their Semantics

- “Wave” — Motion of the hand that proclaims political affinity to the public.
- “Them” — refers to general public, suggesting audience expecting recognition.
- [“They”] — an anaphoric reference to “them” — reiterates the fact that it is the public that financially sponsors the education of the leader.
- “Oxford” – Represents elite education and fluidity, revealing the depredations of the common people.
- “Fee” — Not merely a payment for tuition but a symbolic tribute to the public’s economic contributions (tax, resources)

The semantics deconstruct critiquing class and showing elite benefit at the cost of work class overall.

Speech Act Analysis

- Imperative Speech Act: “Wave to them, son” also creates power and hierarchy, regardless of her stature as a presumably upper-class woman, indicating a potential political dynasty/maternity.
- Act of Assertive Speech: “They paid your Oxford fee” becomes an indirect form of accusation that equates political capital with access to public resources.
- Implicature: The meme silently assails dynastic politics and the financial need of the privileged to suckle at the public udder.

Toolkits of Pragmatic and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

- **Political Construction of Narratives:**

- It depicts political inheritance, where power is not gained but inherited within the families of the elites.

- The divide between “them” (public) and “son” (elite figure) creates a class divide.

- **Power and Ideology:**

- The father-son relationship points to a patriarchal and dynastic political system, which promotes elitism.

- The phrase “they paid” uses the term “paid” which emphasizes exploitation, as the public is cast as financial contributors who do not benefit

- **Satirical Undertone:**

- The meme uses irony to highlight the gap between political rhetoric and public burden.

Background and Social Considerations

- The meme is a comment on political corruption and wealth accumulation in Pakistan.

- It raises questions of legitimacy, claiming that political families have an unfairer share of the public resources.

- It underscores the rift between political elites and the ordinary people, depicting leaders as beholden to the masses but unaccountable.

Conclusion

Political speech has a critical role in providing the public with the information. By performing a pragmatic and critical discourse analysis of these speeches, we can clearly see many examples where the language is manipulated for the sake of influence, persuasion, and ideological construction. Meaning-making in religious discourse can go beyond the linguistics to encompass dimensions that relate to both sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts. This study investigates Political speeches as structured texts by analyzing sentence types such as imperative, declarative, interrogative and exclamatory structures for their communicative functions. The exploration of the transitivity comes in the form of a discourse analysis that brings out the processes of material, mental, and relational whereby meaning is created through the form of working out an essential authority of the Politician. In addition, more pragmatic dimensions like implicature, presupposition, and speech act uncover the deeper communicative purposes of the communication. It is the connotative and denotative meanings of key lexical choices that reflect the way in which political language is an effective tool of persuasion. The study also includes humor, metaphors, and rhetorical devices as a means of engagement, mobilization, and ideological reinforcement. Employing critical discourse analysis (CDA) to expose the workings of power, the study identifies the ways in which language is mobilized by political scholars to delineate authority, consolidate legitimacy and exert influence over their audience. This surprising result indicates that religious speeches do not only serve as an informational purpose but can also act as powerful weapons of social and political contention. This knowledge has implications for understanding the role of language in shaping narratives of faith and belief.

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