

MARYAM NAWAZ'S PRESS CONFERENCES ON THE RECENT FLOODS IN PUNJAB, PAKISTAN: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Natural disasters like floods are not only problems of nature, but they also become important moments for political leaders to communicate with the public. During such times, people expect leaders to show responsibility, care, and good decision making. Language plays an important role in how people understand the situation and trust their leaders. This study looks at the press conferences given by Maryam Nawaz during the recent floods in Punjab, Pakistan, using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The study follows a qualitative research method and analyzes five official press conferences that were held at different times of the flood crisis. Relevant statements about floods were selected through purposive sampling to focus on leadership and crisis communication. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the study examines language features like word choice, use of pronouns, repetition, and overall tone. The analysis shows how ideas of leadership, responsibility, and empathy are presented through language. The findings suggest that Maryam Nawaz often uses inclusive and strong language to highlight government efforts, public welfare, and administrative duties. Her speech tries to show a positive image of governance by mixing sympathy for people with firm decision making.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Discourse, Crisis Communication, Flood Management, Leadership

Introduction

Floods are one of the most common natural disasters in Pakistan and they cause a lot of damage to human life, farming, roads, buildings, and the economy. Because of climate change and heavy monsoon rains, floods are happening again and again, especially in Punjab. In these emergency situations, political leaders have an important role. They guide the public, explain what the government is doing, and show care for the people who are affected. Press conferences are one of the main ways leaders talk to citizens during such crises. The words they use can shape public opinion, build trust, and show their leadership. That is why studying this language is very important to understand political communication during disasters.

During the recent floods in Punjab, Maryam Nawaz gave several press conferences to talk about the situation and to inform people about relief work. These press conferences were shown on major Pakistani news channels and were mostly held at official government places. In her speeches, she spoke about the pain of flood-affected people, the actions taken by the government, distribution of aid, and plans for the future. Her statements give useful material to study how a political leader uses language to show responsibility, authority, and empathy in a crisis situation.

This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze Maryam Nawaz's press conferences related to floods. CDA looks at how language shows power, ideas, and social

relationships. It helps us understand that political language is not always neutral and often has hidden meanings. By studying these press conferences, this research explores how leadership and responsibility are created through words and expressions during a natural disaster in Pakistan.

Statement of Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to look at the language used by Maryam Nawaz in her press conferences about the floods in Punjab. The research tries to understand how she shows leadership, government responsibility, and care for the public through her speech. It also aims to find the ideas and power relations that are present in her flood-related statements by using Critical Discourse Analysis.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it shows how political leaders in Pakistan talk to people during emergency situations. It helps students and researchers understand how language can build public trust and present leadership in times of disaster. The research also adds to earlier CDA studies in Pakistan by focusing on political speeches related to floods instead of media reports. Also, since the study looks at the speech of a female political leader, it gives some understanding of leadership communication from a gender point of view.

Delimitations of the Study

This study is limited to only five official press conferences given by Maryam Nawaz during the recent floods in Punjab. Only statements related to floods are selected for analysis. Other speeches, interviews, social media posts, and media discussions are not included in this study. The focus is only on language analysis, and it does not look at public reactions or the results of government policies.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are to examine how leadership and government responsibility are shown in Maryam Nawaz's press conferences related to floods. The study also aims to identify the persuasive and ideological language strategies used to influence public opinion during the disaster.

Research Questions

This study is guided by following research questions:

- How does Maryam Nawaz use language in her press conference to present leadership and responsibility during the floods?
- What ideological and persuasive messages are communicated through her flood related discourse?

Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis: Concept and Background

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a way of studying language by linking it with power, ideology, and society. It does not see language as neutral or purely objective. Instead, CDA explains how language helps in shaping social realities and influencing how people think. Fairclough (1995) says that discourse is a kind of social practice, which means language both reflects society and also helps in shaping it. This idea is very important in CDA and is commonly used to study political, social, and media texts.

Fairclough (1995, 2010) introduced one of the most well-known models of CDA. His three-dimensional model looks at three levels: the text itself, how the text is produced and understood, and the wider social context. This model helps researchers see how word choices, sentence patterns, and tone are connected with power and ideology. Since political speeches

are often meant to influence people, Fairclough's model is very useful for analyzing political language.

Another important scholar in CDA is Teun A. van Dijk. Van Dijk (2006) focuses on the link between discourse, thinking, and society. He explains that political discourse strongly shapes how people understand events and political leaders. According to him, political elites use language to control stories, justify their actions, and show themselves in a positive way. His work shows how ideology is hidden in everyday political language.

CDA and Political Discourse

Political discourse means the language used by politicians in speeches, interviews, press conferences, and official statements. Many scholars agree that political language is strategic and persuasive, not neutral. Chilton (2004) explains that political discourse is used to legitimize power, influence public opinion, and keep authority. Politicians carefully choose their words to present themselves positively and explain their decisions.

Many CDA studies have analyzed political speeches to show how leaders create authority and leadership through language. Fairclough (2000) points out that politicians often use inclusive words like we and our to create a feeling of unity and shared responsibility. At the same time, they use strong commands and modal verbs to show control and firmness.

Van Dijk (2006) also explains that political discourse often follows an "us versus them" pattern. Leaders present themselves and their governments in a positive way while avoiding blame or shifting responsibility. These strategies become more common during crises, when leaders need to handle public fear and criticism.

In Pakistan, CDA has been used to study political speeches and show power relations and ideology. Researchers have found that Pakistani politicians often use emotional language, religious references, and authority-based expressions to gain public trust. However, most of these studies focus on election speeches or parliamentary debates, not on disaster-related communication.

CDA, Crisis Communication, and Natural Disasters

Crisis situations like floods, earthquakes, and pandemics require fast and clear communication from leaders. Scholars believe that language during a crisis plays a very important role in shaping how people respond. Boin et al. (2005) state that crisis communication is not only about giving information but also about showing leadership, control, and empathy.

Disaster-related language usually focuses on reassurance, responsibility, and future planning. Fairclough (2010) suggests that during crises, leaders use language to protect their political position and keep public confidence. Language becomes a tool to explain the crisis, justify government actions, and reduce public fear.

Research on disaster discourse shows that leaders often highlight government efforts and ignore or minimize failures. Wodak (2009) explains that this kind of language helps build an image of responsible leadership. Studies on floods and environmental disasters also show that political language often stresses unity, sacrifice, and strength to create a positive picture of leadership.

In Pakistan, most research on floods focuses on media coverage and relief work. Very few studies look at the spoken language of political leaders during floods. This shows a clear gap in research, especially in understanding how leadership and responsibility are built through press conferences in disaster situations.

Gender, Leadership, and Political Discourse

Gender also has an important role in political communication. Scholars like Lazar (2005) argue that female political leaders are often expected to use more caring and emotional

language than male leaders. At the same time, they also need to show authority and strength to be seen as strong leaders.

Research on women in politics shows that female leaders usually balance emotional expressions with firm and authoritative language. Because of this, the discourse of women politicians is an important area in CDA studies. Studying Maryam Nawaz's press conferences helps us understand how gender and leadership come together in political crisis communication in Pakistan.

Research Gap

Although CDA is widely used to study political language, there is limited research on disaster-related press conferences in Pakistan. Most studies focus on media reports or election speeches instead of official crisis communication by political leaders. Also, there is very little research on the language of female political leaders during natural disasters. This study fills this gap by analyzing Maryam Nawaz's press conferences on floods using Critical Discourse Analysis.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). A qualitative approach is suitable because this research focuses on understanding meanings, language patterns, and hidden messages in speech rather than numbers or statistics. CDA helps to see how language shows power, leadership, and responsibility in political communication. This approach allows a detailed study of spoken language in its real social and political context.

Data

The data for this study comes from five official press conferences given by Maryam Nawaz during the recent floods in Punjab, Pakistan. Only statements that were directly about floods, relief work, government response, public safety, and future planning were selected. The data was chosen using purposive sampling to make sure it matches the research goals. Parts of the press conferences that were not relevant were excluded from the analysis.

Data Sources

The press conferences were held at official government places, such as the Chief Minister's Secretariat, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Office in Lahore, flood-affected districts in Southern Punjab, and the Chief Minister's Office. The data was collected from televised broadcasts on major Pakistani news channels, including PTV News, Geo News, and ARY News. To keep things accurate and ethical, the statements are paraphrased and used as examples to represent the original speeches.

Analytical Framework

This study uses Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis as the main framework. This model has three levels of analysis. Textual Analysis, it looks at language features like word choice, pronouns, repetition, tone, and modal verbs. Discursive Practice, it focuses on how the press conferences are made, shared through media, and understood by the public. Social Practice, it connects the language to wider social and political contexts, like governance, power relations, leadership during crises, and public trust. Using this framework allows a deep understanding of how language is used strategically in flood-related political communication.

Data Analysis

Press Conference / Speech 1

Context of the Speech

The first speech was given by Maryam Nawaz at the Alhamra Cultural Complex in Lahore, during the launch of the Punjab Flood Survey Campaign. The speech mainly talked about

flood damage assessment, relief distribution, compensation, and how the government is prepared for the disaster. The audience included government officials, survey teams, media, and the general public through television coverage.

Application of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

1. Textual Analysis (Language and Linguistic Features)

At the textual level, Maryam Nawaz uses strong leadership words, inclusive expressions, and moral language to show both authority and care. For example, she described the survey teams as her “eyes, ears, hands, and arms.” This metaphor shows she is closely involved and actively leading, not distant from the process. The word “my” gives a sense of ownership, responsibility, and control over relief work.

She also uses religious and moral language to create emotional connection. Saying “treat this work as an act of worship” links government duty with religion, which is meaningful in the Pakistani cultural context. It frames relief work not just as a government task but as a moral and spiritual responsibility.

The speech often uses inclusive words like “we” and mentions “every affected family” to show collective responsibility and care. Phrases like “every loss will be fully compensated” use strong words like “every” and “fully” to make people feel confident and reduce fear.

Numbers are also used, such as “2,200 survey teams,” “10,000 personnel,” “27 districts”, and specific compensation amounts. These details make the speech sound factual and organized, showing the government is serious, transparent, and efficient.

2. Discursive Practice (Production and Interpretation of the Speech)

At this level, the speech was produced as an official government statement and shared through mainstream media and social media. This helps reach both the flood-affected people and the general public.

The speech moves from announcing actions to reassuring the public and then to showing personal involvement. Maryam Nawaz talks about her hands on monitoring, “staying awake through the nights” and “checking reports every 15 minutes”, which makes her role appear caring and responsible.

She also praises government departments, the armed forces, and officers, which builds a positive image of state institutions and encourages public trust. When media repeats these statements, it reinforces the idea that the government is effective and organized.

3. Social Practice (Power, Ideology, and Social Context)

At the social level, the speech reflects broader political and ideological goals. Floods in Pakistan often come with criticism of government performance. In this context, the speech protects political legitimacy by showing large scale rescue efforts, technological support, and even recognition from international organizations, like the UN confirming Punjab's relief work.

Statements emphasizing discipline, fairness, and accountability like “avoid pressure and ensure every loss is recorded fairly” project the idea of transparent governance and help counter worries about corruption or favoritism.

The speech also links disaster response to long-term development, such as rebuilding infrastructure and introducing green buses. This makes the floods seem not only as a crisis but also as a chance to show strong, modern leadership.

From a power perspective, Maryam Nawaz positions the Chief Minister as the central authority while presenting the government as people focused and morally guided. This balance of authority and empathy helps strengthen political credibility during the crisis.

Press Conference / Speech 2

Context of the Speech

The second speech was given by Maryam Nawaz in Okara during a ceremony where flood relief cards were distributed to affected families. The speech focused on Punjab's independent handling of flood recovery, financial compensation, and efforts to prevent corruption. The audience included flood victims, government officials, and the general public through television coverage.

Application of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

1. Textual Analysis (Language and Linguistic Features)

At the textual level, Maryam Nawaz uses assertive and defensive language to show authority and protect Punjab's government image. For example, she said:

"my government had neither sought international support nor sympathy"

This choice of words highlights self-reliance and pride. The negation "neither...nor" makes the claim of independence stronger.

She also uses personal pronouns carefully. Repeating "I" (like "I did not stretch my hands before anyone" and "I personally took an oath from 10,000 workers") shows personal responsibility and hands-on leadership. It positions her as a leader who is directly involved in flood management, not just a figurehead.

The speech includes numbers and data, such as "70% of the survey completed," "Rs100 billion allocated," "72 camps established," and "71,000 bank accounts opened". These figures make the speech sound factual and organized, showing efficiency, scale, and accountability.

Maryam Nawaz also uses moral and ethical language to create a positive image of governance:

*"No one other than the victims will receive a single rupee,"
"All routes to corruption have been sealed,"
"Serve with honesty"*

These statements emphasize fairness, honesty, and ethical leadership.

2. Discursive Practice (Production and Interpretation of the Speech)

At this level, the speech was delivered as a public relief ceremony address and shared through television and print media. The speech moves from asserting independence, to highlighting compensation, and then to emphasizing transparency and fairness. This helps different audiences understand the message clearly: flood victims feel reassured, political opponents are subtly challenged, and the general public sees the government working efficiently.

The speech also indirectly addresses political criticism. For example, when she mentions PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto, *"I have protected the self-respect of Punjab's people"*, she defends Punjab's autonomy while subtly criticizing opponents.

Numbers and details about surveys and cheque distribution help audiences see that the government is organized, efficient, and fair, which strengthens credibility in managing the disaster.

3. Social Practice (Power, Ideology, and Social Context)

At the social level, the speech reflects broader political and ideological goals. By emphasizing self-reliance, *"my government had neither sought international support nor sympathy"*, Maryam Nawaz highlights provincial autonomy and national pride. This is important in Pakistan's federal system, where disaster management often involves negotiations between provinces and the central government.

The speech also constructs a leadership ideology combining authority and empathy. Statements like *“No discrimination among cities”* and equal relief across Punjab show fairness and inclusivity, presenting her as a leader who is both powerful and people-oriented. Using financial figures, institutional actions, and personal involvement, she frames Punjab as capable, ethical, and modern in disaster response. This reinforces her political authority and builds public trust in the government during crises.

Press Conference / Speech 3

Context of the Speech

The third speech was delivered by Maryam Nawaz in Wazirabad during the distribution of flood relief cards and cheques to affected families. It focuses on Punjab’s independent handling of floods, progress in distributing compensation, and efforts to ensure fairness, transparency, and dignity for citizens. The audience included flood victims, government officials, and the general public through media coverage.

Application of Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model

1. Textual Analysis (Language and Linguistic Features)

At the textual level, Maryam Nawaz uses assertive, prideful, and inclusive language to show authority and credibility. For example:

“As long as I am here, no one will dare look down upon the people of Punjab.”

This shows her personal authority and commitment to protect provincial dignity. Using “I” and “my” throughout the speech emphasizes personal responsibility and leadership.

She also uses repetition and absolute terms to reinforce promises. Phrases like *“not a single rupee from the Rs100 billion fund will go anywhere else”* and *“we did not seek external help”* emphasize integrity and self reliance. Numbers, such as “72 camps,” “71,000 bank accounts,” “Rs50,000 in cash,” and “up to Rs300,000 per day”, make the speech factual and credible, helping people trust the government’s work.

Maryam Nawaz also uses moral and religious language to connect leadership with ethics:

“Every resource I have is a trust of the people”
“May Allah bless Punjab with even more resources so I can place them at your feet”

Inclusive pronouns like *“everyone worked as one team”* and phrases such as *“flood victims were treated as honored guests”* create a sense of unity and solidarity between the government and citizens.

2. Discursive Practice (Production and Interpretation of the Speech)

This speech was delivered as a public ceremonial address and shared via news channels and social media. The speech moves from asserting independence, to highlighting compensation, to emphasizing fairness and dignity, so audiences see it as both informative and reassuring.

Maryam Nawaz also makes political comparisons indirectly. For instance:

“Unlike others, we didn’t cry or beg for money after the disaster.”

This positions Punjab as strong, self-reliant, and capable, subtly contrasting her leadership with other provinces or political opponents.

Mentioning specific actions, like inspecting relief counters and distributing cheques in Depalpur, shows transparency and hands-on leadership, making the audience see her role as active and responsible, not just symbolic.

3. Social Practice (Power, Ideology, and Social Context)

At the social level, the speech emphasizes provincial self-reliance and ethical governance. Statements like *“we did not seek external help”* show political power and control over resources, which is important in Pakistan’s federal context where provinces often negotiate with the central government.

The speech also frames leadership as both strong and caring. Equal treatment of all victims, such as *“no discrimination will be made between cities,”* signals fairness and social justice.

Linking governance with moral and religious responsibility, like *“Every resource I have is a trust of the people,”* appeals to citizens’ values.

Numbers, camps, bank accounts, and monetary compensation make the government appear efficient, transparent, and capable of large-scale disaster management, strengthening both political legitimacy and public trust.

Press Conference / Speech 4

Context of the speech

This speech was delivered in Narowal. It focused on reviewing flood impacts, working with federal authorities like the Prime Minister, and highlighting government rescue and relief efforts. The audience included administrative officials, disaster management authorities, and the general public through media coverage.

Application of Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model

1. Textual Analysis (Language and Linguistic features)

Maryam Nawaz uses personal and inclusive pronouns, like “I” and “everyone,” to show she is personally responsible while also emphasizing teamwork. For example:

“As long as I am the Chief Minister, no one will dare look at the people of Punjab with a sinister eye.”

This statement shows her authority and protective role. Phrases like *“Everyone worked diligently and in a unified manner”* highlight government teamwork.

She also emphasizes the value of human life:

“There is no substitute for human life, it is impossible to compensate for the loss of anyone’s life.”

Action verbs like “directed to ensure drainage” and “directed to send field hospitals” show hands on leadership, while numbers like “10,000 officials deployed,” “1.2 to 1.3 million cases,” and “72 camp sites” show administrative efficiency. Repetition and absolute phrases, such as “Every area of Punjab deserves equal resources and opportunities,” emphasize fairness and inclusivity.

2. Discursive Practice (Production and Interpretation of the Speech)

The speech was given as an official review meeting and shared through news channels and press releases. Its structure moves from reviewing flood impacts, to praising officials, giving instructions, and emphasizing empathy and fairness.

By mentioning actions like timely evacuations and livestock care, the speech presents Maryam Nawaz as caring, involved, and responsible. Her references to coordination with the Prime Minister show her role at a higher administrative level.

3. Social Practice (Power, Ideology, and Social Context)

This speech reflects the ideology of strong, ethical, and citizen-focused governance. It shows control over administrative work while also highlighting moral responsibility. By emphasizing equal treatment of all families, it connects leadership with social justice. Highlighting preparedness and coordination reinforces her legitimacy and the government’s disaster management credibility.

Press Conference / Speech 5

Context of the speech

This speech was delivered on the Geo programme “Naya Pakistan”. It focused on future flood prevention, infrastructure planning, and lessons learned from the recent floods. The main themes are planning, accountability, and proactive leadership.

1. Textual Analysis (Language and Linguistic Features)

Maryam Nawaz uses forward looking and decisive words to show strong leadership. For example:

“We will do whatever is necessary, including the construction of new dams and reservoirs.”
“Prepare a comprehensive plan to tackle future floods.”

These statements show future-oriented governance.

She also includes facts and technical references like NDMA, PDMA, early warning systems, and “thousands of lives saved through timely evacuation”, which make her speech credible and reliable.

Maryam Nawaz continues using personal and inclusive pronouns, like in:

“Maryam Nawaz is everyone’s Chief Minister and everyone’s daughter.”

This connects her leadership to the public, showing both authority and empathy.

She also uses policy focused words, like urban flooding, encroachments from waterways, protective structures, emphasizing legal, planned, and structured governance.

2. Discursive Practice (Production and Interpretation of the Speech)

The speech was broadcast on TV to reach a wide audience. Its structure moves from lessons learned, to plans for future flood prevention, and finally to broader statements of leadership responsibility.

By highlighting institutional planning and infrastructure projects, the speech shows Maryam Nawaz as capable, proactive, and forward-thinking, ready to handle long-term challenges.³

3. Social Practice (Power, Ideology and Social Context)

The speech presents Maryam Nawaz as a proactive and authoritative leader who combines technical competence with empathy. By focusing on preventative measures and planning, it shows governance as effective, forward-looking, and responsive to citizens’ needs.

It also reinforces Punjab’s image as a model province, showing strong administrative and political authority, while projecting stability and public trust.

Conclusion

This study analyzed five press conferences delivered by Maryam Nawaz during the recent floods in Punjab, Pakistan, using Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis. The analysis shows that her language consistently creates a leadership image that is authoritative, empathetic, and proactive, combining political power with moral responsibility.

Across all speeches, she used personal pronouns like “I” and “we” to show her personal involvement while also highlighting teamwork and collective action. The inclusion of numbers, such as affected families, camps, and financial allocations, made her claims credible and projected transparency and efficiency.

Her speeches also stressed ethical and inclusive governance. She highlighted fairness, nondiscrimination, moral responsibility, and the value of human life, while connecting her words to religious and cultural values, which built public trust and legitimacy.

Maryam Nawaz combined immediate disaster relief with future planning, such as infrastructure improvements and urban flood prevention, showing both short term action and long term vision.

This study demonstrates that political discourse during disasters is highly strategic. Through careful word choice, tone, repetition, and storytelling, Maryam Nawaz reinforced public trust, political authority, and Punjab’s image as a model province.

The research also highlights the importance of studying speeches by female leaders, showing how gender can influence the way leadership, empathy, and authority are communicated during crises.

In short, Maryam Nawaz’s press conferences show how language can be used strategically to manage disasters, build trust, show accountability, and project proactive governance. Political speeches are not just for information, they shape public perception and reinforce social and political legitimacy.

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