



Framing War through Words: A Critical Discourse Analysis of DG ISPR's Press Statements in the Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos

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Abstract

This study critically examines the use of military discourse as a tool of power and ideology by analyzing the public statements of DG ISPR, Lt. General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry, during the 2025 Pak-India conflict. The study looks at how language shapes national identity and supports state actions during war. It focuses on military press statements by DG ISPR during the 2025 Pak-India conflict. Using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis model, the research examines five official statements to see how language is used to counter enemy claims and promote nationalism. The study uses a qualitative method to understand how words influence public opinion and power. The study reveals that the DG ISPR employed emotionally charged metaphors, nationalist rhetoric, and ideological framing to delegitimize Indian aggression, assert Pakistan's sovereignty, and construct a unified public consciousness. Lexical items such as *mockery of journalism*, *dream stories*, and *we will never bow down* served not only as defense but as tools of resistance and power projection. The study helps us understand how the military, politics, and media use language during times of conflict. This shows that in modern conflicts, language is a powerful weapon.

The study offers new insight into how military communication influences public opinion and national identity during war.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, DG ISPR, Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos, Fairclough, military discourse, ideology, national identity, Pakistan-India conflict, media rhetoric, power and language

Background of the Study

In contemporary warfare, battles are no longer confined to physical terrains; they extend into the symbolic realm of language and media. Discourse has become a powerful weapon in the arsenal of modern states, used to construct, legitimize, and propagate strategic narratives (Chouliaraki, 2005). In Pakistan, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the armed forces plays a central role in crafting public messaging during military operations. Its spokesperson, the Director General (DG ISPR), delivers official statements, shaping the national narrative and influencing public perception (Ahmad, 2018).

One such instance is Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad, particularly its component Bunyan-un-Marsoos, initiated in response to a surge in terrorism following the 2017 Army Public School attack. The operation was not only militaristic but communicative, with DG ISPR issuing regular press briefings that framed the conflict using specific discursive strategies. These press statements were critical in portraying the military as protectors of the nation, terrorists as enemies of humanity, and the operation as a necessary step toward national security and peace (Ali, 2020).

Language in such contexts is never neutral; it reflects, sustains, and reinforces power structures and ideological positions (Fairclough, 1995). The use of metaphors, lexical choices, and intertextual references in the DG ISPR's speeches serves to produce particular meanings that influence public opinion and legitimize military action. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly through Fairclough's (1992, 1995) three-dimensional framework—textual analysis, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice offers an effective tool to deconstruct these narratives and uncover the underlying ideologies.

Although there is considerable research on media discourse during war (Van Dijk, 2008; Richardson, 2007), specific academic studies analyzing Pakistan's military discourse remain scarce. Most literature focuses either on journalistic framing or broader strategic communication, leaving a gap in the critical examination of how official war narratives are linguistically and ideologically constructed in Pakistan's unique civil-military context (Zubair & Rafique, 2021).

This study seeks to fill that gap by critically analyzing the DG ISPR's press statements during Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos. It aims to explore how war is framed through discourse, how ideologies are embedded in official narratives, and how language is used to construct legitimacy, unity, and national purpose during military operations.

Fairclough (along with colleagues) also advocates for Critical Language Awareness, arguing that language education and analysis must be informed by an understanding of how language functions ideologically in society (McInnes & James, 2006). This perspective is especially relevant for this study as it explores how the military, a dominant institution, uses discourse to sustain public trust, justify military action, and marginalize the enemy.

While alternative CDA approaches exist such as Van Dijk's cognitive model, which focuses on mental models and ideology reproduction (McInnes, 2006), and Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach, which emphasizes the socio-historical context of political discourse—Fairclough's model is best suited for this study due to its emphasis on institutional discourse, media communication, and ideological critique.

Therefore, this theoretical lens allows for a comprehensive exploration of how power and ideology operate through language in military discourse, specifically within the context of DG ISPR's framing of Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos.

Literature Review

The language of war, particularly when deployed by state institutions, serves to construct and maintain dominant narratives around national security, patriotism, and legitimacy of force

(Chouliaraki, 2005; Van Dijk, 2008). In conflict situations, state actors often engage in discursive framing to justify military actions and to garner public support. In Pakistan, this task is prominently undertaken by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), with the Director General (DG ISPR) acting as the principal voice of the military in public forums.

During Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos, launched in May 2025, DG ISPR's press statements employed a discourse of strategic legitimacy, emphasizing restraint, professionalism, and moral high ground. According to DG ISPR Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry (2025), "Pakistan never requested a ceasefire", a framing that constructs Pakistan as firm yet non-aggressive, reinforcing an image of a peace-seeking nation under threat (The Express Tribune, 2025). Such statements align with what Fairclough (1995) identifies as the use of discourse to reinforce institutional ideologies and power relations.

The linguistic framing of victory was also notable. In another press release, DG ISPR stated that the Pakistan Army had "concluded Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos successfully", with key military targets "neutralized with precision" (News Desk, 2025). This kind of language serves to normalize the use of force and positions the military as protectors of sovereignty, echoing what Richardson (2007) refers to as the ideological function of official discourse in constructing moral legitimacy during war.

Moreover, media coverage emphasized the heroism and sacrifice of Pakistan's soldiers while depicting the enemy as aggressors. This is consistent with Van Dijk's (2008) assertion that elite discourse often reproduces polarized mental models "us" as victims or heroes, "them" as threats to peace. For instance, ARY News (2025) reported the DG ISPR's statement that India was the one to seek ceasefire, suggesting a rhetorical inversion where military dominance is cast as diplomatic superiority.

Scholars like Zubair and Rafique (2021) argue that the ISPR has increasingly utilized media to craft war narratives that resonate with nationalist ideologies, reinforcing the unity and resilience of the Pakistani state. These narratives, visible in 2025's press briefings, are not only

disseminated through traditional press conferences but amplified via platforms like YouTube and digital media channels, broadening their ideological reach.

Fairclough's (1992, 1995) three-dimensional CDA model including textual features, discursive practice, and socio-cultural context offers a critical lens for understanding such discourse. At the textual level, DG ISPR's choice of active verbs ("neutralized," "achieved," "restored") and declarative tone reflects institutional authority. At the level of discursive practice, statements are strategically timed and distributed across multiple platforms for maximum public engagement. Finally, the socio-cultural dimension reveals how such briefings participate in the broader national project of constructing military credibility and patriotic unity.

While some studies (Ahmad, 2018; Ali, 2020) have examined ISPR's role in previous military operations (e.g., Zarb-e-Azb, Radd-ul-Fasaad), there remains limited academic engagement with post-2020 ISPR discourse, especially in the context of heightened Indo-Pak tensions and digital warfare. The 2025 briefings during Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos thus represent a contemporary extension of militarized national discourses.

Discourse has long been studied by linguists and theorists as a powerful tool that shapes society, identity, and meaning (Foucault, 1972; Fraser, 1989). Fairclough (1993) defines discourse not only as written or spoken language but also as a semiotic system including photography, gestures, and symbols. This perspective views language as a form of social action that both reflects and constructs societal values (Fairclough, 1993). According to Austin (1962) and Levinson (1983), language does more than communicate—it constructs social roles, expresses identity, and reinforces historical and cultural meanings. Halliday (1978) adds that language serves three major functions: ideational (expressing experience), interpersonal (shaping relationships), and textual (organizing communication). In different settings such as courtrooms, classrooms, or hospitals, language changes form and function, leading to what Fairclough (1992b) calls "specialized registers." These shifts show how discourse is shaped by social norms and professional identities.

Multimodal discourse analysis broadens this view by incorporating non-verbal and symbolic communication, such as gestures, images, and music, which also carry meaning (Blommaert,

2005). For example, American Sign Language (ASL) relies entirely on visual signs rather than speech to convey ideas. Discourse analysts study both the structure and use of language across different cultures and historical moments (Hopper & Traugott, 2004). They also explore how new languages are acquired, especially how first languages are learned unconsciously while second languages require more focus (Ferguson, 1997). As Johnstone and Andrus (2024) argue, discourse analysis differs from traditional language analysis by focusing on how people use language in real life to express ideas and achieve goals. Critical Discourse Analysis, in particular, emphasizes how language connects to power and ideology, revealing that meaning is never neutral but always tied to broader social structures (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Fairclough, 2002).

Purpose of the Study

In today's world, the way people talk about war and national security has a big impact on how others see it. The language used by the DG ISPR (Director General of Inter-Services Public Relations) is more than just sharing news, it is a powerful tool used to show strength, shape ideas, and build national identity. Words and phrases in military press briefings are carefully chosen to show Pakistan's actions as right and necessary while making the other side look wrong or aggressive (Fairclough, 1995). This study looks at how the DG ISPR used such language during *Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos*, a military response by Pakistan. Using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this research shows how language is used to gain public support, show power, and draw a clear line between "us" and "them." It also helps explain how official statements can create unity and influence how people understand conflict. Overall, this research gives insight into how language works in war situations, especially in Pakistan and other postcolonial countries.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which provides a socio-cultural approach to understanding discourse. Fairclough's CDA framework is particularly suited for analyzing institutional discourse such as media briefings because it integrates language with ideology and power relations (Fairclough,

1995). His model examines not just the text itself but also the processes of its production and its broader social context.

According to Fairclough (1995a), CDA consists of three interrelated dimensions:

1. Textual Analysis (Description)

This dimension focuses on the linguistic features of the text such as vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and text structure. In this study, it will involve examining the lexical choices, metaphors, passive structures, and repetition used in DG ISPR's press briefings.

2. Discursive Practice (Interpretation)

This refers to the processes involved in the production, distribution, and consumption of texts. It explores how the DG ISPR's statements are constructed, who constructs them, for what purposes, and how they are circulated and received by audiences (Fairclough, 1995a).

3. Socio-Cultural Practice (Explanation)

This final dimension involves the broader social, political, and cultural contexts in which the discourse is embedded. Here, the study will examine how the military's discourse reflects and reproduces dominant ideologies, national narratives, and socio-political power structures in Pakistan during times of war (Fairclough, 1992).

Methodology

This research paper is qualitative in nature and analyzes how power is maintained and exercised through language, using the lens of Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model. The study pays particular attention to the socio-cultural practice dimension of CDA, which explores how language operates socially to construct meaning, identity, and ideology. Words, phrases, and sentence structures are examined to highlight how discourse becomes a tool for asserting institutional power, especially in times of national crisis. The analysis aims to uncover the social realities and inequalities embedded within the discourse, emphasizing how linguistic strategies influence public opinion and shape national narratives.

The data for this study have been collected in the form of written text from *The Express Tribune E-paper*, one of Pakistan’s leading English-language electronic newspapers. Internationally affiliated with *The New York Times*, *The Express Tribune* maintains editorial offices in Karachi (its headquarters), as well as regional branches in Peshawar, Lahore, and Islamabad. The selected material consists of official statements made by DG ISPR, Lt. Gen. Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry, in May 2025 during the Pak-India conflict and in response to India’s military initiative titled Operation Sindoor. Following this attack, which caused widespread destruction across multiple regions of Pakistan, the Pakistan Army launched Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos’ a term derived from the Holy Qur'an:

“ ﻭﺍﻟﻮﺍﻟﻤﺎﻧﻴﻦ ﻭﺍﻟﻮﺍﻟﻤﺎﺳﻮﻭﺱ ﻭﺍﻟﻮﺍﻟﻤﺎﺳﻮﻭﺱ ﻭﺍﻟﻮﺍﻟﻤﺎﺳﻮﻭﺱ ﻭﺍﻟﻮﺍﻟﻤﺎﺳﻮﻭﺱ ﻭﺍﻟﻮﺍﻟﻤﺎﺳﻮﻭﺱ
ﻭﺍﻟﻮﺍﻟﻤﺎﺳﻮﻭﺱ ﻭﺍﻟﻮﺍﻟﻤﺎﺳﻮﻭﺱ ﻭﺍﻟﻮﺍﻟﻤﺎﺳﻮﻭﺱ ﻭﺍﻟﻮﺍﻟﻤﺎﺳﻮﻭﺱ ﻭﺍﻟﻮﺍﻟﻤﺎﺳﻮﻭﺱ ”

(*Surah As-Saff, Ayah 4*)

Indeed, Allah loves those who fight in His cause in rows, as though they are a solid, cemented structure.

The term *Bunyan-un-Marsoos* translates to "unbreakable wall" or "solid-cemented structure," symbolizing unity, strength, and divine endorsement. This study focuses on five public statements delivered by the DG ISPR in this context, each selected for its discursive construction of power, resistance, and national identity during a time of heightened military tension.

Analysis and Discussion

The discourse employed by DG ISPR, Lt. Gen. Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry, during the 2025 Pak-India conflict exemplifies how language functions as a tool of power, resistance, and ideological reinforcement. Using Fairclough’s (1995) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the first layer textual analysis reveals deliberate lexical choices and rhetorical devices that assert authority and delegitimize opposing narratives. For instance, the statement,

1. *What a shame? What a mockery of a journalism? Please stop living in Bollywood, Grow up! Indian media reports of a Pakistan attack are completely fabricated.* (DG ISPR, 2025), conveys

indignation and ridicule, using emotionally charged language to discredit the Indian media's credibility (ARY News, 2025). The phrase *stop living in Bollywood* metaphorically criticizes the dramatization and fabrication of war-related news, blurring the line between entertainment and factual reporting. These lexical features reflect what Fairclough (1992) terms the ideological work of language, wherein discourse is structured to reproduce power relations and social control. This rhetoric contributes to constructing Pakistan's moral high ground and portraying India as an instigator engaged in disinformation. As Van Dijk (2008) notes, elite discourse often includes polarization *us* as rational and truthful, *them* as deceitful and aggressive which is clearly reflected in these statements. Hence, the DG ISPR's language is not merely reactive but part of a broader institutional strategy aimed at shaping national identity and international legitimacy through discursive means.

The above statement is one of the statements made by DG ISPR on the occasion of Pak-India conflict. Discourse shapes our identity and ideologies and society plays a major role when it comes to identity and ideology. As we can see, the above statement reflects the propaganda of Indian media because Indian media over hyped the news during Pak-India conflict.

This discourse also shows how media spread fake news to reflect dominant ideological positions. Media portrayed Pakistan as their enemy because they want to justify their aggression. Indian made false claims like, citizens of Pakistan left Pakistan. We can see certain lexical choices that clearly define criticism of Indian media like *What a shame?*, *what a mockery of a journalism?*. The statement expresses disappointment and the speaker used a word *mockery* to ridicule them. Indian media lacks truthfulness and integrity. The phrase *stop living in Bollywood* shows that speaker is upset and annoyed and at the same time the phrase reflects the unrealistic way of thinking of Indian media because Bollywood refers to fantasy and it is a source of blurring entertainment and journalism.

It shows that the content of Indian media lacks facts and it was unsupported because it leads to promoting warfare. While on the other hand, Pakistani media was fact based and it did not make any kind of propaganda like an Indian media. The phrase *completely fabricated* refers to exaggeration of the content and the absence of authoritative briefings. The phrase shows the complexity of interplay of verified events and misinformation on both sides.

Through the lens of Fairclough's third dimension, this statement evaluates how nationalistic ideology shapes media narratives. It reflects struggle over truth and journalistic integrity. The tone of speaker is authoritative and commanding. His choices of words show emotiveness and harshness because he is disappointed with Indian media.

2. *Indian media is creating "dream stories" that amuse us.* (DG ISPR ,2025)

The word *dream stories* used by DG, ISPR because it highlights and reflects dominant cultural norms and embedded ideologies. As we know on the recent occasion of Pak-India conflict, Indian media played a key role to spread fake news. Indian media's propaganda was based on fake news and lies because their main agenda was to spread fake news and they wanted to portray Pakistan as an oppressor. The word *dream stories* emphasizes irony and the act of a mockery. The word *dream stories*, also used as metaphorically because it upbrings the idea of fantasy not facts: provokes element of a fabrication. The tone of a speaker is wit and sarcastic because it routes towards criticism and disbelief. And the statement has a powerful effect on the audience. Through the lens of CDA the above statement was a clapback to the Indian media as it was relevant to their fake not-so-needed aggressive propaganda.

3. *When Pakistan chooses to respond, it won't go unnoticed the world will see it, hear it and the echo will be heard loud.* (DG ISPR, 2025)

The above statement is also made by DG ISPR on the occasion of Pak-India conflict. The above statement is loaded with ideological contextual words. The statement reflects Pakistan as a responsible yet resolute state, Pakistan is capable to respond. Pakistan chooses to stay quite when the conflict was on its peak. The conflict among Pak-India reflects a discourse of hegemonic power, strength and deterrence intended to influence both domestic and international audience. The statement made by DG ISPR, the phrase *echo will be heard loud and clear*, portrays Pakistan as a main lead whose action will have significant geopolitical consequences and it will have powerful impact on globe if India opt for a war there will be a huge destruction because war is not a good option and always leads to destruction. The statement also highlights a clear warning to India because Pakistan itself is

a nuclear power. We can see how language can be used as a powerful tool and the statement is a clapback to India.

The phrase *echo will be heard loud and clear* also used as a metaphor to emphasize the anticipated act of Pakistan's response on the international level. The statement also validates; action will resonate beyond immediate military retaliation to affect diplomatic and political dynamics globally. The statement tries to challenge hegemonic narratives that showcase Pakistan as weak or reactive.

By using the lens of CDA, this discourse is not just a declaration of intent but a strategic discourse that reflects and reshapes power structures, ideologies and international perceptions surrounding the India-Pak conflict.

4. *We will never bow down to Indian hegemony. (DG ISPR, May,2025)*

The above statement declares resistance against Indian hegemony, power and struggle that is embedded in regional, political and cultural context. The phrase used by DG ISPR, *We will never bow down* portrays determination towards his country as he serves Pakistan Armed Forces. He used the statement to make things clear that Pakistan will never bow down to Indian hegemony because Pakistan itself known as a nuclear power. The contextual level of this statement shows a warning and a threat by DG ISPR. His tone has assertiveness and we can see the speaker's selection of words address and resolves uncompromising strength. The language builds a collective social identity because it refuses submission and it reinforces nationalist ideologies among speaker's community. We can see by highlighting *Indian hegemony* as a threat to regional peace and the world. The speaker is concerned for peace all around the world as he wants global stability.

5. *The truth is that India is not the US and Pakistan is not Afghanistan. India is not Israel and Pakistan is not Palestine. Pakistan will never be deterred. It can never be coerced. (DG ISPR, May,2025)*

The above statement was made by DG ISPR, Ahmed Chaudhry after the operation "Bunyan-un-Marsoos" launched by Pakistan. Pakistan defended itself that is why the operation Bunyan-

un-Marsoos was launched. The statement highlights comparison of Pakistan and India with two different countries. India highlighted Pakistan as a weak state, but the reality is different. DG ISPR states *Pakistan is not Afghanistan* and *Pakistan is not Palestine*. It shows assertiveness because speaker is committing to future battle plan. He makes comparison to make things clear that Pakistan is a nuclear power, it has its Armed forces. He wants to emphasize contrast so the argument could be powerful and unforgettable. The phrase *Pakistan will never be deterred. It can never be coerced*, highlights foregrounding because this phrase is used to threaten and warn enemy. The statement also shows tension between two regions India and Pakistan. Speaker is rejecting every possible kind of dominance from the other country. The intended meaning of a speaker is to convey the message that do not provoke us it will lead you towards the destruction and it will definitely have negative consequences. He makes comparisons of countries to make his statement more powerful and validate. He warned them to clear things for the safety of Pakistan's sovereignty.

Findings

The analysis reveals that the DG ISPR's discourse during the 2025 Pak-India conflict strategically constructs a narrative of national strength, resistance, and ideological superiority. Through emotionally charged phrases like *What a shame?* and metaphors such as *stop living in Bollywood*, the language delegitimizes Indian media narratives and reinforces Pakistan's moral authority. The term *dream stories* sarcastically critiques media fabrication, reflecting an institutional effort to expose misinformation and reassert truth. Statements like *When Pakistan chooses to respond* function as indirect warnings, highlighting military capability and portraying Pakistan as both restrained and powerful. The repeated use of metaphors such as *echo will be heard loud* enhances the dramatic and symbolic impact of Pakistan's geopolitical stance. The phrase *We will never bow down to Indian hegemony* reflects a nationalist resolve and rejection of subordination, strengthening collective identity and sovereignty. Comparisons like *India is not the US and Pakistan is not Afghanistan* serve to reframe international assumptions and affirm Pakistan's autonomy and nuclear status. These linguistic strategies demonstrate how national identity, power, and legitimacy are discursively constructed and defended in wartime communication. Fairclough's model helped uncover how text, discursive

practice, and socio-cultural context interact to create meaning and assert dominance. Overall, the DG ISPR's discourse functions as a powerful mechanism of resistance and image-building in the face of external aggression.

Conclusion

The study shows that the discourse of military plays a major role in shaping the opinions of public and national narratives. The above study critically evaluates by using the lens for Norman Fairclough's three dimensional-model. Basically, it revolves around the recent statements used by DG ISPR, LT General Ahmed Chaudhry in answer to the Pak-India conflict, highlighting how national identity, power and ideology are constructed and portrayed. The analysis is based on a qualitative study of the public address delivered by DG ISPR, considering relation of Pakistan's socio-political landscape. It revolves around what contributions have been made by Pakistan Army since 1947 and how it still stands strong for its nation.

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