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Ideological Framing and Ecolinguistic Construction of Climate Change in Pakistani English Newspaper Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Climate Change is one of the most serious challenges faced by Pakistan today. Pakistan's is one of the top 10 of the most climate-sensitive countries in the world. The issue of language is very significant in the Pakistani newspapers' representation of this crisis. Media language has influence on how the reader understands the issue of climate responsibility as well as the ecological risk and the role of the state. This study adopted a qualitative research design. The study explored how the climate change discourse is presented in the three major English newspapers in Pakistan i.e. Dawn, The Express Tribune and The Nation. There are 91 headlines in the data set from 2023 to 2026. The combination of two frameworks is used in this study. The first one is Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The latter is Stibbe's "Ecolinguistics" (2015). We analyzed these elements, ideological framing, power relations, and the six ecolinguistic categories of framing, metaphor, identity, conviction, salience and erasure in a combined analysis. The results indicate that urgency language is used to highlight the climate crisis in all three newspapers. However, they also defy the voices of affected communities, and seldom question structural inequalities that leave people vulnerable to climate change. The study reveals some striking incongruities between urgency discourse and accountability of government in climate coverage of newspapers in Pakistan. The study adds to the existing body of literature on the environmental discourse in the media of South Asian countries.

Keywords: *Climate Change Discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis, Ecolinguistics, Van Dijk, Stibbe, Pakistani Newspapers, Ideological Framing, Ecological Narratives*

1. Introduction

Pakistan is one of the climate change prone countries of the world. Floods, droughts, glacier melt, extreme heat and smog are all a regular occurrence across the country annually. However, Pakistan's contribution to the global greenhouse gases is less than one per cent. This produces a strong dynamic of eco-victimization and the responsibility to govern. The way this tension is expressed in language is real world and has an impact on understanding and policy. The Pakistani English-Language Newspapers have a significant role in developing the Public Discourse of the elite on environment issues. The three most popular English newspapers in Pakistan are Dawn,

The Express Tribune and The Nation. They both target educated, urban and institutional audiences. They affect the perception of policy makers, academics, and informed citizens about the ecological crisis due to their climate change coverage.

Language is not solely a means of reporting climate change. It constructs it. The reader's interpretation of ecological responsibility is influenced by the lexical choices, the presence of certain voices, as well as by the use of metaphors and the framing strategies. The narrative in the newspaper, which is one of failure of governance, is very different from the one that is one of injustice or natural disaster. In this research, 91 headlines from these three newspapers from 2023 to 2026 have been analyzed. It uses a socio-cognitive combined analytical model of Van Dijk (1991) and Stibbe (2015), namely the Ecolinguistics model. This mix enables the investigation of the ideological aspects of climate talk, as well as the particular ecological narratives that are present in the language of newspaper articles. This is a study of the 3 years from 2023 to 2026. During this time a number of big climate events are taking place in Pakistan. The following are some of the extreme weather events observed: Heavy smog in Lahore and Multan, glacier melting in Gilgit-Baltistan, 2025 floods in KP and GB, and extreme heat in Sindh and Punjab. The dataset thus reflects actual and up-to-date climate communication, which has a direct link to society.

This study is a suitable gap filler study. Previous research has tended to be limited to single newspapers, limited data samples and a limited number of analytical tools. This study is the first comparative three-newspaper study of Pakistani climate discourses between Van Dijk's CDA and Stibbe's Ecolinguistics, for the period of 2023-2026.

1.1 Research Questions

This study addresses three research questions:

1. What ecolinguistic stories including framing, metaphor, identity, conviction, salience, and erasure are embedded in these three newspapers' climate change coverage, and how do these narratives construct or undermine ecological responsibility?
2. To what extent does the combined CDA and ecolinguistic analysis reveal ideological contradictions between urgency discourse, national governance framing, and global climate justice narratives in Pakistani English newspaper coverage?
3. How do Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The Nation ideologically frame climate change through discursive strategies, and what power relations are constructed between state actors, affected communities, and the natural environment?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ecolinguistic Analysis of Environmental Discourse in Pakistani Media

Sadiq et al. (2025) examined the way in which the print and digital media in Pakistan have elicited environmental discourse. They employed an ecolinguistic and CDA approach. They discovered that there is a significant influence of political and economic interests on the media. This advances anthropocentric stories, and undermines ecological responsibility. The study failed to provide any clear definition of the sample, however, nor was it clear which media outlets were being used. This made the empirical reliability less. So a new study, with a clearly defined corpus of 91 headlines from three of the country's named newspapers, fills this gap. Shakeel et al. (2025) performed a corpus based ecolinguistic analysis for 120 dawn and express tribune newspaper news. They adopted Stibbe's model and software AntConc. They discovered that Dawn employs language in her environment that is of an emotional nature, such as the word "war" and "disaster. Express Tribune is more economic and resource oriented. This is a valuable comparative study of the corpus. However, it was not editorials or opinion articles, it was general

news articles. The present study extends this work in several ways, by also recording the ideology that can be found in several different genres of articles.

Ashraf et al. (2025) investigated the impact of using ecolinguistic strategies on environmental awareness. They discovered anthropocentric language to be detrimental to ecological responsibility. An eco-centric framing of the frame favors sustainability. However, the study was still more of a theoretical study, which was devoid of empirical corpus. Language as a means to the cause of environmental responsibility was also the theme of Gul, Elismariy and Riaz (2025) who examined the issue in the light of Halliday's SFL and Stibbe's ecosophy. However, it remained a conceptual analysis. The two studies had a high degree of theory but lack of empirical substance. This issue is tackled in the present study which is based on 91 authentic newspaper texts. In terms of terms such as 'climate crisis' and 'global emergency', Fatima et al. (2026) explored what this urgency is. They discovered that collective responsibility is encouraged by metaphors such as "planet as shared home". However, the research did not have a specific corpus and a sampling method. For the current study, a purposive sampling of three newspapers was used to get a more systematic analysis of the newspapers that can be reproduced.

2.2 CDA of Climate Change in Pakistani Print Media

Ashfaq and Sarfraz (2025) used three-dimensional CDA model from Fairclough to analyze the discourse of the Pakistani media climate. They have come to realize that in public service messages, nationalistic and developmental ideologies are being propagated. They minimize the causes of climate change at global level. There is disconnect between the message of the institutions and how the audiences interpret the message, the study revealed. It was, however, exclusively public service messages and not much attention was paid to counter-narratives. The present study comprises of editorial and opinion articles, both with institutional positions and critical voices. Chandio et al. analyzed the discourse of the Dawn in the context of climate change through CDA and SFL approach in 2025. They identified that lexical-g Grammatical options present socio-political crisis about climate change. Linguistic connections were established between the flooding, glacier melt and socio-economic problems. The study however, was only conducted on news reporting in one newspaper. This is further extended in the current study, which looks at three newspapers and all types of articles.

The paper by Nazeer et al. (2024) analyzed the coverage of climate change in three newspapers Dawn, The Nation and Express Tribune published in 2022 and 2023. They discovered that the public perceptions were influenced by the metaphors, the urgency narratives and the mitigation framing. However, the study did not consider digital media and only used CDA (without ecolinguistics). In the present study, the time period is extended to 2026, and both CDA and ecolinguistic tools are used in the study. Aslam and Shahzad (2025) used 3D CDA for analyzing the climate change in headline news of Pakistani newspapers. They discovered that the government had a political agenda and an economic agenda which influenced climate discussion. Five headlines were analyzed only though. This restricts any generalization. The present study relies on 91 full-length articles to get into a much more empirical dimension.

Mehr-un-Nisa and Pillai (2025) contrasted Dawn's and The Washington Post's approach to the floods in 2022. They discovered Dawn focused on the failures of internal governance, and The Washington Post was able to pinpoint the floods in relation to global climate injustice. The comparative finding is an immediate clue to analyze the position of national responsibility over the global responsibility in the light of this current study on the level of national and global climate responsibility as presented by the Pakistani newspapers.

2.3 Ecolinguistic Analysis of Flood and Disaster Discourse

Fatima and Sani (2026) analyzed the metaphorical images of 2025 floods in the editorial sections of Al-Jazeera, BBC and Dawn newspapers. They were able to identify six metaphor categories. War metaphors dominated. These framed floods as enemy and encouraged the emergency response rather than long-term flood prevention. Affected communities' agency was denied. Only six editorials were analyzed for a limited time period, however. The present study spans a broader temporal scope and a bigger corpus than the previous one, consisting of three newspapers.

Alvi, Hassan and Fatima (2025) made a comparative study between the two representations of the 2025 floods – Dawn and BBC. They determined that Dawn portrayed floods as governance and emergency matters. The BBC put floods under the spotlight of global climate injustice. BBC put floods under the spotlight of global climate injustice. A post-humanist and intersectional approach were adopted in the study. However only 25 articles were analyzed. In the present study, the current research is rooted on this finding and is more systematic in nature, which focuses on a number of newspapers from Pakistan.

2.4 Corpus-Based and Comparative Approaches

Saleem and Khan (2025) used 'Stories we live by' framework to analyse the climate reports by Dawn in the year 2020–2025. The framing and identity were dominant issues they discovered. Climate change was imminent as a security and development threat. The war and reckoning metaphors increased the sense of urgency. Only Dawn was studied, however. The present study adds two newspapers: Express Tribune and The Nation to enable a true comparison. In this study, Potter's fact construction theory and Stibbe's facticity model were applied to 15 articles from seven countries to analyze the articles. To analyze the articles, Potter's fact construction theory and Stibbe's facticity model were used in this study on the 15 articles of seven countries. The newspapers in the West used more modal verbs and nouns to make climate change appear as a reality. The newspapers in the east were not so assertive at all. However, the number of articles in the corpus (15) was insufficient for drawing more general conclusions. In the current study, only corpus of 91 headlines from Pakistan is used, which will enable more in-depth and accurate analysis.

Shaikh and Obaidullah (2026) analyzed the discourse of climate change in approximately 350 texts from Bangladeshi newspapers. They discovered that the Bangladeshi media is able to synthesize science, urgency and developmental nationalism. Elite media dominated. The voices of grassroots were not heard. The following comparison is with other South Asian countries for the sake of context for the current study's findings in Pakistan.

2.5 Multimodal and Comparative Environmental Discourse

Javed (2025) analyzed 24 headlines of climate change news from BBC and BOL News in the framework of Stibbe and with CDA of Fairclough. The two media from both countries, UK and Pakistan, created different human-nature relations through narrative techniques such as identity, evaluation and conviction. Only 24 headlines were analyzed, however. However in the current study a more substantial corpus was provided and the study was conducted with only Pakistani newspapers. The study of Nasir, Habib and Yousaf (2022) used Stibbe's model of ecolinguistics and multimodal model of Kress and van Leeuwen for the analysis of Clean Green Pakistan advertisements. They discovered that framing, metaphor, and salience were an effective naturalization and persuasion in ecological discourse. However, there were only five advertisements studied. The present study is a filling of the genre gap, where news and opinion texts are analyzed instead of promotional texts.

Ali and Shaheen (2024) used the theory of Kress and van Leeuwen's (1984) pictorial grammar and Stibbe's theory to analyse ten Dawn pictorials. They discovered that the use of metaphor,

framing and salience draw attention to environmental threats. However, this research only dedicated to picture data. This is a verbal textual analysis in the present study. Five Pakistani websites of ecotourism were analyzed by Hussain et al., (2025) using Stibbe's story framework. They discovered positive lexical selections and living metaphors that helped them to present nature as valuable. In total, only five unofficial websites were used, though. The present study deals with the mainstream institutional print media that has much more authoritative ideology.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive CDA

In Socio-Cognitive CDA, Van Dijk (2008) distinguishes between three levels: discourse level, the cognitive level and the societal level. It is the words used in newspaper texts that are called discourse. Cognition is the mental models and the ideology of journalists and readers. The concept of "society" is linked to other power structures and social institutions that are shaped by and shape discourse. Van Dijk's framework is used to explore the phenomenon of the ideological construction of climate change in the language of the newspaper in this study. Elite journalists and editors have certain mental models regarding ecological crises, national governance, and responsibility of the state and global climate justice. Their mental models implicate their selection of words and argumentative patterns. The study shows the macro-level (overall topics and arguments) and micro-level (specific words, metaphors, and modality) analysis of texts, which has the ability to detect hidden patterns of ideology embedded in texts. The analytical tool is van Dijk's Ideological Square. There are four moves that we will focus on: highlighting our strengths, highlighting their weaknesses, de-emphasizing our weaknesses, and de-emphasizing strengths. In the context of climate change communication, this implies that some groups including the government and international climate change bodies – get a positive mention, while others – such as those impacted, grassroots climate change activists and global polluters – may be silenced or overlooked. Van Dijk, too, singles out certain strategies of communication. These include the number game (using statistics and figures), the authority (including credible sources), the victimization (including victims of injustice) and the burden (including climate as a threat/ burden). The below strategies are seen in all three newspapers included in the dataset.

3.2 Stibbe's Ecolinguistics (2015)

Stibbe (2015) has developed a tool to study the relationship between humans and natural world as created in language. These relationships he referred to as the "stories we live by. He has six categories for analysis.

1. Framing: the way environmental issues are put in specific frameworks. When considering climate change as a security issue, for instance, then the perception of responsibility and solutions are altered.
2. Metaphor: Language that is used figuratively to describe an environmental phenomenon. This relationship between humans and nature is built in the context of a conflict through the use of a war metaphor such as 'battle against floods'.
3. Identity: Representation of humans as protectors, victims or destroyers of nature in texts.
4. Conviction: Words of assurance and urgency in relation to claims concerning the environment. Conviction is created through the use of modal verbs, intensifiers and certainty adverbs.
5. Salience: which issues and/or figures are given the discursive weight and which are de-emphasized or overlooked.

6. Erasure: The exclusion or omission from media texts of a voice, perspective or community within the ecologies.

Each article from a corpus of 91 headlines is assigned to each of these six categories, in sequence. They make visible the narratives that are promoted and suppressed in the ecological discourse of Pakistani newspapers and how the human-nature relationship is ideologically constructed in the climate discourse of the Pakistani newspapers.

3.3 Why These Two Frameworks Together

The CDA is a useful tool for uncovering the relationship between ideology and power in media texts in Van Dijk's book. It does not offer specific tools to analyze ecological aspects, as the representation of nature, the environmental values promoted, etc., and whether or not the ecological responsibility is encouraged or hindered in discourse. Stibbe's ecolinguistics is just right in this area. The two frameworks can be used together to provide a more holistic analysis. CDA looks at the ideological and political aspects. Ecolinguistics is the analysis of the ecological and environmental aspects. Their marriage is especially important in an environment such as Pakistan, where the capitalization of national victimhood and failure of governance, the urgency of ecological issues and the inaction of politics are rich and complex ideological oppositions. Previous studies have largely adopted either the two approaches of ecolinguistics (the work of Stibbe) or CDA (the work of Fairclough). This study is one of the first to systematize a dialogue between the two approaches of Van Dijk and Stibbe. It is indeed a methodological and theoretical contribution.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The type of research conducted in this research is qualitative research. CDA has a qualitative, interpretive character, as do ecolinguistics. The study is set to uncover the patterns of ideology, the ecological framings and discursive strategies contained within newspaper texts. This is a good use of Qualitative analysis. It enables in-depth interaction with language, meaning and ideology. The method followed is similar to the previous CDA and ecolinguistic studies conducted by Ashfaq and Sarfraz (2025), Javed (2025) and Aslam and Shahzad (2025).

4.2 Data and Corpus

The data consists of 91 headlines from three English newspapers of the Pakistan namely Dawn (articles 1-29), The Express Tribune (articles 30-51) and The Nation (articles 52-91). Articles were published in the years 2023-2026. The purposeful sampling was employed. The articles have been chosen because they relate directly to the themes of climate change, environmental governance, climatic disasters and climate justice.

Table 1 *Corpus Distribution by Newspaper and Thematic Focus*

| Newspaper | Articles (N) | Period | Main Topics Covered | Article Types |
|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Dawn | 29 | Feb 2023 – Nov 2025 | Smog, glacier melt, wheat yield, floods, heat, SC climate orders | News reports, opinion pieces, CLIMATE BYTE features |
| The Express Tribune | 22 | May 2023 – Mar 2026 | Urban flooding, air quality, heat extremes, climate justice, floods 2025, COP30 | News reports, opinion articles, analytical features |

| | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| The Nation | 40 | May 2023 – May 2026 | Cotton & agriculture, eco-anxiety, climate migration, SC orders, colonialism framing, energy transition | News reports, opinion articles, expert-quoted features |
| Total | 91 | 2023–2026 | Climate change across all dimensions of Pakistani society | Multiple genres |

4.3 Analytical Procedure

There are three stages of the analysis. In the Stage 1 a macrostructural CDA analysis is applied. Each article is read to determine the overall topic, main point and stance of the text. The analyst looks at the issues that are highlighted in the climate discourse, the definition of responsibility, and the story that is told about Pakistan's climate situation.

The microstructural CDA analysis is used in Stage 2. The following linguistic aspects are discussed: Lexical selections, modals (certainty and urgency), metaphors, active and passive voice, nominalization and presuppositions. These features show how at the word and sentence level ideology is embedded.

In Stage 3, an ecolinguistic understanding of the concepts of Stibbe is used. All texts are assigned to all six ecological categories. Framing patterns are recognized. Metaphors are classified. Identity constructions are explored to gain insight into the positioning of humans, communities, the state and nature in relation to each other. The language of conviction is analyzed with regard to urgency and certainty. Erasure patterns are detected by the ability to recognize missing voices. Discursive prominence is considered as an indicator of salience.

5. Data Analysis

5.1 Ideological Framing across Three Newspapers

The first analytical task is identification of the dominant frames of the ideologies in each newspaper's climate discourse. Table 2 shows the three predominant structures identified in the 91 headlines in the corpus.

Table 2 Dominant Ideological Frames in Climate Change Discourse (All Three Newspapers)

| Ideological Frame | Frequency | Dawn Evidence | Express Tribune Evidence | The Nation Evidence |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Climate Victimhood Frame (Pakistan as victim of global injustice) | 37 articles (41%) | 'Lives, uplift gains lost due to climate crisis: UN' (Nov 6, 2023) | 'Carbon inequality: why Pakistan takes the heat' (Feb 20, 2026) | 'Climate Crisis Is New Colonialism' (Nov 20, 2025); 'We are among top 10 countries most affected' (Aug 1, 2025) |
| Governance Failure Frame (state not acting fast enough) | 31 articles (34%) | 'Punjab farmers want climate change action — not words' (Feb 7, 2024); SC seeks climate report (Mar 15, 2024) | 'Our media needs to wake up to reality of climate change' (Sep 6, 2024); 'Doable climate solutions needed' (Oct 24, 2025) | 'Govt must run at cheetah speed to tackle climate change' (Mar 22, 2025); 'NA-Climate Change Committee questions tree-cutting' (Jan 31, 2026) |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Urgency and Disaster Frame (crisis demands immediate action) | 23 articles (25%) | 'CLIMATE BYTE: rapidly melting glaciers pose serious risks' (Nov 28, 2023); 'Govt declares smog calamity' (Nov 1, 2024) | 'Only unpredictability is certain as climate extremes grip Pakistan' (May 29, 2024); 'No longer rare: Pakistan floods spark calls for adaptation' (Aug 26, 2025) | 'Climate Change — The Terrible New Normal in Pakistan' (Sep 22, 2025); 'Climate change fuels disasters' (Jan 22, 2026) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The most common frame is that of climate victimhood, occurring 41% of the time. All three newspapers portray Pakistan as innocent victim of a climate crisis which it could not have caused. An effective ideological tactic. Makes a moral appeal to resources and climate finance on the global level. Also very strong is the governance failure frame (34%). This demonstrates that newspapers, although pointing fingers at global forces, hold the Pakistani government accountable for the lack of action on their part. Urgency/disaster frame (25%) – emotional pressure. It addresses the need for urgent policy action in the face of dramatic language and the vivid imagery of disaster events. All three of these frames seem to coexist in the same article, forming complicated blends of ideology.

5.2 Van Dijk's Ideological Square in Climate Discourse

Table 3 uses Van Dijk's four square ideological moves to specific pieces of textual evidence in the dataset.

Table 3 Van Dijk's Ideological Square: Evidence from 91-Article Corpus

| Ideological Move | Discursive Strategy | Dawn & Express Tribune | The Nation |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Positive Self-Presentation (Pakistan, affected communities) | Victimization strategy; number game; authority (UN, SC, NDMA) | 'Eight in 10 Pakistanis concerned about climate change' (Dawn, Dec 8, 2023); 'Pakistan ranks 3rd in most polluted countries' (Dawn, Mar 11, 2025) | 'Though we produce less than 1% of global GHGs, we are among top 10 most affected' (Aug 1, 2025); 'Experts urge Pakistan to declare national health emergency' (Nov 28, 2025) |
| Negative Other-Presentation (global polluters, slow government) | Direct attribution of failure; naming inaction; juxtaposing suffering with political delay | 'Punjab farmers want action — not words' (Dawn, Feb 7, 2024); 'Doable climate solutions needed: can no longer afford climate rhetoric without action' (ET, Oct 24, 2025) | 'Govt must run at cheetah speed' — SC judge fumes over delay (Mar 22, 2025); 'Climate change fuels disasters, but deaths don't add up' (Jan 22, 2026) |
| De-Emphasis of In-Group Negatives | Selective salience — domestic causes | 'How Pakistan got second spot in worst | 'Climate Crisis Is New Colonialism' — frames |

| | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (Pakistan's own emissions, deforestation) | under-reported; focus stays on external causes | air quality' focuses on external rankings, not domestic policy failure (ET, Apr 18, 2024) | Pakistan's crisis as caused by industrial countries, silencing domestic deforestation and governance issues (Nov 20, 2025) |
| De-Emphasis of Out-Group Positives (international climate funds, bilateral help) | Minimal positive framing of global climate finance; charity framing used when mentioned | 'Climate hazards threaten farm production: UN' (Dawn, Feb 24, 2024) — UN cited as warning voice, not as support actor | 'Gillani urges Pakistan-Ethiopia cooperation' (Aug 18, 2025) — cooperation framed as symbolic gesture rather than structural climate justice |

The ideology of Van Dijk is very prominent in all three newspapers. The most consistent ones are the positive portrayal of Pakistan's victimhood and the negative portrayal of global polluters and lazy governments. In particular, the removal of ingroup negatives is important. Domestic factors affecting climate vulnerability (such as deforestation, urban mismanagement, and agriculture and governance failures) are poorly prioritized compared to global factors. This enables newspapers to build up a Pakistan that's beyond reproach and yet call on the government for "slow response. This contradiction will be one of the main findings of the ideological aspect.

5.3 Stibbe's Ecolinguistic Analysis

Table 4 shows the six ecolinguistic categories which were applied systematically to the 91-article corpus.

Table 4 Stibbe's Six Ecolinguistic Categories: Analysis Across Three Newspapers

| Category | Definition | Evidence from Dataset | Dominant Newspaper | Ecological Implication |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Framing | How climate issues are presented within conceptual structures | 'Climate change: the cost of inaction' (Dawn, Jun 5, 2023) — frames inaction as the problem, not structural causes; 'Climate crisis is here' (Nation, Aug 1, 2025) — crisis frame | All three newspapers equally | Crisis framing promotes urgency but rarely addresses root systemic causes |
| Metaphor | Figurative language shaping human-nature relationship | War: 'onslaught of floods' (Nation, Aug 25, 2025); 'fight against climate-driven health risks' (ET, May 14, 2024); Monster: 'merciless heat' (Dawn, Jun 13, 2023); Alarm: 'Terrible New Normal' (Nation, Sep 22, 2025) | The Nation (most frequent war metaphors) | War and monster metaphors construct adversarial human-nature relationship; discourage long-term prevention |
| Identity | How humans, state, and nature are | Farmers and minorities as victims: 'invisible victims of floods' (ET, Nov 16, 2025); Pakistan as | Express Tribune (strongest victim- | Affected communities given victim identity without agency; |

| | | | | |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | positioned in relation to each other | vulnerable nation; state as reluctant actor; scientists and UN as authoritative voices | identity construction) | state given responsibility without accountability |
| Conviction | Language of certainty and urgency about climate claims | 'Pakistan cannot afford climate rhetoric without action' (ET, Oct 24, 2025); 'urgency of funding cannot be overstated' (ET, Jun 5, 2024); 'climate impacts to intensify by 22pc next year' (Nation, Aug 26, 2025) | Express Tribune and The Nation (stronger conviction language) | High conviction language creates urgency but rarely translates to specific action demands |
| Salience | What topics and actors receive discursive prominence | Most salient: floods, smog, agriculture, national leaders, UN reports, SC orders. Prominent topics: Lahore smog (Dawn, ET), GB glaciers (Dawn), cotton & wheat (Nation), climate finance (ET) | The Nation (broadest salience range: 40 articles) | Scientific, agricultural, and economic dimensions of climate get prominence; grassroots voices and adaptation strategies get less space |
| Erasure | Absent or silenced ecological perspectives and voices | Absent: voices of flood survivors, minority communities in disasters, local ecological knowledge, indigenous adaptation practices, women-led environmental activism, grassroots climate action | All three newspapers equally | Erasure of community voices creates discourse dominated by elite, institutional, and state perspectives on climate change |

The six categories of ecolinguistics bring to light some significant trends in the ways in which the human-nature relationship is represented in the Pakistani newspapers. Focusing on crisis is always the approach. Metaphors are almost exclusively negative: floods the enemy, heat the most merciless, climate an onslaught. These metaphors establish a contrast between people and nature a conflict dynamic, not a caring dynamic or a symbiotic one. In the process of identity construction, Pakistan is seen as a victim and state as responsible but reluctant. Language of conviction is strong newspapers employ lots of urgency markers but not necessarily so in terms of specific, structural or long term solutions in the ecological field. The presence of salience's emphasis on dramatic disaster events, national leaders, UN reports, and the exclusion of the voices of the grassroots. Erasure is the most significant finding. All three newspapers have a systematic lack of coverage of climate change by those who suffered the consequences of the floods, by minority communities, by women led environmental groups and by indigenous ecological knowledge.

5.4 Discursive Strategies by Newspaper

A summary of some of the key Van Dijk discursive strategies is given in Table 5, which compares the three newspaper texts.

Table 5 Comparative Discursive Strategies Across Three Newspapers

| Strategy | Dawn | Express Tribune | The Nation |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Number Game | 'Eight in 10 Pakistanis concerned about climate'; 'wheat yield may decline 16pc'; 'Pakistan ranks 3rd most polluted' | 'Pakistan second in world's worst air quality in 2023'; 'climate risks weigh heavily on region's economy' | 'climate impacts to intensify by 22pc next year' (NDMA chief); 'agriculture accounts for 20% of Pakistan's GDP' |
| Authority | UN, Supreme Court, NDMA, World Bank reports; expert scientists cited | UNDP, Asian Development Bank, UN Environment Programme; sector experts cited | SC Judge, NDMA chief, government ministers, international conferences; OICCI cited |
| Victimization | Glacier melt communities in GB; wheat farmers in Punjab; Karachi heat victims | 'Invisible victims of floods': minorities in 2025 disaster; health-risk communities in Islamabad | Eco-anxiety sufferers; climate migrants; Buner flood victims; cotton farmers |
| Populism | 'Societies must act'; collective responsibility to save ecosystems | 'Doable solutions needed'; calls for public-private collaboration | 'Pakistan's climate crisis demands collective action'; 'CM Maryam calls for collective action on Earth Day' |
| Alarm Burden / | 'Comes winter, comes smog'; 'early warning systems ready' | 'Climate risks weigh heavily'; 'unbearable heat'; 'only unpredictability is certain' | 'Climate change is terrible new normal'; 'climate crisis is new colonialism'; 'eco-anxiety' as a burden on mental health |

The three newspapers are avid practitioners of the number game and give their claims of climate a good amount of credibility. The universal use of authority citing is going on. However there are some significant differences. Dawn takes more information from reports from UN, World Bank. Express Tribune is using the data from the multilateral development banks. The Nation devotes more space to the Supreme Court and the government ministers. All three use the word victimization, but the term is most clearly used in Express Tribune where the focus is on minority and marginalized communities being victims such as is expressed in the 'invisible victims of floods'. Alarms and burdens are used most dramatically in the Nation, defining a new colonialism as a form of climate change and burden as a social health burden. The differences are due to subtle, but real, editorial positioning differences between the three newspapers.

5.5 Ecolinguistic Metaphor Classification

Table 6 shows a classification of the main environmental metaphors that appeared in the data set.

Table 6 *Ecolinguistic Metaphor Classification in Pakistani Newspaper Climate Discourse*

| Metaphor Type | Frequency | Examples from Dataset | Human-Nature Relationship Constructed |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| War / Battle | High — all 3 papers | 'onslaught of floods' (Nation); 'fight against climate-driven health risks' (ET); 'combat climate change smog crisis' (Nation, May 16, 2026) | Adversarial — humans vs. nature; promotes emergency response not ecological coexistence |
| Alarm / Urgency | High — all 3 papers | 'Climate crisis is here' (Nation); 'climate change: cost of inaction' (Dawn); 'planet waits for reprieve' (ET, Nov 2025) | Crisis consciousness — humans face imminent threat; promotes urgency but not transformation |
| Human Body / Suffering | Medium — Nation highest | 'eco-anxiety' (Nation, Aug 2025); 'merciless heat' (Dawn); 'unbearable heat' (ET); 'climate change hits home' (Nation) | Emotional and bodily register — makes climate personally relatable; humanizes ecological impact |
| Economic / Numbers | Medium — ET and Nation | 'climate change emerges as major threat to economy, food security' (Nation); 'climate risks weigh heavily on region's economy' (ET) | Instrumentalist — nature valued through economic lens; ecological intrinsic value erased |
| Colonialism / Injustice | Low — Nation only | 'Climate Crisis Is New Colonialism' (Nation, Nov 20, 2025); 'Carbon inequality: why Pakistan takes the heat' (ET, Feb 2026) | Counter-hegemonic — challenges global power structures; positions Pakistan as colonized ecology |
| Home / Belonging | Low — Nation only | 'climate change hits home' (Nation); 'climate exodus' — smart city planning needed (Nation, May 2026) | Intimate and communal — connects ecological crisis to home and displacement; promotes belonging-based response |

There are numerous war and alarm metaphors in all three newspapers. These create an opposition and crisis relationship between people and Nature. This finding is in line with the work of Fatima and Sani (2026) who found that Pakistani newspaper's flood discourse was in the grip of war metaphors. Economic metaphors are also frequently used. These frame nature instrumentally as a resource that needs to be protected and conserved due to its economic value, rather than its intrinsic value. The Nation and Express Tribune are the only newspapers where colonialism metaphors are present. These are the most important ones in the data set and the most counter hegemonic. They contest with the global power structures and place Pakistan in a climate justice context. The most ecocentric and the rarest home and belonging metaphors are those in which the home is the center. The paucity of these indicates that the Pakistani newspapers' climate discourse is not yet robust with any ecocentric or deep ecological narratives.

6. Discussion

6.1 Ideological Framing and Power Relations

The analysis indicates that Pakistani newspapers shape the climate change in three dominant and major frames of ideology (climate victimhood 41%, governance failure 34% and urgency and disaster 25%). These frames collectively produce a certain "image of the ideologies. Pakistan is innocent. The government is slow-moving. The situation is dire. This is a well-formed political image that is poorly formed ecologically. What is called into question in this framing is the power

relations. The voices and powers of state actors, UN agencies, Supreme Court judges and national scientists are given. The communities involved in the impact of flooding are the survivors of flood, farmers, minorities, women and indigenous knowledge holders and they are treated as victims. They aren't known or acted upon, but objects of sympathy. A purely ideological square pattern by suggesting positive self-presentation of Pakistan as a vulnerable country, negative other-presentation of international polluter states and slow response of government and systematic marginalization of community voices.

This is in line with the study done by Mehr-un-Nisa and Pillai (2025), which shows that the focus of Dawn is on internal governance shortcomings as well as victimhood. The present study validates and expands this finding for three newspapers and for a more recent period of time. It also highlights increased frequency of suppression and framing of the term 'governance failure' since 2025, with the number of Supreme Court orders, NDMA warnings and expert warnings for emergency declarations rising.

6.2 Ecolinguistic Stories in Pakistani Newspaper Climate Discourse

The six ecolinguistic categories by Stibbe show the dominant ecological story dominant in the Pakistani newspapers on climate change. These are stories of emergency, of national suffering, of urgency (and delay), and of communities voiceless. Focusing on crisis is always the approach. The majority of metaphors are hostile. Identity has the effect of constructing Pakistan and its communities as victims. The words of these men were convincing, forceful, and urgent. Salience places emphasis on the dramatic catastrophes and the voice of institutions. Erasure silences community knowledge, grassroots responses.

The results partially corroborate Saleem and Khan's (2025) findings as they are also related to climate change being thought of as a security and development issue. The current study, however, demonstrates this pattern throughout three newspapers, and reveals a more complicated pattern. The Nation's language of the strongest alarm and identity-based conviction is used. The strongest framing is a community victimization and economic framing in Express Tribune. Dawn relies on the most institutionalized authors in the form of the UN, the World Bank and the Supreme Court. This study's most important ecolinguistic finding is the erasure finding. The voices of grassroots communities, indigenous ecological knowledge and experience, women-led environmental activism, and minority groups are missing in action. This is in line with the results of Shaikh and Obaidullah (2026) in their study about the marginalization of the local voices and grassroots and the dominance of the elite mediated discourse in Bangladeshi media. This can be clearly seen in the news coverage of climate change in Pakistani newspapers.

6.3 Ideological Contradictions

This study reveals an ideological gap in the Pakistani newspapers 'climate' discourse to be the most significant. All three newspapers utilize combination of high urgency language and governance failure framing. They call for immediate action. They condemn the government's delay. But they do not offer any room for discussion of structural solutions, adaptation strategies at the grassroots level and radical ecological change. The colonialism metaphor in The Nation is the most structurally critical, as it is the one with the lowest mean score. It calls into question the power dynamics at the international level and uses climate change to highlight this ecological injustice. However, this metaphor is only found in a few articles and is only partially maintained throughout the corpus. The idea of victim quickly comes back, as does the sense of urgency and the sense of government failure. The opposition of urgency and erasure is just the one that this study's title calls out. Newspapers create urgency. They demand action. But they have effaced the voices and knowledge of those most impacted. This makes it a discourse that talks loudly of crisis and doesn't speak loud about transformation.

The findings are different from Shakeel, Arslan and Akram (2025) which comes to the conclusion that the Express Tribune frames its environmental content in an economic manner, whereas Dawn frames its content in an emotional manner. This differentiation has been confirmed in the current study but to another level. Urgency language is used in conjunction with structural silence in all three newspapers. The newspapers raise the alarm but don't give a roadmap. This is aligned with Ashfaq and Sarfraz (2025) who described this as 'Institutional messaging and real ecological accountability'.

The results of this study are confirmatory and greatly extend previous research. Nazeer et al (2024) revealed that the print media in Pakistan employs urgency narratives and framing concentrating on mitigation. The current study validates this, but demonstrates that there is a difference between rhetorical and ideological urgency, and that the latter is not only a rhetorical move but an ideological stance as well. The current study is also about 2025 and 2026 events that could not be included in the previous studies. Aslam and Shahzad (2025) only considered five headlines. The current study's much larger corpus confirms their finding that governmental ideology has an impact on climate discourse. This governmental ideology is visible in the three newspapers, and more so as the climate situation grows worse in the governance failure frame, as the current study illustrates.

Alvi et al. (2025) have determined that the Da'wah perspective on flooding is as a governance problem while the BBC perspective is framed as a global issue of inequities. The present study reveals the emergence of this global frame of climate injustice in Pakistani newspapers, using metaphors of colonialism, and framing in terms of carbon inequality. This is a path of evolution that has not been recorded in the past by other studies which focused only on the flood coverage up to 2025. This study is a clear contribution in three ways. Firstly, it provides a temporally current analysis of the Pakistani newspaper climate discourse from 2023 to 2026. Primarily, it is the most up-to-date analysis of Pakistani newspaper climate discourse in the period of 2023-26. It covers events not reported in any earlier study such as 2025 Pakistan floods, Lahore smog calamity, 2024 and the introduction of the concept of eco-anxiety discourse in the newspaper The Nation.

Second, it is one of the few studies to systematically use Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive CDA along with Stibbe's Ecolinguistics in a dialogue. This double framework uncovers aspects of the climate discourse which would be inaccessible from a single framework. The ideological square analysis, when combined with the ecolinguistic categories, gives a uniquely comprehensive view of the relationship between the human and nature that is formed in Pakistani newspapers.

Third, it is the first study to employ this mixed methodology comparatively in three English-language newspapers of Pakistan in one study. The framing, metaphor, and salience of the different media sources, including Dawn, Express Tribune, and The Nation, offer fresh insights into the construction of ecological narratives in the Pakistani English-language media for various audiences.

7. Conclusion

A total of 91 headlines on climate change were analyzed in this study from Dawn, The Express Tribune and The Nation during the period 2023-2026. To investigate the ideological and ecological aspects of climate discourse in the Pakistani newspapers it used the Socio-Cognitive CDA of Van Dijk and Ecolinguistics of Stibbe. They found three overarching ideology takes, with its highest shares: climate victimhood (41%), governance failure (34%), urgency and disaster (25%). The ideology of Van Dijk is very prominent in all three newspapers. The hallmark ideology of this corpus is a positive portrayal of Pakistan as a climate victim, negative portrayal of global polluters and slow government, and systematic silencing of the voices of the community. Stibbe's

analysis of the language, known as an ecolinguistic analysis, showed that war and alarm metaphors are predominant. The nature is built as an opponent. The communities and Pakistan are victims with no voice. Language is urgent and strong. However, the voice of the grassroots, the knowledge and practices of indigenous peoples and structural answers are forgotten. The main contradiction of the Pakistani newspaper discourse on climate change is the mix of urgency and no change, alarm and no action.

The most important thing is the systematic silencing of the voices of the communities that were impacted. This is true for all three newspapers, whichever might be editorials. The Urdu-language newspaper and regional-language newspaper should be explored in future studies as they have a much more large audience and directly affected region. Local-language media discourses may include voices from the community more. A comparative analysis of climate-related news coverage in English and Urdu newspapers would be beneficial for enriching the understanding of the climate discourse in Pakistan.

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