



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Resurgence of Taliban in August 2021 and Paradigm Shift in their Representation in Newspaper Editorials: Inter-relationship of Genre Analysis and Discourse Analysis**

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**ABSTRACT**

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To analyze the representation of Taliban in editorials is important because it reveals the hidden ideological tilt of the editorialists. On conscious level, these ideologies may not be represented in plain language but using discourse analysis and genre analysis, a detailed and perceptive insight is obtained. The editorials have been analyzed which were published in Dawn newspaper in the month of August 2021 dealing with the issue of Afghanistan and Talibanization. Eleven editorials dealt with this theme in August 2021 and all of them are viewed through genre analytical techniques and discourse analysis. It has been found out that the move structure of these editorials comprise five common moves i.e. presenting the case, offering the argument, elucidating the case, reaching the verdict and recommending action. There are no optional moves in the generic move structure of these editorials. Moreover, it has been observed that the representation of Talibans in newspaper editorials after their lightening capture of Kabul in August 2021 has also undergone a paradigm shift. Unlike the negative representation of Talibans in Dawn (Nadeem and Khan, 2017), Talibans are represented in neutral way and the US is chastised. This shows the reciprocal relationship between discourse and society. Unexpected change in the political landscape in Afghanistan brought about this paradigm shift in the representation of Talibans in media discourse.

**Introduction**

Giles (2002) asserts the significance of the method of discourse analysis in contemporary media studies and research in psychology. Similarly, genre analysis is widely-used in 21<sup>st</sup> century because discourses are embedded and “inscribed” with ideologies and different groups use discourse to orient themselves with reality (Achugar, 2004). Moreover, genre analysis focuses on the communicative purpose and communicative intention of the language used in a particular genre. This underlying structure aids significantly in discourse analysis as it brings forth the

latent structure of the discourse. Bhatia (2002) underscores the importance of genre analytical approach by describing it as “narrow in focus but broad in vision”.

Keeping in view the gossipy nature of news items, it is considered as a representative type of public discourse (Van Dijk, 1988). It makes up mind of the general public regarding some issue and it has deep impact on the psyche of the public. Therefore, propagandists try to manipulate the power of media and try to distort and misrepresent things in order to create a deformed image of reality in the minds of general public. Discourse analysis and genre analysis are useful in alerting the cautious readers/listeners to such manipulations and enable them to scrape the surface and see through the envelope encompassing the actual news items. Same actors are represented in different ways at different point of time in order to serve the vested national interests (Dar and Ali, 2015).

### **Phenomena of Talibanization**

The word “Taliban” means a student studying in religious seminary and in addition to religious knowledge undergoes military training as well (Malik and Iqbal, 2010). The mushroomed growth of religious seminaries in the wake of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 with the passage of time gave birth to the phenomena of Talibanization. Malik and Iqbal (2010) traced back the history of Talibans from their earliest emergence as mujahideens in era of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and underlines some of the causes of their popularity among underprivileged strata of society. They discuss the construction of Talibans in print media of Pakistan and indicate that their representation is highly unfavourable.

Nadeem and Khan (2017) substantiated this claim that representation of Taliban in newspaper editorials of Pakistan is negative and for this purpose, they analyzed 352 editorials of *The Nation* and *Dawn* published in the time slot spanning one whole year (March 2013-February 2014). They found out that the representation was largely negative in both newspapers regardless of the fact that *Dawn* is considered as left wing newspaper and *The Nation* is viewed as the voice of the right wing faction of Pakistani society. Moreover, they observed that the foreign office of Pakistan also represents Taliban in negative light and these newspapers are in fact conforming to the official narrative.

The aforementioned study has been very significant in year 2013-2014 but as in 2021, situation in Afghanistan has drastically changed by August 2021 and there is a second coming of Taliban in Afghanistan so the need arises of a fresh inquiry into the representation of Talibans in newspaper editorials of Pakistan. For the current study, all editorials published in *Dawn* newspaper, the leading English newspaper of Pakistan, have been analyzed. There are eleven editorials dealing with Talibans in *Dawn* published from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021. Moreover, in addition to discourse analysis to reveal the hidden ideology and slant of the editorialists, genre analysis has also been employed to view the generic structure of the moves in these editorials. This angle was missing in the study of Nadeem and Khan (2017) and holds vital significance because in addition to the slant of the editorialists towards favourable, unfavourable or negative representation, an additional aspect is also necessary whether the editorialists are offering some recommendations or only emphasize the representation through argumentation or narrative building through persuasion.

Since 1990s, the Taliban have been represented in newspapers and their representation varied over time but especially after 9/11, Taliban became synonymous with terrorists, hence, represented in negative light everywhere. Due to the shift of international arena from unipolar to multipolar and abrupt withdrawal of America from Afghanistan gave rise to the frequent discussions about Taliban and Afghanistan in newspaper editorials. In other words, there have been two phases of representation of Taliban in media i.e. one before 9/11 (positive representation, heroes, mujahideens) and other after 9/11 (hard-liners, terrorists, militants, etc) (Nadeem and Khan, 2017); Barbarity, ultra-orthodox, islamic extremism, terrorists (Malik and Iqbal, 2010). But the researchers of the current study opine that a third phase has commenced in the wake of Taliban resurgence in 2021 and a pinnacle moment reached in August 2021 when Kabul fell to Taliban once again after two decades of War-on-Terror of America. So, it is worth while to observe the representation of Taliban in this historic moment. It is interesting to see whether the editorialists show optimism, pessimism or neutrality on the sudden capture of Kabul by Taliban concerning the future of Afghanistan.

Dawn is considered as the leading English newspaper of Pakistan and it has a great impact on the intelligentsia of the country. Policymakers and people belonging to the bureaucracy are the avid readers of this newspaper (Nadeem & Khan, 2017).

Nadeem and Khan (2017) in their study commit a serious mistake by not distinguishing between two different organizations having resemblance in their name only. In this study, here Taliban refers to the members of Tehrik-i-Taliban Afghanistan and not the members of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The latter organization is outlawed in Pakistan due to its anti-Pakistan rhetoric and activities (Abbas, 2008; Rana, 2009) whereas on the former, Pakistan has some strategic leverage as Pakistan was one of the countries who gave recognition to their government in Afghanistan in 1996. These two organizations bear resemblance in their names but they are distinct entities and have separate leadership structures and agendas. Only those editorials have been analyzed where Taliban belonging to the former organization have been discussed by the editorialists.

## **Literature Review**

Swales (1990) defines genre as a collection of communicative events i.e. events where language plays a definitive role. Moreover, the contribution of these communicative events to the overall production and reception of discourse in a particular context is also crucial. Finally, he asserts that all these communicative events should have a common aim or objective which he calls communicative purpose (Swales, 1990).

Malik and Iqbal (2010) viewed the construction of the image of Taliban in The News and Dawn and chose editorials of February and March 2010. They came to this conclusion that the representation of Taliban has been negative in the media and they have been represented as actors of extremism and fanaticism in the country.

Dar and Ali (2015) made use of framing theory to analyze the representation of the phenomena of drone attacks in elite newspapers of Pakistan and the United States. For this analysis, they chose New York Times and The News International and using the technique of census study, the duration of this study was set to January 2008 to December 2013. They observed that the representation of this phenomena in these

newspapers was impacted by the foreign policy and national interests of their respective countries. The News framed drone attacks in negative light and used harsh tone and presented justification of collateral damages whereas New York Times supported drone attacks by attributing positive and favorable frames and put forth the inevitability of such attacks.

Iftikhar and Shafiq (2019) found that representation of Pakistan and US diplomatic relations in Bush administration and Obama administration was different. In Obama era, the hostility was on the rise and both Dawn and NYT represented the diplomatic severity in the same manner.

Johnson and Mason (2007) debunk this myth that Taliban is simply an Afghan Islamist group. They point towards other distinguishing factors which complicates the issue of Talibans such as their tribal kinship hierarchy and charismatic acumen. This complexity is responsible for the resurgence of Taliban at various moments in their fight against NATO and American forces. This resurgence of Talibans in the face of superior and well-trained international security forces accord them the opportunity to be in the limelight and newspapers give full coverage to Talibans in their news posts as well as in their editorials. The representation of Talibans has been fluid at various time periods and in various newspapers. It is, therefore, a rich area for linguists to bring to the fore the hidden ideologies embedded by the editorialists in their editorials concerning Talibans.

### Material and Methods

In the conception of Fairclough (1995), discourse analysis is nothing but a language type having 'particular representation' with respect to a 'specific point of view' concerning some 'social practice'. In this study, move analysis has been done using the models of Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993). The criterion of common and optional moves have been derived from Tongsibsong (2013, 2014). A blend of both Discourse analysis and genre analysis has been used in this study because in addition to the content of the editorials, its structure is also crucial in depicting the covert activities of media houses by the manipulation of linguistic resources at their disposal (Le, 2009).

Qualitative method of research has been employed in this study and editorials in the month of August 2021 have been downloaded from the official website of Dawn. The unit of analysis comprised all those editorials which were concerning Talibans implicitly or explicitly. Eleven editorials fulfilled this criteria and these are:

**Taliban assault (3<sup>rd</sup> August 2021)**, Refugee debate (6<sup>th</sup> August 2021), Looming peril (8<sup>th</sup> August 2021), Afghanistan's future (15<sup>th</sup> August 2021), Taliban's challenge (17<sup>th</sup> August 2021), Price of US follies (18<sup>th</sup> August 2021), Militancy concerns (19<sup>th</sup> August 2021), Anti-Taliban protests (21<sup>st</sup> August 2021), Afghan Taliban flags (22<sup>nd</sup> August 2021), Kabul massacre (28<sup>th</sup> August 2021), and US drone strikes (31<sup>st</sup> August 2021).

The rationale behind observing the editorials of Dawn is that Dawn is the oldest newspaper of Pakistan and caters to the needs of elite class in the country (Malik and Iqbal, 2010) and is crucial in mind making of the people at the helm of the affairs in Pakistan.

## Results and Discussion

The sequence of common and optional moves is important. Each distinct sequence is manifested as different generic structure. These generic structures are crucial in understanding the focus of the writers. As in this research analysis, it has been observed that almost all of the editorials have the terminal move of recommending action.

Moves are divided on the basis of criteria given by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993). The part of the editorial portraying the picture or setting the stage for the editorial has been termed as presenting the case, the move in which editorialists are arguing a position by propounding reasons in favor or against some issue is termed as offering the argument, the move where editorialists are giving more details to the incident happened or issue at hand is labelled as elucidating the case, in the move in which the editorialists conclude their stance is known as reaching the verdict, and the move in which the editorialists suggest a way forward is the move of recommending action. The choice of words and underlying structure of this move of recommending action reveals the outlook of the editorialists i.e. optimistic, pessimistic, or neutral.

Following Table 1 shows the generic move structure of the editorials of Dawn on the topic of Talibans. Here abbreviations are used for all the moves i.e. P for presenting the case, O for offering the argument, E for elucidating the case, R.V for reaching the verdict, and R.A. for recommending action.

**Table 1**  
**Generic Move Structure**

Sr. No.	Editorial	Move1	Move2	Move3	Move4	Move5	Generic Move Structure
1.	Taliban assault (3 <sup>rd</sup> August 2021)	O	P	E	R.V.	R.A.	O-P-E-R.V.-R.A.
2.	Refugee debate (6 <sup>th</sup> August 2021)	P	O	E	R.V.	R.A.	P-O-E-R.V.-R.A.
3.	Looming peril (8 <sup>th</sup> August 2021)	P	O	E	R.V.	R.A.	P-O-E-R.V.-R.A.
4.	Afghanistan's future (15 <sup>th</sup> August 2021)	O	P	R.V.	E	R.A.	O-P-R.V.-E-R.A.
5.	Taliban's challenge (17 <sup>th</sup> August 2021)	P	O	R.V.	R.A.	-	P-O-R.V.-R.A.
6.	Price of US follies (18 <sup>th</sup> August 2021)	P	O	E	R.V.	R.A.	P-O-E-R.V.-R.A.
7.	Militancy concerns (19 <sup>th</sup> August 2021)	P	E	O	R.V.	R.A.	P-E-O-R.V.-R.A.
8.	Anti-Taliban protests (21 <sup>st</sup> August 2021)	P	O	R.V.	R.A.	-	P-O-R.V.-R.A.
9.	Afghan Taliban flags (22 <sup>nd</sup> August 2021)	O	P	R.V.	E	R.A.	O-P-R.V.-E-R.A.
10.	Kabul massacre (28 <sup>th</sup> August 2021)	O	P	R.V.	E	R.A.	O-P-R.V.-E-R.A.
11.	US drone strikes (31 <sup>st</sup> August 2021)	O	P	E	R.V.	R.A.	O-P-E-R.V.-R.A.

After analyzing the above table in the light of criteria of common and optional moves presented by Tongsibsong (2013; 2014), it has been found out that there are no

optional moves in the move structure of the editorials of Dawn on the crisis of Afghanistan. Tongsibsong (2013; 2014) considers all those moves as optional whose percentage of occurrence is below 50% but as it is evident from the above table that all the moves have frequency of occurrence greater than 50% so all these moves are common moves. Among these moves, recommending action is the most important because in almost all editorials, it demonstrates, the editorialists never forget to suggest their proposed way forward.

It has also been observed that the lexical choices used in all these editorials show optimism and despite having reservations regarding Talibans, all the editorials point towards neutral self-image of Talibans and negative portrayal of the US. For instance, "The US, which invaded Afghanistan two decades ago, cannot shift the burden of its **failed nation-building adventures** onto others (Refugee Debate, 6<sup>th</sup> August 2021), "WHILE Kabul may have fallen to the **Afghan Taliban with little violence**, Thursday's devastating suicide blast outside the Afghan capital's airport serves as a harbinger of what lies ahead should the local chapter of the self-styled Islamic State group have the freedom to operate in a security vacuum" (Kabul massacre, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2021).

In "Refugee Debate" (August 6, 2021), the onus of Afghan Imbroglia has been placed on forces other than Talibans, thereby, presenting a lenient approach towards Talibans and a harsher tone has been employed for America and its allies, both internationally and within Afghanistan. Dawn writes, "Pakistan is not responsible for Afghanistan's crisis – foreign states and Afghanistan's political class and warlords share that dubious distinction" and "Powerful forces have toyed with that country for decades".

Dawn accepts Taliban as a respectable group in Afghan conflict in its editorial "Looming peril" (August 8, 2021): "It is in Pakistan's interest that violence subsides and a power-sharing arrangement between the Taliban and the Kabul government is reached". In this same editorial, Dawn clearly differentiates between Talibans and terrorists and put TTP, Al Qaeda and ISIS in the latter category and considers only them a spillover threat for Pakistan. Exclusion of Taliban from the label of "terrorists" which Dawn previously used to ascribe shows the neutral tendency of Dawn towards them. Dawn used to dub Talibans a misogynist group working to routinize violence against women in the name of religion (Malik and Iqbal, 2010).

The editorial "US drone strikes" (August 31, 2021) presents USA in very contemptuous manner. The lexical choices "unilateral drone strike", "washed its hands off", "imperial overreach", "collateral damage", "US tends to consider itself above the international rules-based Order", "should the US choose to play lone ranger, things will get more complicated" depicts America in negative light. In the same editorial, Dawn makes use of expressions such as "the anti-IS effort should be spearheaded by the Afghans", "inclusive set-up" and "Afghan forces" for all the domestic stakeholders of Afghanistan including Talibans and depicts Talibans as one of the other present groups in Afghanistan.

The current research shows a paradigm shift in the representation of Talibans in Pakistani print media and is in contradiction with what Malik and Iqbal (2010) and Nadeem and Khan (2017) put forth.

## **Conclusion**

Lexical expressions have been subtly observed and centered on these observations, discourse analysis of the content and headings of newspaper editorials unraveled the representation of Taliban and Americans, the two main combatants in Afghan conflict.

August 2021 witnessed a key historic moment in Afghanistan when Kabul fell to Taliban and Americans retreated in an unplanned and haphazard manner. This second coming of Taliban also resulted in their neutral representation and the representation of the United States has been mostly negative in Dawn newspaper. This paradigm shift is indicative of the fact that discourse is the representation of society and societal influences transforms the discourse.

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