

Linguistic analysis of language used in placards observed during Aurat March 2020

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Abstract: *The current paper presents an attempt to provide the overview of language of placards in 'Aurat March' of this year – 2020. The research includes analysis of language used in Aurat March from linguistic point of view and specifies linguistic means used in the relevant placards. The paper describes the use and purpose of linguistic devices in the feminist movement within Pakistani context. The language use in selected posters was analysed the Ideological Square Model suggested by Van Dijk.*

Keywords: Language, Linguistics, Aurat March, 2020, Slogans, Placards, Pakistan, Ideological Square Model, Van Dijk

Introduction

The movement, 'Feminism' is a philosophical movement that initially began during the late 18th century. It is philosophical theory that observes justice for women that is manifested worldwide, represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women's right and interests. The revolutionary movement has gained much prestige over the last few years that even in third world countries, such as Pakistan, we see women coming on roads and protesting for their rights.

The women of Pakistan are seen coming on roads since the past 2 years particularly. The first march was observed on 8th March 2018 in Karachi. The march of last year gained much hype, due to the slogan, "Mera Jism, Meri Marzi". Due to this hype, research on this topic was intended to be done. Since 'Feminism' is a revolutionary movement which is being observed in Pakistan with a great influence, it was thought to analyse the language of slogans portrayed via placards in the Aurat March with the intentions to know that to what extent does this have an impact on the conservative Pakistani society.

The study shall highlight the importance of language. It shall highlight that language is not restricted to the medium of education alone. The study will put forward the idea that it is the language alone that plays a vital role in revolutionary movements, such as, 'Feminism' to bring changes in varying yet conventional societies. The study aims at answering the following research questions:

- i. How is the language used in the placards made during Aurat March, 2020?
- ii. What are the main elements of 'Ideological Square Model' incorporated into the language used in the selected placards?
- iii. How is language related to societal norms in these placards?

Literature review

There has not been any research made so far regarding the analysis of the language of placards used in Aurat March, that too within the Pakistani context. However, there were various webpages related to the topic of this research added under literature review.

According to the webpage, 'Naya Daur', Aurat March of this year was about a lot more than just one slogan - "Mera jism, meri marzi", unlike that of last year. The page writes, "Glimpses from last year include a placard showing a girl sitting with her legs apart along with the slogan, 'Lo baith gayee saheeh say' (see, I sit appropriately), others saying, 'Mujhay kia maaloom tumhara moza Kahan hai' (how would I know where your sock is?). The cherry on top is, 'Mera Jism Meri Marzi' (My body, my decision) which has become the highlight and also the centre of controversy surrounding this year's Aurat March." The writer of this webpage also stated, "The gender roles remain strong; at home, in careers, in manners. The issue is not the Aurat March. The issue is the shockingly bold way it is being executed. Why is there a need to switch to an amplified mode? The organisers argue that if they continue with subtle, decent remarks like Bol kay lab azaad hain teray (speak for your lips are free) they go unnoticed and do not get the message across" (Mahfooz, 2020).

In 'Tribune', it was stated that Fatima Farooqui held up a placard that turned several heads, "Are the demons that descend after Maghrib men?" it asked. The student explained that the thought was propelled by the unsafe environment that threatens women (Mehwish, 2020). In an online article of BBC News, Saira Asher wrote that Mahira Khan, one of Pakistan's most famous actresses, said on Twitter that she supported the march but warned against using provocative placards (Asher, 2020).

In an online article, "Pakistan: Women march stirs controversy", Aamir Latif wrote that many women holding banners saying, "Divorced and happy" and "No uterus no opinion" including many others had invited ire not only from religious circles but from several women rights activists as well (Latif, 2020).

Methodology

The population included the people of Pakistan. Under sampling, 30 people were randomly chosen as sample. They belonged to different age groups and occupations. 15 were males while

15 were females. Research materials included placards observed in Aurat March of 2020. These were pictures adopted mainly from Instagram. The major goal of the present study was to analyse the usage of linguistic figures in language of posters used in Aurat March, 2020. For this to be carried forward, a sample of 5 slogans highlighted during the feminist movement were chosen which were analyzed using the ‘Ideological Square Model’ proposed by Van Dijk. These were gathered from social media pages on Instagram.

A mixed methodology was used in the research to be conducted. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative research was incorporated in this paper. For quantitative study, a questionnaire based on the Likert scale was conducted. Therefore, quantitative study was done through a survey. The qualitative research was based on content observation alone. It was based entirely on personal observations.

Findings and Discussion

The findings obtained from the survey are displayed below.

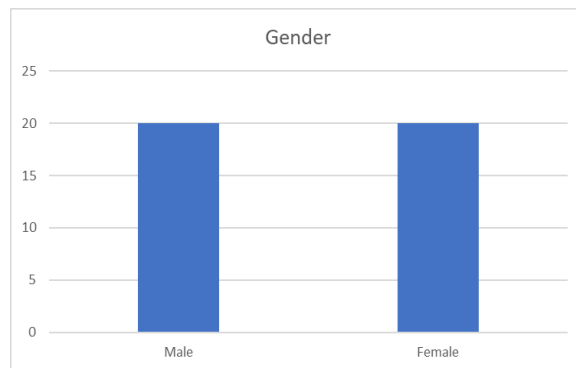


Figure 1

The findings for the statements based on Likert scale are shown below in a tabular form.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Languages play a profound role in bringing resolutions.	44%	38%	6%	6%	6%
Slogans in Urdu language (mother tongue) are more effective in carrying along revolutionary movements than those in English language (second language) in Pakistan.	20%	57%	6%	17%	0%
Language used that on placards is more effective than that observed in delivered speeches or talk shows.	13%	38%	38%	13%	0%
When movements such as those that tend to bring in revolutions, it is better to begin with the mild use of words instead being harsh in our choice of words.	38%	25%	19%	18%	0%
Language of placards (or written text in a creative manner) seen on Aurat March is an affective strategy to highlight the issues of women instead of verbal communication.	13%	31%	19%	13%	25%
“Mera Jism, Meri Marzi”; an ambiguous interpretation of the slogan by masses.	31%	31%	31%	0%	7%
Placards tend to violate or tarnish the image of men. The language use on placards is	25%	32%	25%	6%	12%

promoting extremism.					
It is due to the incorporation of these “placards” in Aurat March that has helped it gain a greater attention and attracted groups of people to talk on the rights of women.	6%	44%	25%	25%	0%

Table 1

Write down any slogan which you came across in Aurat March.

Responses

- Mera jisam meri marzi (16 responses)
- Lo beth gayi theek say (4 responses)
- Apna khana khud banao (3 responses)
- Bhook lagi hai tou khud pakao (2 responses)
- Agar dupatta itna pasand hai tu khud pehan lou
- Open arms, open minds - open yours
- Mehndi se pehle qalam dou

What was the medium where you came across this slogan?

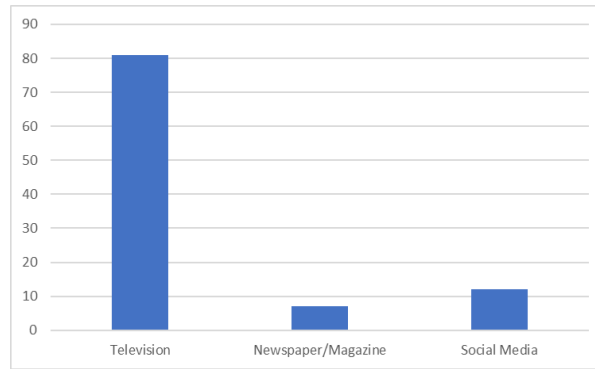


Figure 2

If you would make a placard for 'Aurat March', what would that be?

Responses

(All responses have not been added due to either repetition or irrelevant answers. The responses have been added without any changes made to them, including grammatical mistakes as well.)

- Islam Kai diyai hakook hi auraton ko dai do (2 responses)
- We need equity rather than equality
- Maali khudmukhtaari aurat k tahafuz aur baqa k liye zaruri hai. (Financial independence is pertinent for the welfare and security of a woman)
- Pakistan is an independent land for both men and women!
- Aao mill k seerat perhai aur ous pa amal krai.
- Women have rights too, woman needs your support
- I'm not femisist.
- Hazrat khadija (R.A) used to do business ..we can also do so
- Women can do what men cannot. They are not equal
- Aurat ko b sab haq ha
- To educate a girl is to reduce poverty
- Educate girls, don't beat them
- Lets empower humanity
- Give respect and than take respect

- Who are you to decide our future?
- Give what is rightfully ours for it should be enough for us
- Mera jism tou tumhari marzi kahan se aa gayi?

The above responses were used to carry along the discussion. The survey included 20 males and 20 females. These were random people who were selected for the survey.

According to the survey, majority of the people do believe that languages have a greater role in bringing revolutions. A vast number of people either strongly agreed or agreed to this statement. Moreover, masses also believe that slogans or placards in Urdu language have a greater impact on others since it is the national language of Pakistan and understood by majority.

People were neutral when asked about the incorporation of placards observed in Aurat March. The larger number of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed about placards being more effective than verbal speeches or talk shows.

Moreover, substantial number of respondents also strongly agreed to the statement that a mild use of language should be done when taking initial steps to bring in revolutions. This shows that people have a belief that language plays a vital role in bringing changes. Therefore, they agreed that harsh usage of words should be avoided when moving towards a greater cause.

However, for the statement, “Language of placards (or written text in a creative manner) seen on Aurat March is an affective strategy to highlight the issues of women instead of verbal communication”, the responses were uncertain. There were few differences seen between the answers obtained. 44% agreed while 38% disagreed and 19% were neutral about it. But, the percentage of those who agreed was still higher than those who disagree; therefore, this shows that incorporation of creativity in any form, in this case, placards does have an impact in carrying along with the movements.

It was observed that the slogan, “Mera Jism, Meri Marzi” gained much attention in the past. Therefore, the masses were asked whether or not this slogan was misinterpreted by the common people. Where one group of people in Pakistan believes that it stands against issues such as marital rape, sexuality, objectifying the figure of women or rape of women not in

relation with other men. The other group is of the notion that it talks about vulgarity; it supports prostitutes or the Muslim females who wear tight or clothes that reveal skin. According to the results obtained, 62% of the people agreed that this slogan was ambiguous. While 31% were neutral about it and remaining 7% disagreed.

Many people also agreed that a considerable number of placards are being used as a weapon to tarnish the image of men. This denotes that movement might be leading to become an extremist movement rather than serving and fighting for the rights for women. Moreover, a vast majority agreed that it is due to the integration of placards in Aurat March that has led it to spread its message to a larger number of populations.

When respondents were asked to write any slogan that they came across the recent Aurat March, majority responded as, “Mera Jisam, Meri Marzi” since the slogan went into a controversy and was discussed and talked about on multiple platforms. Apart from it, various slogans which respondents wrote were promoting female chauvinism. Moreover, a large group of people responded that they came across these slogans on social media. Their percentage being 81% followed by those who said television (12%) and only 7% chose newspaper/magazine.

Lastly, when respondents were asked that if they were to make a placard, what would they write on it; there were excessive slogans that were bilingual. Next to this, there were more slogans in Urdu language than in English. This denoted that people in a country where there is a national and a second language; become bilinguals.

Based on these findings, five placards were chosen from Aurat March 2020. These were analyzed with the help of ‘Ideological Square Model’ proposed by Van Dijk. The analysis has been added below.



Figure 3

In this slogan, “**Topos**” is observed. Topos is when a group is victimized. In this placard, it could be seen that “Hero” which a term is used for men in a prestigious and positive sense, therefore, ‘males’ are being victimized that hero is incomplete without “her”.

“**Counterfactuals**” is also observed. It is when persuasive argumentative strategy is used to portray an expression to highlight what somebody would be like if certain conditions are created or nor created. In this case, the placards denotes that males are nothing without females. Particularly, the word, “Hero” has been used.

“**Generalization**” could be observed too. It is a tactic used to the attribution of negative or positive aspects of specific group to a large population. Here, the term “hero” is used to attribute “males” as a whole.

In regard with the generalization explained above, it could also be said that “**Implication**” is incorporated in this slogan as well because the term, “Hero” is implying not particularly hero, it is an implication for males as a whole.

The slogan is also ironic. **Irony** is when something is simply or briefly expressed by using certain words but in reality, it means something else. There is a hidden message which is not explicitly stated in the expression. The information thus needs to be deducted. In this case, again, ‘hero’ is referring to the masculine.

“**Lexicalization**” is also seen because from the word, ‘hero’, the girl has extracted another lexicon, ‘her’.

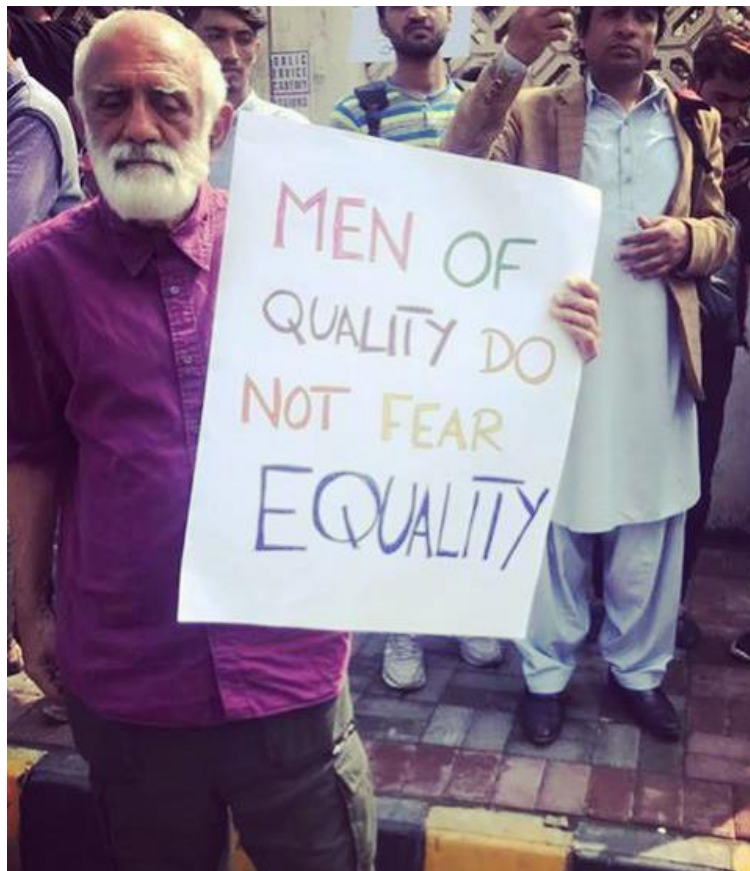


Figure 4

“**Categorization**” is seen in this placard. The categorization is being made between two groups; those who fear equality and those who are men of quality and are not afraid of giving equal rights tri women.

Due to the categorization, “**Comparison**” is also being made. The two groups are being compared to one another.

“**Counterfactuals**” is also used. Persuasive argumentative strategy is used in this expression to highlight an issue that if the conditions were either created or not, the situation would be different.

Since less harsh words are used, such as, “quality” and “fear” rather than “standards”, “caliber” and “panic”, “horror”, “risk” or “terror”. Thus, “**Euphemism**” is also seen.

It could be said that “Norm expression” is used too. It is when norms are conveyed in a manner that illustrates how something should or should not be done and what somebody should or should not do. Here, men are being advised that they should not fear giving females their due rights.



Figure 5

“**Comparison**” is done with a brand tagline of Cocomo with the opinion of men. The tagline of Cocomo says, “Mujhay bhe dou” – Give it to me too. Thus, the placard compares this tagline with others’ opinion and states that one does not need your opinion unlike Cocomo.

“**Euphemism**” is also used because lesser harsh words have been used. The slogan has been made milder due to the incorporation of the tagline of Cocomo.

“**Metaphor**” is seen as well since a comparison between two phenomena is being made between things that bear no similarity. Where Cocomo is a junk food, opinion is completely different phenomenon. Here, the tagline is directed towards the opinions of people with the use of metaphor.

“**Norm expression**” is used too because the placard denotes that one does not need other’s opinion.



Figure 6

Since a renowned personality is holding this placard, Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, thus “Authority” is incorporated here. When authorities support one’s claim about a statement, the validity of that statement is assured.

“**Counterfactuals**” is observed because the roles that females play such as that of a mother, wife, daughter or sister are seen to be cut and ‘someone’ is left. This shows that an expression to highlight the claim that before being in relation with someone, a woman is somebody to be respected and valued.

There is “**Irony**” seen in this text. This placard tends to focus on the fact that regardless of the position or relations a woman is known for, above all these, she’s someone; somebody who should be appreciated and distinguished as an individual being. Regardless of being associated with any relation.



Figure 7

“**Euphemism**” is seen in this text. No harsh words have been used for boys or men. Instead, the placard is simple yet potent. The message has been delivered and word selection is mild as well.

Since attribution of a positive aspect of girl is being portrayed here, therefore “**Generalization**” is observed. Girls have been generalized in regard that it is their “super-power”.

It could also be said that “**Hyperbole**” is used because exaggeration of language is seen in the text. Where super-power is that of something which ordinary humans cannot possess, the placards states that to be a girl is super-power alone.

The language used in placards is simple and easy to comprehend. Main elements of ‘Ideological Square Model’ as those seen in placards are;

- 1) Categorization
- 2) Comparison
- 3) Counterfactuals
- 4) Euphemism
- 5) Generalization

These are common amongst placards. Implication might also be said to be repeatedly seen in the text of various placards. This is because every placard does imply something.

Language is used in such a way in these placards so as to support women. Society, despite many changes, still remains to be rigid when it comes to ‘Women’. The text in placards is used in a creative yet mild manner that is not much offensive but always delivers the exact meaning at the same time too.

The placards analyzed, amongst these, many are written in English language. However, bilingualism is also seen in a few. This is because the women who already possess their rights come on roads to support those who are either not allowed to do so or the ones who are not literate or educated. Since, the women coming on roads are literate, thus majority of placards are either written in English language or they are bilingual.

Conclusion

The placards observed above have a mild language used. Unlike the slogan, “Mera jisam, meri marzi”, these placards have adopted a mild approach. Harsh usage of words is avoided.

However, since the sole cause of ‘Aurat March’ is to support women alone, the term Feminism itself relates to emphasize on rights of females and a movement that serves as solutions for injustices against women. It shall also not be wrong to say that languages play a crucial role in everything. From a mere advertisement to the revolutions to be brought in societies, all depends on language. Those issues are evident in placards which the society ignores when it comes to the position of women.

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