

Integrating Critical Discourse Analysis and Genderlect: A Framework for
Reshaping Democratic Institutions Towards Gender Equity in Pakistan

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Article Information	Abstract
Received: Dec 27, 2024 Revised: June 25, 2025 Accepted: June 28, 2025	<p>This study explores the intersection of language, gender, and democratic leadership using Norman Fairclough's CDA Model and Deborah Tannen's Genderlect Theory, in this regard, the study seeks to inquire as to how gendered discursive patterns build power relationships and thereby influence decision making within a democratic system. It proposes a bicameral system of governance where two gendered parliamentary forums, male and female, would synergistically tackle gender-specific issues and constitute an inclusive government. Organizations led by women are said to be women-centered, while those headed by men are male-centered. The model under consideration is based on cross-gender cooperation, mutual inclusion of both houses, and equality. The model stemming from the Islamic participatory spirit reiterates gender equality perceived in cultural and religious light. To this end, the present study proposes constitutional amendments to grant legitimacy for the establishment of women's and men's parliaments within institutional reforms. The issues somehow call for reforms due to recent happenings involving gender, particularly issues like the issue of the terrible rape of a girl in Punjab College and judicial pronouncement of the Lahore High Court barring male staff going to work in women-only institutions. The gravity with which the incidents demand looking into structural and legal means to protect women as well as give them visibility in governance. Drawing upon campaign trails, policy briefs, parliamentary debates, media narratives, and interviews with students, this study carried out discourse and thematic analyses as lenses to analyze the patterns of leadership and gendered social communication in action. Finding results thus lead to a democratic governance agenda in Pakistan where gender-inclusive policy-making facilitates social cohesion, equity, and progressive change.</p>
Keywords <i>Gendered Leadership</i> <i>Critical Discourse Analysis</i> <i>Genderlect Theory</i> <i>Islamic Ideology</i> <i>Democracy</i>	

1. Introduction

The issue of gender equality has risen to higher prominence in contemporary democratic societies because language and power relationships determine social operations. Critical Discourse Analysis emerged as one of the main analytical frameworks developed by Norman Fairclough for understanding how language and ideology interact with power dynamics to construct political reality. When blended with Deborah Tannen's Genderlect Theory, which considers how men and

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women communicate, such analytical frameworks provide a comprehensive approach to understanding how gender influences democratic processes. This effort seeks to synthesize these two theoretical stances to produce a novel paradigm of gender-sensitive governance and a democratic philosophy capable of addressing historically prevalent gender disparity.

Fairclough (2013) says Critical Discourse Analysis reveals how power inequalities are embedded in institutional language, so structural change is inevitable. Challenging the masculine past, the paradigm being proposed has gendered parliaments and women have a voice in politics beyond patriarchal norms. This addresses gendered issues and a more balanced political culture where men and women can participate in government according to their respective communication style.

Sociolinguistic studies of language and gender show that gender plays an integral role in communication patterns and political participation. The paradigm allows male politicians to be direct within frameworks that respect their sociolinguistic identity, while female politicians can use their negotiation and collaboration skills by offering different but equal spaces (Coates, 2015). This adds equity and representation to the democratic process, because good governance requires multiple communication modalities.

The main argument of the study is that democracy can be changed through the application of Critical Discourse Analysis's critique of political talk and Genderlect Theory's understanding of communication styles. According to this idea, we should have a parliament for men and one for women to address the issues specific to each gender as the demographics change. This is because current political institutions do not give women equal opportunities to participate. Separate election processes and institutions for each gender may reduce the biases generated by patriarchal communication in political talk and give women a better platform to air their concerns (Baxter, 2010).

By exploring these subjects, this study builds on previous research concerning gender and political activity. As indicated in studies like Lazar's (2005) feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, it seems essential to consider how language, mainly political speech, influences the regulation of power within communities. Research by Eagly and Carli (2007) on gender and leadership also highlights that gendered expectations greatly affect how women can lead in both corporate and political spheres. By arguing that linguistic analysis is important to understanding and overcoming the barriers women face in political leadership, this research contributes to a growing body of literature calling for gender-sensitive reforms in democratic governance.

Recent (though unverified) event in Lahore, where reports of gender-based abuse at Punjab College Gulberg Campus, Lahore led to widespread protests, highlight the urgency of this research. After a security officer reportedly assaulted a female student on October 11, 2024 (The Friday Times, 2024), protests erupted across Punjab, prompting a holiday on October 18, 2024 and highlighting the need for gender-sensitive reforms in governance (Daily Ausaf, 2024).

Such protests demonstrate the nation's ongoing struggle with issues like discrimination and gender-based violence. The proposed constitutional reform seeks to incorporate gender-specific issues into democratic governance, ensuring that all voices are fairly heard and represented in decision-making process. Much like earlier amendments sought to include marginalized communities in the national framework, the current effort builds on that legacy. Moreover, historical passage of the 26th Amendment by the National Assembly, supported by 225 lawmakers with only 12 opposing, marks a collective acknowledgment of the need for systemic governance reform.

This further emphasizes that achieving gender empowerment and inclusivity also requires the same dedication and urgency as Pakistan witnessed in the passage of the 26th Amendment. The same seriousness must now be applied to address these critical issues, as they truly impact the rights and lives of all members of society.

2. Research Objectives

- To explore how gendered communication patterns as per Genderlect Theory affect leadership positions in democratic institutions.
- To use Critical Discourse Analysis to expose gender-based power imbalances in political discourse especially in the wake of Lahore's Punjab College incident.
- To propose a new democratic model inspired by 26th Amendment that can ensure gender equity in governance by having separate parliaments and institutions for men and women.
- To investigate how the proposed democratic model can address gender-specific needs following the Punjab College incident and promote cross-gender cooperation in governance.

3. Research Questions

- What structural reforms can be suggested to ensure equitable gender representation and leadership in democratic institutions in the wake of the Punjab College incident?
- How do gendered communication styles, as defined by Genderlect Theory, affect leadership roles in democratic institutions?
- In what ways does gender-based power inequality persist in political discourse, as shown through Critical Discourse Analysis?
- Given the recent events in Punjab, how can gender-specific issues be effectively addressed by separate male and female parliaments while promoting inter-gender collaboration?

4. Statement of the Problem

Despite some reforms in gender equality, women are still underrepresented in leadership positions in democracies. One of the reasons for this underrepresentation is that women's voices are being silenced in political discourse due to gendered communication styles that conform to masculine norms. With patriarchal structures still dominating our political language, the recent incident of a female student at Punjab College demands immediate gender sensitive governance reforms. Current democratic institutions are not addressing these issues; hence women are being excluded from meaningful political participation. To bridge this gap, this research will propose a restructured democratic framework that will integrate Critical Discourse Analysis and Genderlect Theory for immediate reforms

5. Significance of Study

The study at hand presents multiple significant aspects to the academic field. The research deepens existing knowledge about the relationship between language and power in democratic systems which expands current scholarly focus on women's political rights. The research integrates Genderlect Theory with Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the impact of female communication styles on political leadership positions.

The current study also proposes a gender-inclusive governance model which stands as an innovative solution to resolve the long-term problem of women's political exclusion. The study disrupts conventional democratic frameworks by promoting the establishment of segregated male and female legislative bodies which could lead to genuine representation.

Moreover, this research is also pertinent to policymakers and politicians striving to achieve gender equality in governance. It outlines a set of institutional reforms that address gender concerns and support leadership collaboration across genders. Finally, the research is valuable to activists,

organizations promoting gender equality in politics, and scholars and policymakers committed to inclusive governance. By presenting both a theoretical and practical framework for addressing barriers to women's participation, it supports the broader goal of building more equitable and inclusive democratic systems.

6. Literature Review

Several studies have earlier been carried out concerning equitable gender inclusion, their specific quota or mixed-gender participation in our legislative bodies, there still remains a gap in the exploration of structural models where gender-specific parliamentary bodies and other institutions coexist with effective and regular coordination. Furthermore, little or no focus has yet been paid on as to how gendered communication style as theorized by Genderlect Theory, impact democratic decision-making systems. Current unique and innovation model fills this gap by proposing and analyzing a dual-gender parliamentary system through the lens of CDA.

Critical Discourse Analysis has been shown as an efficient technique for demonstrating that language is able to depict and subvert existing power relationships within democratic organizations (Fairclough, 2013). Discourse, far from being neutral, contains values that represent and uphold common power relations, most notably gendered ones. Gender discursive patterns are capable of opening or closing the doors of possibility for equal access to democratic space, where open decision-making is the preferred ethos. CDA, as Wodak (2001) outlines, has the crucial function of revealing the unstated means whereby language, particularly in public and political life, perpetuates inequality. With the application of CDA, the present study exemplifies how patriarchal norms are reproduced in democratic governments and how the voice of women is undermined in male-dominated political discourses. At the same time, Tannen's (1990) Genderlect Theory explores how gender-specific communication patterns influence relationships in both cultural and political situations. Tannen says men and women follow different conversational norms, men assertive and regulated, women cooperative and indirect. These are expressions of larger societal norms and gender roles too. Male dominated norms can create conversation patterns that exclude women from their place in governing institutions in democracies on account of different forms of communication (Holmes, 2006). To explain how gendered speech styles affect political participation and governance in democracies, Genderlect is added to the CDA model.

The relationship between democracy, gender and speech has been studied extensively specifically in terms of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Genderlect Theory. Moreover, how political regimes use communication, thought and power is explained in Norman Fairclough's CDA. Fairclough (2013) also speaks on how language is crucial when it comes to rewriting and redrawing the equilibrium of power. Language becomes a symbol for social hierarchy as well as a means of ensuring gendered inequality, particularly within government, in which patriarchal practices continue to abound, according to Fairclough. The application of political discourse to exclude or marginalize specific groups, especially women, from active participation in decision-making has also been studied by scholars such as van Dijk (1993) and Wodak (2001).

However, Deborah Tannen's Genderlect Theory examines the precise distinctions between the communication styles of men and women. According to Tannen (1990), women tend to speak more collectively and relationally, whereas men tend to speak more directly and authoritatively. Here, the distinction is influenced by both personal characteristics and more general cultural standards regarding what conduct is considered masculine and feminine. When female views are often ignored and male talk is presented as the norm, such gendered communication tactics can be responsible for power discrepancies within political coalitions (Holmes, 2006). Building on Tannen's work, scholars such as Baxter (2010) have investigated how gendered styles are perceived differently in male-dominated firms, which are often disadvantageous to women who aspire to become high-ranking employees.

Gender and leadership studies also contribute significantly to this debate. Gender biases in leadership are, according to Eagly and Carli (2007), a product of deeply embedded cultural norms that associate men with leadership qualities such as decisiveness and aggressiveness. This hinders women's ability to take up leadership roles, particularly in democracies where political debate often adheres to norms traditionally seen as masculine. Power relations are embedded within language, as further exemplified by Lazar's (2005) feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA), which advocates for a more advanced comprehension of the manner in which discourse can be altered to further gender equity in political regimes.

This body of literature is further supplemented by the present research in applying Genderlect and CDA as a mixed theoretical framework in putting forth a model of governance to remedy women's structural exclusion in political leadership and include gender-oriented forms of communication into account. This framework recommends a redesign that will allow both sexes to equally contribute to and benefit from representation and leadership opportunities to strive against the patriarchal construct propping up democratic organizations.

7. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore as to how gendered discourse is constructed, communicated, and interpreted within democratic institutions in Pakistan. The research aims to examine the relationship between language and power in political contexts, with a particular focus on how gendered patterns influence participation, leadership, and representation.

7.1 Research Design

The qualitative design of the study at hand paves the way for an in-depth inquiry into both textual and experiential data. It's not about statistical generalization but mainly about interpretation of discourse and meaning in political and social domains. CDA along with thematic analysis is used to look into institutional language practices and how individuals perceive gendered communication.

Data was gathered using two main tools: semi-structured interviews and textual analysis. Textual data includes transcripts of parliamentary debates, political speeches, election campaign brochures, government policy reports and a news story about a judgment from the Lahore High Court. These texts were chosen because they represent formal political communication and legislative discourse.

In addition to textual data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with male and female undergraduate students from different Pakistani universities. Interviews aimed to gather participants' experiences and thoughts about gendered communication in political, academic and professional contexts. This mix of official documents and personal narratives makes for a good qualitative data set.

7.2 Sampling Methods

Purposive sampling was employed for selecting both the participants and the texts. Participants were selected based on their education, sex and willingness to talk about political discourse and gender. Students from different social and academic backgrounds were included to get diverse responses. For textual data, sources were selected based on relevance to themes of governance, gender equality and institutional power. These sources represent the spectrum of political discourse in Pakistan and the different platforms where gendered communication happens.

7.3 Analysis Techniques

The data collected were examined using two qualitative analysis techniques: Critical Discourse Analysis and thematic analysis. CDA was used to analyze institutional and political texts. The purpose was to identify how language constructs, maintains, or challenges gendered power relations. Attention was given to vocabulary use, grammatical structures, representations of authority, and the framing of leadership in political language. CDA helped uncover how male-dominated (patriarchal) discourse shapes policy narratives and excludes alternative voices.

Thematic analysis was applied to the interview data to capture common patterns in participants' views on gendered communication. Interview transcripts were carefully read and annotated. Meaningful data segments were identified and grouped into initial codes. These codes were then refined into broader thematic categories, which reflected recurring perceptions of leadership, communication style, exclusion, participation, and representation. The process involved continuous comparison across interviews to ensure consistency and coherence in theme development.

7.4 Purpose and Outcome

Through the combination of CDA and thematic analysis, the study explores both public and personal dimensions of gendered discourse in democratic settings. The findings serve as the basis for proposing a governance framework that incorporates both masculine and feminine voices/ perspectives in policy dialogue and decision-making. This proposed framework aims to promote equity, encourage participatory governance, and challenge the linguistic patterns that have historically limited women's political involvement.

8. Data Analysis

The conclusion-based information from these sources will guide the creation of an advisory framework which aims to enhance gender equality in democratic bodies. The approach bases its recommendations on the analysis of data.

8.1 Election Campaign Materials

Speech texts including billboards and political party manifestos from the general elections of 2018 and 2024 in Pakistan were analyzed. In the campaign advertisements, females commonly resorted to a more nurturing approach while males took a more aggressive stance. Based on Tannen's (1990) Genderlect Theory, language used highlights deeper socio-cultural aspects and relationships defined by different communication patterns of men and women. Although female candidates raised important issues like education and healthcare, they were, unfortunately, overshadowed in credibility by the existing patriarchal structures of society. In interviews conducted, students expressed that they perceived the male candidates as more adept in multifaceted situations which was indicative of entrenched social realities (Ali & Khan, 2023).

8.2 Parliamentary Debates

The transcripts from the recent meetings of Pakistan's National Assembly and Senate were thoroughly examined, with the aim of identifying the frequency of gendered language and the depiction of women's issues in political discourse. The analysis showed severe inconsistency in the use of description whereby male politicians were branded as "strong," "decisive," and "leaders" whereas females were described in supportive or interpersonal roles. For instance, during a debate at a renowned institution, male members discussed infrastructure, tough decisions and security, while

female members stressed victim support policies and gender-based policies. These patterns highlight the associative effects of governance on the socio-structurally subordinate feminine sphere.

8.3 Policy Documents

Key documents, comprising the *National Gender Policy (2002)* and the *Framework for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (2021)*, were also analyzed for their linguistic framing of gender inclusivity and gender balance. Both documents, while acknowledging the need for greater women's participation, lacked concrete measures or accountability mechanisms. Vague language and non-specific targets failed to address structural barriers, allowing systemic exclusions to persist (Government of Pakistan, 2002; Ministry of Human Rights, 2021).

8.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

Undergraduate students from various universities were interviewed to understand their experiences with gendered communication in academic and political settings. Three core themes emerged:

- a. **Perceptions of Leadership:** Leadership was commonly associated with masculinity; women in leadership were judged more harshly than their male counterparts.
- b. **Barriers to Participation:** Participants identified harassment, societal expectations, and dismissal in discussions as major deterrents to women's political engagement.
- c. **Recommendations for Inclusivity:** Many students proposed the creation of separate legislative chambers for men and women to ensure balanced representation and respectful communication environments.

9. CDA of Gendered Language in News Discourse

The Express Tribune article "No Male Staff in Female Institution, Says CJ" was analyzed from both a CDA and thematic analytical perspective with regard to a ruling of the Lahore High Court regarding the male staff in female educational institutions due to harassment concerns. In this case, four themes were theorized:

Harassment in Female Institutions: The article spotlighted repeated incidents of harassment pointing towards a systemic failure in guaranteeing women's safety;

Gender-Specific Staffing as a Safeguard: Although framed as a protection, the court ruling implied that co-educational spaces are dangerous;

Institutional Accountability: The judiciary berated ineffective response on the part of the police and educational institutions which exposed oblique power play and institutional apathy;

Media Framing: Media built up a public opinion that gender segregation is necessary for protection thus reiterating patriarchal gender norms.

These layers of discourse reflect broader societal constructions of gender, vulnerability and authority and the CDA finding that language both mirrors and shapes institutional power dynamics.

10. Proposed Governance Model

Drawing from the analysis, the study proposes a **shift in existing governance model** aimed at dismantling patriarchal structures within democratic institutions. The model comprises:

Parallel Legislative Structures: Separate chambers for male and female representatives to ensure that gender-specific concerns are directly addressed, while collaborative bodies tackle broader national issues.

Replication in Other Sectors: Establishing sex-parallel structures in sectors like education, law, sports, and professional spaces to encourage safe and inclusive environments and balanced power structures.

Language Reform in Policy: Institutional language in official documentation must include gender-sensitive terminology and clear accountability frameworks to promote representation. In addition, neutral language may be prioritized.

This model does not support or call for a complete segregation but rather puts forth a **gender-responsive structure** that provides equal communicative space, encourages mutual respect, and combats long-standing biases embedded in political and societal institutions.

11. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the selected political texts and interview data revealed consistent patterns in how gender is communicated and perceived within democratic institutions. Parliamentary debates, political speeches, and campaign materials often relied on language that reflected traditional male authority. These forms of communication emphasized control, command, and firmness i.e. the traits that are commonly associated with male leadership. Such patterns addressed the third research question, showing how unequal gender dynamics continue in the language of political discourse.

Through Critical Discourse Analysis, it became apparent that male voices and perspectives are more frequently present and more strongly framed in institutional language. When women were mentioned, it was often in limited contexts or through terms that reinforced conventional roles. Even in discussions related to gender or inclusion, the language used often lacked depth or empathy.

Interviews with undergraduate students helped bring personal perspectives into focus. Many participants expressed awareness of the differences in how male and female leaders are perceived. They noted that when women adopt assertive communication styles, these are often judged more harshly than when the same approach is employed by the men. In addition to it, when women lead through care, collaboration or empathy, such traits are not always recognized as valuable. Such feministic traits receive little or no acknowledgement. These observations can directly be linked with the second research question, which examines the influence of gendered communication styles on leadership.

The discussion gains further relevance when the Punjab College event is brought up. Although the specifics of the event are still debated, it sparked conversations highlighting how easily gender-related topics can become emotionally charged. According to the interviews, such instances often divide public opinion, whether the events are real, fabricated or merely perceived. The challenge in addressing gender issues lies in the fact that the surrounding discussions rarely foster genuine dialogue; instead, they tend to reinforce existing assumptions and beliefs, making it difficult to approach these issues with the compassion and objectivity they truly require.

The study also dived into the idea of having distinct parliamentary spaces for both genders. When this concept was shared with interview participants, the reactions were mixed. Some believed it could create a more equitable platform for both genders to voice their unique concerns. Others, however, raised doubts about whether establishing separate forums might unintentionally broaden the divide instead of fostering unity. These responses tie closely to the fourth research question, indicating that

while separate spaces might help bridge some gender-related gaps, they also bring up important questions about long-term inclusivity..

Suggestions for structural reforms came forward in both interviews and document analysis. Participants highlighted the need for more balanced representation, clearer guidelines for respectful and inclusive language, and leadership development programs that focus on gender awareness. These ideas speak to the first research question and support the need for changes in both mindset and structure.

12. Conclusion

This study looked into how gendered communication shapes leadership roles and representation within democratic systems. The results point out that political discussions still appear to incline towards male-centric styles, which can hamper the acknowledgment and involvement of female voices in our political discourse and social spheres. Both the language used by institutions and public opinion reflect these trends, highlighting the pressing need for change; not alone in policies, but also in our ways of discussing leadership and inclusion.

The combination of interviews and text analysis shows that how something is said is just as important as what is said. When communication styles associated with women are dismissed as invalid or ineffective, a whole perspective is excluded from decision making. Bridging this gap requires us to be fair in how we understand, support and practice leadership.

The proposal for separate parliamentary spaces for men and women as presented in this study is one possible solution to achieve equitable representation. While this has its own challenges, it could ensure both voices are heard, acknowledged and valued. Ultimately the study calls for these spaces to work together not in isolation so democratic practices become stronger not more fragmented.

In summary the study asks for a renewed focus on how gender and language shape public life. Leaders, policymakers and teachers all in their own domains have a role to play in building more inclusive systems; the ones where communication is open, respectful and truly representative of the people. Moving in this direction will not only improve participation but also a more thoughtful and responsive democracy.

13. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Institutional Reforms

Institutional reforms need to be executed to establish separate parliamentary committees for men and women which will address gender-specific concerns and facilitate cooperative governance.

Training and Education

The establishment of gender-sensitive communication training programs for political leaders and government officials would result in better inclusiveness of political discourse and a deeper understanding of diverse communication styles.

Policy Development

The promotion of gender-responsive policy design and enforcement needs to be advocated by policymakers to solve the distinctive problems which stop women from political involvement so that their voices can take part in decision-making.

Community Engagement

Grassroots initiatives receive support to educate the public about political gender parity which enables women to enter politics and disrupt current power dynamics.

Comprehensive Anti-Harassment Policies

Anti-harassment guidelines must be established in all organizations along with educational institutions to identify all forms of bullying and sexual harassment. Organizations and institutions need to offer ongoing training and bystander intervention programs which will create an accountable and respectful workplace environment.

Gender-Specific Staffing in Female Institutions

Staffing in Female Institutions In light of judicial guidelines that limit the presence of male staff in female-only institutions, it's crucial to focus on hiring female personnel in these settings. This not only boosts safety but also fosters empowerment and trust among female students and staff. In this way, we can be in a better position to sustain mental well-being and encourage women to play an active part in education and leadership.

Development of Soft Skills for Female Employability

The integration of gender-sensitive curricula that highlight both technical and soft skills specifically designed for female students also becomes imperative here. This evenhanded approach is expected to enhance employability by tackling the unique challenges women face in the job market, ultimately promoting greater gender empowerment and increasing their presence in traditionally male-dominated fields

Addressing Male Harassment in Policy Discourse

It is important to acknowledge and tackle harassment faced by males to ensure that policy discussions are balanced and inclusive. Legislators need to treat all harassment incidents with the same level of seriousness to promote social justice and gender equality.

Promoting Ethical Conduct and Personal Growth

Encouraging a cultural shift may probably require a strong emphasis on ethical principles, moral standards and personal development as essential tools in fighting harassment and assault. True societal change hinges not merely on implementing policies but also on individuals' dedication to integrity, honesty, responsibility, and mutual respect.

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