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FROM CONDITIONAL RESTRAINT TO DECLARATIVE TRIUMPH: MODALITY, TRANSITIVITY AND NAMING IN PAKISTANI AND INDIAN STATE DISCOURSE ACROSS THE 2025 CONFLICT

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Abstract

The study explores the reconfiguration of textual aspects of Pakistani and Indian official rhetoric between the pre-war and post-war periods of the 2025 India-Pakistan conflict and how these reconfigurations reflect transformations in ideological orientation and national identity. A corpus of 76 authenticated statements by state actors was analyzed using the textual dimension of Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional model and Hallidayan accounts of modality and transitivity (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014): 47 Pakistani statements (12 pre-war, 35 post-war) and 29 Indian statements (16 pre-war, 13 post-war), with the pre-war phase defined as 22 April to 6 May 2025 and the post-war phase as beginning on 7 May 2025. A descriptive frequency analysis on the level of the statement confirmed the qualitative coding of modality, transitivity, naming techniques and lexical evaluation. It is found that the Pakistani pre-war discourse is structured around negated and conditional modality and an evidentiary register, whereas the post-war discourse is structured around agentive, declarative achievement claims and memorial nominalization. Whereas Indian pre-war discourse was organized around ritual condemnation, punitive pursuit lexis and administrative directives, post-war discourse was organized around doctrinal naming ("new normal", "Lakshman Rekha") and religious-cultural and technological-nationalist legitimation. We find a temporal asymmetry in negated modality, with negation being a restraint signal in Pakistani pre-war discourse and a deterrence doctrine in Indian post-war discourse. It is suggested that in both states national identity moved from a defensive, legally based self-image to an assertive, historically consequential one.

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INTRODUCTION

Interstate conflict is not only fought with military and diplomatic instruments but also with a sustained struggle over meaning in which competing actors try to define events, allocate responsibility and prescribe the terms on which their own conduct and that of the adversary are to be evaluated (Chilton, 2004; Fairclough, 2003). In this regard, political utterances by state actors are not neutral representations of unfolding circumstances, but rather, are argued to be semiotic interventions through which legitimacy is claimed, agency is distributed and collective identities are consolidated (Van Dijk, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2015). The India-Pakistan dyad, in which the unresolved Kashmir dispute, recurring military crises and mutually incompatible national narratives have formed the relationship, provides a particularly useful framework for understanding such dynamics (Bose, 2003; Raghavan, 2010).

The crisis of 2025 gives a compacted and analytically useful example of this battle. On 22 April 2025, the attack on tourists at Pahalgam in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir killed twenty-six civilians. Therefore, India launched Operation Sindoor on 7 May 2025, and Pakistan executed Operation Bunyan-um-Marsoos before a ceasefire was announced on 10 May 2025 (Mukhopadhyay & Nadathur, 2025). Thus, in less than three weeks both states had progressed from a phase of accusation, denial and warning to one of open hostilities and retrospective claims of success. A rapid transition is said to create conditions under which changes in political language can be observed with unusual clarity, considering that the same institutional actors were obligated to address markedly different communicative exigencies within a short span of time (Dunmire, 2005; Hodges, 2011).

While there has been much scholarly attention to the political and media discourse on India-Pakistan relations, it is essential to point out that most studies have looked at a single national discourse or a single moment of crisis, rather than tracing how the lexico-grammatical texture of state discourse changes as a conflict moves from one phase to the next (Thussu, 2007; Sabir & Naeem, 2025). Moreover, when they have been forthcoming, comparative studies of the 2025 crisis have tended to treat the crisis as a synchronic whole, such that the question of how modality, transitivity and naming were reconfigured between pre-war and post-war phases has remained largely unaddressed (Jalbani, 2025; Sabir & Naeem, 2025). Consequently, the micro-linguistic mechanisms via which discursive shifts are enacted in this dyad are under-documented. This study fills this gap by phase-sensitive cross-national analysis of textual aspects of Pakistani and Indian state speech throughout the 2025 conflict in the textual dimension of Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional model. Two research questions are examined. What are the textual elements of the state discourse in Pakistan and India throughout the pre-war and post-war phases of the 2025 conflict? Second, how do discursive transformations between pre-war and post-war stages represent shifts in ideological orientation and national identity? The claim, brief, is that the grammar of posture and agency was systematically reorganized in the two corpora in response to the commencement of hostilities, and that these restructurings were patterned in partially symmetrical and partially state-specific ways (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Van Leeuwen, 2008).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language, Grammar and Ideology in Political Discourse

The theoretical basis of the present study is the view of language as a social semiotic . Every linguistic choice construes experience, enacts social relations and organizes the message at the same time (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). From this perspective grammar is not a neutral container of pre-existing meanings. Rather it is suggested that grammar is a resource through which specific interpretations of

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reality are made apparent and others are backgrounded. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) builds upon this functional premise by examining how such decisions are entangled in the reproduction and contestation of power and ideology (Fairclough, 1992, 2013).

In CDA, discourse is seen as a social activity which is not only socially constituted but also socially constitutive so that texts are seen as the locations where ideological viewpoints are realized in concrete lexico-grammatical form (Fairclough, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Likewise, Fowler (1991) showed that news language incorporates ideology through patterns of lexical choice and syntactic modification. Van Dijk (1998) argued that group ideologies are presented through a polarized strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. It is thus proposed that an examination of political language that solely pays attention to explicit statements is likely to miss the ideological work achieved through grammatical structure (Machin & Mayr, 2023). Fairclough's (2013) approach is here particularly relevant in its textual dimension, since it needs a rigorous description of vocabulary, grammar, coherence and text structure as the empirical basis for interpretive assertions about discursive and social practice. In this respect Stubbs (1996) advises that assertions concerning ideology should be supported by identifiable linguistic patterns rather than the political intuitions of the analyst and this has guided the design of the present study. Similarly, Baker et colleagues (2008) maintain that an emphasis on the recurrence of forms throughout a corpus of texts may improve the dependability of CDA without replacing its interpretive orientation.

2.2 Modality, Transitivity and Naming as Resources of Stance and Agency

Modality refers to the grammatical ways by which speakers express degrees of certainty, obligation and commitment, and is thus a significant way in which authority and responsibility are negotiated in political speech (Palmer, 2001; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). High-value epistemic and deontic modality tends to project institutional authority. Conversely, conditional, hypothetical and hedged forms may be employed to defer commitment or to transfer responsibility for future consequences onto another party (Fairclough, 2003). Also, Chilton (2004) notes that pre-conflict political discourse commonly employs future-oriented and conditional modal forms in framing threats and in presenting military action as a conditional necessity rather than an option.

In turn, transitivity deals with the portrayal of processes, participants and situations and is said to demonstrate how agency is dispersed among social actors in a text (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Thompson, 2014). It is recognized that the distribution of the Actor in material processes, the employment of passive constructions which delete or background agents, and the transformation of processes into nominalized entities are ways in which responsibility may be foregrounded or backgrounded (Fowler, 1991; Goatly, 2007). Hence, in conflict discourse the adversary is often constructed as the Actor of transgressive processes, whereas the in-group is constructed as the Actor of controlled, reactive or protective processes (Van Leeuwen, 2008).

Naming techniques, or nomination, concern the linguistic creation of social actors, objects, events and acts, and are strongly related to predication, that is the attribution of traits to what has been named (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). The categorization and functionalization of social actors can have ideological implications, as Van Leeuwen (2008) shows, because it is decided which players are made public and on what terms. Moreover, evaluative lexis and metaphor are recognized as important tools for legitimizing or delegitimizing behavior, especially when dealing with a war where moral polarization is exacerbated (Charteris-Black, 2004; Lakoff, 1991).

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2.3 Pre-war and Post-war Discourse: The Diachronic Perspective

An increasing amount of CDA research has argued for the diachronic analysis of political discourse, as the communicative intentions of state actors vary as a conflict progresses (Fairclough, 2003; Wodak, 2009). For example, Dunmire (2005) showed how the Bush administration's discourse before the invasion of Iraq drew on anticipatory narratives that made future military action inevitable. Baker et al. (2008) found that the discursive construction of contested groups changes measurably over time in response to shifting political events. The pre-war phase is often characterized by threat construction, conditional warnings and mobilization, whereas the post-war phase is typically characterized by justification, remembrance and the consolidation of a desired narrative of outcome (Hodges, 2011; Jackson, 2005).

Hodges (2011) argues for the need of repetition for the coherence of war narratives across institutional forums, but at the same time war narratives are dynamic and responsive to change circumstances and thus require analytical techniques that can trace change across phases. Similarly, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) view discourse as historically situated and always rearticulated in response to changing relations of power. It is thus proposed that a phase-sensitive design is not just a technical improvement but also a theoretical prerequisite for understanding how the work of conflict discourse is made (Wodak, 2009).

2.4 India-Pakistan Conflict Discourse and the Research Gap

Studies of India-Pakistan conflict discourse have documented the persistence of mutually exclusive narratives from Partition onward, with competing constructions of victimhood, legitimacy and nationhood reproduced across political speeches, curricula and media texts (Talbot & Singh, 2009; Raghavan, 2010). In relation to Kashmir, Indian discourse has often framed the territory as an integral part of the Union, while Pakistani discourse has generally framed it as the unfinished business of Partition (Bose, 2003). Likewise, studies of Indian and Pakistani media have noted that nationalist framing rises during crises, and that official views are prioritized over alternative viewpoints (Thussu, 2007; Ninan, 2007). Regarding the 2025 crisis specifically, Sabir and Naeem (2025) applied Fairclough's model to political and military rhetoric on both sides and reported the normalization of militarized language, binary framing and the near absence of references to negotiated peace, while Jalbani (2025) looked at the construction of martyrdom, memory and identity around Operation Bunyan-um-Marsoos in Pakistani strategic culture. Further, Mukhopadhyay and Nadathur (2025) found that aggressor-victim framing, hyphenation and decontextualized violence were dominating frames in worldwide media coverage of Operation Sindoor.

Nevertheless, note that these studies have treated the 2025 crisis as one discursive moment and have not systematically compared the pre-war and post-war phases within each national discourse while comparing the two national discourses with each other (Jalbani, 2025; Sabir & Naeem, 2025). In addition, although nationalism and legitimacy themes are often discussed in the regional literature, the particular grammatical mechanisms through which such themes are realized, namely modality, transitivity and nomination, have received relatively little systematic attention (Van Dijk, 2006; Van Leeuwen, 2008). This study aims to address these two deficiencies by combining a within-country diachronic comparison with a cross-country synchronic comparison at the level of textual features.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study aims to understand how language is used to generate political meanings, and is not to measure the prevalence of beliefs or attitudes. Thus, the research methodology is qualitative and

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interpretive (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The design used CDA as the main analytical method and the textual dimension of the three-dimensional model of Fairclough (2013) was used as an organizing framework. The design was a comparative approach on two levels: a within-country comparison of pre-war and post-war statements, and a cross-country comparison of Pakistani and Indian remarks in each phase (Wodak, 2015).

3.2 Data and Corpus Construction

The data include remarks made by Pakistani and Indian state players in reference to the 2025 conflict. The state actors include heads of government, ministers, foreign-office spokespersons, military spokespersons and official institutional entities (Fairclough, 2003). The statements were gathered from nationally recognized sources that consistently reported the conflict and from where the speaker, wording and date could be traced. These were Dawn, The News International, The Nation, The Express Tribune, Radio Pakistan and the Associated Press of Pakistan for the Pakistani sub-corpus and The Hindu, The Times of India, India Today, NDTV, The Indian Express, the Ministry of External Affairs and the Press Information Bureau for the Indian sub-corpus. The emphasis is placed on the fact that these sources were considered as documentary channels via which state statements were accessible and confirmed rather than the focus of study such that editorial framing was not itself analyzed (Fowler, 1991).

Statements were included if they met four criteria: Relevance to the 2025 dispute; Attribution to an identifiable state actor or to an authorized institutional representation; Traceability to a published source; and Temporal eligibility within one of the two phases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Statements that appeared in more than one report were counted once and statements with unknown attribution or date were excluded. The resulting corpus has a total of 76 assertions, dispersed as indicated in Table 1. The full corpus with speaker, outlet and date for each item is available as supplementary material.

Table 1. Composition of the corpus by country and phase

Sub-corpus	Pre-war (22 April to 6 May 2025)	Post-war (from 7 May 2025)	Total
Pakistan	12	35	47
India	16	13	29
Total	28	48	76

The unequal distribution across countries and phases is treated as a property of the verified data rather than as a methodological defect, since equalisation would have required either the exclusion of eligible statements or the inclusion of statements that did not meet the selection criteria (Baker et al., 2008). Consequently, the analysis privileges qualitative patterning and contextual interpretation, and frequency data are reported as proportions of each phase sub-corpus in order to permit comparison across unequal sub-corpora.

3.3 Temporal Delimitation

The pre-war phase was delimited as 22 April to 6 May 2025, starting from the Pahalgam attack and ending on the day before the onset of Operation Sindoor, while the post-war phase was delimited as commencing on 7 May 2025 and as including both the period of open hostilities and the subsequent period of claims, commemoration and doctrinal statement (Mukhopadhyay & Nadathur, 2025). The term 'post-war' is used to refer to the hostilities themselves and the period after them; this is because the analytical emphasis is in the change in discourse once the conflict was overt

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rather than in the precise military chronology (Hodges, 2011). The same time limits were applied to both national sub-corpora to ensure chronological comparability.

3.4 Analytical Categories and Procedure

(see Table 2) Four textual categories were operationalized on the basis of systemic functional and critical discourse studies (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001) Each statement was coded for all four categories and the decisions made in the coding process were recorded along with the textual evidence that inspired them.

Table 2. Operationalisation of textual categories

Category	Operational focus	Principal sources
Modality	Epistemic certainty, deontic obligation, negated and conditional futures	Palmer (2001); Halliday and Matthiessen (2014)
Transitivity	Allocation of Actor and Goal roles, process types, passivisation and nominalisation	Halliday and Matthiessen (2014); Goatly (2007)
Naming strategies	Nomination of actors, events and actions; formulaic labels and operation names	Reisigl and Wodak (2001); Van Leeuwen (2008)
Lexical evaluation	Evaluative adjectives, intensifiers, metaphor and triadic listing	Charteris-Black (2004); Martin and White (2005)

The analysis was done in four stages. Firstly, each of the four sub-corpora was attentively read and classified for the categories in Table 2. Second, a descriptive frequency analysis was performed, where the number of statements containing each of a series of recurrent lexical items or formulae were counted and presented as a percentage of the relevant phase sub-corpus; this method is robust to variations in statement length and sub-corpus size (Biber et al., 1998). Third, within each country, the coded qualities were compared between phases to see if there were any shifts in the discourse, without a priori expectations about the direction of change. Fourth, the patterns found in each country were compared to each other to find points of convergence and divergence (Fairclough, 2013).

3.5 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed through Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Credibility was enhanced by the use of attributed and dated assertions and by grounding all interpretive claims in quoted textual evidence. Dependability was enhanced by applying the same categories and techniques to all four sub-corpora. The description of textual features was dissociated from their interpretation, and transferability was supported by a detailed account of the corpus, the period and the procedure, so that readers may judge the relevance of the findings to comparable contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and confirmability was sought through doing so. It is recognized that the frequency data are descriptive and not inferential and that some of the items reported enter the corpus in the form of reported speech, a limitation to which we return in Section 6.

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4. Findings

4.1 Pakistani Pre-war Discourse: Negated Modality and Evidentiary Framing

Pakistan's pre-war utterances were characterized by negated and conditional modality, an evidentiary register and hypothetical naming methods that collectively framed Pakistan as a constrained yet warning actor (Palmer, 2001; Fairclough, 2003). A prime example is the Defense Minister's statement that "Pakistan will not initiate any escalation but warned of a strong response if provoked" (Khawaja Muhammad Asif, 29 April 2025), where the negated modality in a categorical statement ("will not initiate") is coupled with a conditional clause ("if provoked"). This structure is said to effect a twofold move: the negation denies Pakistani initiative; and the conditional shifts responsibility for any future escalation to India, which is therefore portrayed as the sole party able to initiate conflict.

Yet negation was not just a means of expressing limitation. The same grammatical resource is used in "Pakistan won't sit idle in face of Indian aggression" (Dawn, 24 April 2025) to deliver a warning, such that negation serves at once to deny aggression and to guarantee a response (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Similarly, the Director General of Inter-Services Public Relations said that "any attempt to stop or divert the flow of water will be considered as an act of war and responded with full force across the complete spectrum of national power" (Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry, 29 April 2025). Here, a hypothetical action is nominalized and categorized as a "act of war", a label that upgrades a prospective policy measure into a legally and morally charged category, while the passive "will be considered", "responded" delete the Pakistani agent and present the response as an automatic consequence rather than a decision (Goatly, 2007).

Also seen was the evidential register where Pakistani speakers challenged the absence of evidence supporting Indian claims. "Seven days have passed since the attack in Pahalgam but not a single piece of evidence has been provided in support of the baseless allegations hurled against Pakistan" (Attaullah Tarar, 30 April 2025), while the Foreign Minister was quoted as saying he was considering a response "after India points the finger without proof" (Ishaq Dar, 30 April 2025). The temporal framing ("seven days") is recommended to foster the patience of Pakistan. The hyperbolic denial ("not a single shred") and the evaluative naming ("baseless allegations") are advised to delegitimize the Indian case at the level of epistemic warrant (Van Dijk, 1998). India was always portrayed as the Actor of poorly assessed processes in terms of transitivity. In the statement that "India's reckless conduct brought two nuclear-armed states closer to major conflict" (Khawaja Muhammad Asif, 28 April 2025), agency for escalation is attributed only to India through a nominalized and evaluated Actor ("India's reckless conduct"), while Pakistan is represented only as one of the "two nuclear-armed states" involved in the process (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Similarly, the National Security Committee's use of the phrase 'India's worn-out narrative' (2 May 2025) uses a metaphor of weariness to India's discourse itself, so that it is the claims of the adversary, rather than a specific action, which become the focus of delegitimization (Charteris-Black, 2004).

4.2 Pakistani Post-war Discourse: Agentive Declaratives and Commemorative Nominalisation

Pakistani post-war statements were characterized by declarative, past-tense achievement claims, agentive active-voice constructions and commemorative nominalization, which together constructed Pakistan as a triumphant and vindicated actor (Hodges, 2011; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). A clear example of this shift is the statement by the Prime Minister that "we responded decisively, downing six Indian jets and defended with honor" (Shehbaz Sharif, 7 May 2025). Here, the inclusive first-person plural "we" is the Actor in a series of completed material processes ("responded", "downing", "defended")

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while the evaluative adverbials "decisively" and "with honor" confer both effectiveness and moral legitimacy to the action. In the pre-war phase, it is claimed, the negated and conditional modality is replaced by one of declarative certainty. There was a repeat of a transitivity pattern. An illegal Indian action was paired with a valid Pakistan response. India pushed region into war; Pakistan responded decisively" (Shehbaz Sharif, 14 May 2025). In this headline formulation, India is constructed as the Actor of a coercive material process ("pushed") affecting a collective Goal ("region"), while Pakistan is constructed as the Actor of a reactive and positively evaluated process (Van Leeuwen, 2008). The Chief of Army Staff similarly stated that "the current Indian leadership weaponized a tragic security breach in Pahalgam and launched an unprovoked, illegal military misadventure against Pakistan" (Gen Syed Asim Munir, 12 May 2025). The Pahalgam attack is renamed as a "security breach" and the Indian operation as a "misadventure" in this construction, reframing the Indian account of events through nomination.

Post-war speech also exhibited a pattern of reserved and deferred agency, as Pakistan asserted its right to act without committing itself to any specific action. The Foreign Office said that "Pakistan reserves the right to respond appropriately at a time and place of its choosing" (Pakistan Foreign Office, 7 May 2025). A military spokeswoman said "they will get an answer in our own timing" (Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry, 23 May 2025). It is argued that these formulations keep the conditional logic of the pre-war phase but modify it: the condition is no longer a hypothetical Indian provocation, but Pakistan's own decision, so that control over timing is discursively taken (Chilton, 2004).

The most unusual post-war development was the emergence of commemorative nominalization and ceremonial naming. The official declaration, that "the resolute and professional response of our armed forces during the May crisis has permanently rewritten the script of conventional deterrence in South Asia" (Government of Pakistan, 15 May 2025) packages the entire military episode into a single nominal group ("the resolute and professional response"). The metaphor "rewritten the script" and intensifier "permanently" construct a historicized and near-mythic account of the episode (Goatly, 2007). Similarly, the naming of May 16 as Youm-e-Tashakur ("Day of Gratitude") and the triadic attribution of "resolve, professionalism, dedication" to the armed forces (Shafqat Ali Khan, 16 May 2025) insert the operation into the national calendar and into a rhythmic pattern of repetition of praise, marking a shift from a crisis register to a celebratory register (Billig, 1995).

It should be noted, however, that the Pakistani post-war sub-corpus did not universally express triumphalism. Statements like "Our brave armed forces have severely damaged so-called military might of India and proved our defense capabilities. However violence is not a solution" (Shehbaz Sharif, cited in Al Jazeera) and "Ready for war and peace, option is yours" (Shehbaz Sharif, 14 May 2025) mix claims of strength with invitations to dialog (Reyes, 2011). In the latter, the war/peace choice is grammatically shifted to India by the second person possessive yours, thus, Pakistan is made to be ready for either conclusion, and the onus for the outcome is put on the adversary.

4.3 Indian Pre-war Discourse: Condemnation, Pursuit and Administrative Directives

Ritual condemnation formulations, punitive pursuit lexis, a bureaucratic and administrative register and unilateral deontic orders were found to characterize Indian pre-war declarations (Fairclough, 2003; Van Leeuwen, 2008). Prime Minister's first comment "I strongly condemn terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu & Kashmir. My condolences to those who have lost their loved ones" (Narendra Modi, 22 April 2025). This statement juxtaposes a first-person evaluative verb with a conventional condolence act, and it is argued that such a formula creates the moral

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occasion upon which subsequent punitive measures were founded. Similarly, the declaration that "those behind this heinous act will not be spared, their evil agenda will never succeed" (Narendra Modi, 22 April 2025) uses denied future modality in a punitive rather than restraining role.

The most dominant lexical trait of the Indian pre-war sub-corpus was punitive pursuit lexis. India will identify, trace and punish each and every terrorist and their sponsors. We shall chase them to the ends of the earth" (Narendra Modi, 24 April 2025) incorporates a triadic verb sequence and the universal quantifier "every", along with the spatial hyperbole "to the ends of the earth", thus building an unlimited commitment (Charteris-Black, 2004). In the same vein, the Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir stated that "every perpetrator and supporter of Pahalgam terror attack, whatever his location or affiliation, must be hunted and they must pay the heavy price" (Manoj Kumar Sinha, 25 April 2025), a construction in which deontic "must" is combined with passivization ("must be hunted"), so that the obligation is framed as impersonal and self-evident rather than as a decision of a particular agent (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

In the announcement of punitive policy actions an administrative register was observed. The Ministry of External Affairs stated that "the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 will be put in abeyance with immediate effect, until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably gives up its support for cross-border terrorism" (23 April 2025), and that "all existing valid visas issued by India to Pakistani nationals stand revoked with effect from April 27" (24 April 2025). The conditional clause ('until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures') is said to invert the agency pattern in the Pakistani pre-war sub-corpus: India is constructed as the controlling Actor who sets the conditions, while Pakistan is constructed as the party who must satisfy them, and the presupposition that Pakistan supports cross-border terrorism is embedded within the clause rather than asserted, which makes it less open to challenge (Fairclough, 2003).

Naming techniques in the Indian pre-war sub-corpus were aimed not only at Pakistan but also at third-party criticism. The Ministry of External Affairs called a statement by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation as "issued at the behest of Pakistan" and "absurd in refusing to recognize the facts" (Randhir Jaiswal, 6 May 2025), thus subordinating an intergovernmental body to Pakistani influence and delegitimizing its criticism (Van Leeuwen, 2008). The opposition parliamentarian Asaduddin Owaisi referred to the militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba as the "illegitimate child of Pak Government, ISI" (29 April 2025), a noteworthy statement since the most direct delegitimizing nomination in the Indian pre-war sub-corpus originated outside the executive (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001).

4.4 Indian Post-war Discourse: Doctrinal Declaration and Cultural Register

Indian post-war statements were found to be characterized not only by the institutional register that was observed in the pre-war phase but also by declarative achievement claims, by doctrinal naming and by appeals to religious-cultural and technological-nationalist legitimation (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Van Leeuwen, 2007). The official statement "Pakistan attempted to engage military targets, we neutralized air-defence radars" (Government of India, 8 May 2025) shows a contrast in transitivity in which Pakistan is the Actor of a process that is attempted and unsuccessful, while India is the Actor of a process that is completed and successful. This structure parallels the Pakistani formulation "India pushed region into war; Pakistan responded decisively" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

The most notable postwar innovation was the naming of doctrine. "Operation Sindoor is the new normal for India now... India has drawn a clear Lakshman Rekha against terrorism," the Prime Minister said in a televised speech to the nation. "We will not accept any nuclear blackmail"

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(Narendra Modi, 12 May 2025). The nomination "new normal" is argued to shift a bounded military operation to a permanent policy condition. The epic allusion "Lakshman Rekha" however draws on the protective line in the Ramayana, and acts as a red-line through an indigenous mythological repertoire (Charteris-Black, 2004). Moreover, the operation term itself became a frequently used nominal anchor, appearing in six of the thirteen Indian post-war pronouncements, so that a single label emerged to encapsulate the event, its explanation and its continued existence. The same message provided a religious-cultural legitimation with the saying "Lord Buddha has shown us the path of peace". "The way of peace also passes through strength... it is also necessary to use this strength when needed" (Narendra Modi, 12 May 2025) Here, the paradox of peace and power is resolved through a chain of deontic necessity ("it is very necessary for India to be powerful", "it is also necessary to use this power") and it is suggested that the Buddhist allusion lends moral authority to coercive capacity (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Thus, the statement "destroyed Pak air bases in minutes, this is the strength of new indigenous systems" (Narendra Modi, 30 May 2025) mixes temporal hyperbole with technological-nationalist framing, with national pride based on home defense manufacture (Billig, 1995).

Another hallmark of the post-war was the re-cycling of pre-war administrative lexis into the military realm. The statement that "operations against Pakistan have only been kept in abeyance, and future action will depend on their behavior" (Narendra Modi 12 May 2025) re-uses the term "abeyance", which in the pre-war phase had been used to describe the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, to describe the suspension of military action (Fairclough 2013). It is suggested that this linguistic consistency transmits the conditional logic of the pre-war phase to the post-war phase: in both cases India is built as the Actor who suspends and resumes, and Pakistan's "behaviour" as the condition on which resumption depends. In the same vein, "Pakistan pled for ceasefire during Operation Sindoor, it's not over yet" and "after being soundly beaten, Pakistan contacted us in desperation" (Narendra Modi, 12 and 31 May 2025) create a humiliation frame where Pakistan is presented as a supplicant (Van Dijk, 1998).

4.5 Lexical Frequency Patterns

The qualitative patterns described above were examined against a descriptive frequency count, in which the number of statements containing each item was recorded for each phase (Biber et al., 1998; Baker et al., 2008). Table 3 reports the Pakistani results and Table 4 the Indian results, and it is emphasised that, given the modest size of the sub-corpora, these figures are illustrative of direction rather than evidence of statistical difference.

Table 3. Statements containing selected items in the Pakistani sub-corpus

Item or formula	Pre-war (n = 12)	Post-war (n = 35)	Direction
Negated future modality ("will not", "won't")	2 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	Pre-war only
Evidentiary lexis ("evidence", "proof")	2 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	Pre-war only
"Act of war"	1 (8.3%)	3 (8.6%)	Stable
Negative other-evaluation ("baseless", "reckless", "cowardly",	3 (25.0%)	9 (25.7%)	Stable

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Item or formula	Pre-war (n = 12)	Post-war (n = 35)	Direction
"fabricated", "delusion", "hysteria" and similar)			
Positive self-evaluation ("resolve", "resolute", "professional", "dedication", "valiant")	1 (8.3%)	5 (14.3%)	Increase
Achievement and moral lexis ("decisive", "honour")	1 (8.3%)	4 (11.4%)	Increase
Reserved right formula ("right to respond", "right to take self-defence measures")	0 (0.0%)	4 (11.4%)	Post-war only
Inclusive first-person plural ("we", "our", "us")	1 (8.3%)	7 (20.0%)	Increase
Dialogue lexis ("dialogue", "talks")	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.7%)	Post-war only

Table 4. Statements containing selected items in the Indian sub-corpus

Item or formula	Pre-war (n = 16)	Post-war (n = 13)	Direction
Punitive pursuit lexis ("punish", "hunted", "not be spared")	5 (31.3%)	0 (0.0%)	Pre-war only
"Terror", "terrorist", "terrorism"	6 (37.5%)	3 (23.1%)	Decrease
Negative other-evaluation ("heinous", "evil", "cowardly", "dastardly", "illegitimate", "absurd", "misadventure")	4 (25.0%)	1 (7.7%)	Decrease
Administrative lexis ("abeyance", "revoked")	2 (12.5%)	1 (7.7%)	Recycled post-war
Deontic "must"	2 (12.5%)	1 (7.7%)	Decrease
"Operation Sindoor" as nominal anchor	0 (0.0%)	6 (46.2%)	Post-war only
Doctrinal naming ("new normal", "new line")	0 (0.0%)	2 (15.4%)	Post-war only
Religious-mythological lexis ("Lakshman Rekha", "Lord Buddha")	0 (0.0%)	2 (15.4%)	Post-war only

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Item or formula	Pre-war (n = 16)	Post-war (n = 13)	Direction
Humiliation lexis ("begged", "desperate", "desperation")	0 (0.0%)	2 (15.4%)	Post-war only
"Will not tolerate"	0 (0.0%)	1 (7.7%)	Post-war only
Inclusive first-person plural ("we", "our", "us")	4 (25.0%)	5 (38.5%)	Increase

From Tables 3 and 4 several observations follow. First, the items that cluster in the pre-war phase in both sub-corpora are those associated with warning, evidence, punishment and administration. The items that cluster in the post-war phase are those associated with achievement, reserved agency, doctrine and commemoration. This pattern is consistent with the qualitative analysis (Hodges, 2011). Secondly, the percentage of Pakistani statements with negative other-evaluation and the "act of war" formula remains relatively constant across phases, which suggests that the absolute increase of such items in the post-war phase is a function of the larger volume of post-war statements, not of an intensification of delegitimizing lexis per statement, and that the Pakistani shift is therefore primarily in self-presentation and modality, and not in other-presentation (Van Dijk, 1998). Third, the Indian sub-corpus shows a proportional decrease in explicit negative other-evaluation, compensated by the emergence of a humiliation frame and by doctrinal and cultural naming, so that the adversary is diminished rather than denounced in the post-war phase (Van Leeuwen, 2008).

4.6 The Discursive Shift across Phases

The findings reported in Sections 4.1 to 4.5 are summarised in Table 5, which presents the principal dimensions along which the discourse of each state shifted between phases (Fairclough, 2013; Wodak, 2009).

Table 5. Dimensions of discursive shift by country

Dimension	Country	Pre-war phase	Post-war phase
Tone	Pakistan	Defensive and anticipatory	Triumphant and retrospective
Tone	India	Condemnatory, punitive and administrative	Declarative and doctrinal
Modality	Pakistan	Negated and conditional ("will not… if provoked")	Declarative certainty; reserved agency ("at a time and place of its choosing")
Modality	India	Deontic and conditional, with India as condition setter ("until Pakistan… abjures")	Categorical negation for deterrence ("will not tolerate"); conditional resumption ("will depend on their behaviour")

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Dimension	Country	Pre-war phase	Post-war phase
Transitivity	Pakistan	India as sole Actor of escalation; Pakistan backgrounded	Pakistan as agentive Actor of completed, positively evaluated processes
Transitivity	India	India as Actor of punitive pursuit; agents deleted in deontic passives	India as Actor of completed operations; Pakistan as Actor of failed attempts and pleas
Dominant speech acts	Pakistan	Warning and denial	Announcement and commemoration
Dominant speech acts	India	Condemnation and directive	Doctrinal declaration
Lexical register	Pakistan	Legalistic and evidentiary ("act of war", "baseless allegations")	Heroic and commemorative ("rewritten the script", Youm-e-Tashakur)
Lexical register	India	Bureaucratic and punitive ("abeyance", "revoked", "punish")	Religious-mythological and technological-nationalist ("Lakshman Rekha", "Lord Buddha", "indigenous systems")

5. Discussion

5.1 Textual Features across Phases and Countries

Conclusion Regarding the first research question, it is concluded that the textual features of both national sub-corpora differed systematically between the pre-war and post-war phases and that the principal axis of change was a movement from conditional, negated, evidentiary and administrative features toward declarative, agentive, triadic and commemorative features (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Hodges, 2011). In the Pakistani sub-corpus, the clearest realization of this process was through the removal of negated future modality and evidential lexis after the pre-war phase, and the growth in positive self-evaluation, achievement lexis and inclusive first-person reference. The Indian sub-corpus shift, in contrast, was accomplished by the elimination of punitive pursuit lexis and the appearance of doctrinal, humiliation and cultural naming, such that the Indian change was anchored as much in the register of legitimation as in modality itself. However, there are points of convergence between the two states. Both sub-corpora used triadic structures, be it India's "identify, track and punish" and "no talks, no trade, discussion only on PoK" or Pakistan's "resolve, professionalism, dedication". Both used hyperbolic intensifiers of scope, space and time, such as "full force across the complete spectrum of national power", "to the ends of the earth" and "in minutes" (Charteris-Black, 2004). Similarly, both states constructed transitivity contrasts where the adversary's processes were transgressive or unsuccessful, while their own processes were controlled and successful. This pattern is consistent with Van Leeuwen's (2008) account of the ideological distribution of agency in conflict discourse.

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5.2 Discursive Shifts and the Repositioning of National Identity

Regarding the second study issue, it is suggested that the above mentioned textual shifts were consistently linked with a repositioning of national identity (Anderson, 1983; Wodak, 2009). In the pre-war phase, both states built their identity around claims of legality, evidence and restraint: Pakistan through denial of escalatory intent and its demand for evidence, India through ritual condemnation, the language of legal pursuit and the claim that "India has evidence to prove Pakistan was behind the attack" (Vikram Misri, 24 April 2025). In the post-war phase, by contrast, both states re-centered their identity around claims of vindicated strength and historical consequence, with Pakistan claiming to have "permanently rewritten the script of conventional deterrence" or India declaring a "new normal" guarded by a "Lakshman Rekha". This repositioning is argued to be closely aligned with the move from mobilization to consolidation as set forth in the literature on war narratives (Hodges, 2011; Jackson, 2005). Before hostilities, legitimacy was sought prospectively, by constructing the self as law-abiding and the adversary as the party responsible for any future escalation; after hostilities, legitimacy was sought retrospectively, by constructing the self as having acted effectively and honorably and by embedding that action within durable national narratives. Moreover, the Pakistani Youm-e-Tashakur and the Indian elevation of Operation Sindoor to the status of standing policy can be read as two different ways of transforming a bounded episode into a lasting resource of national identity, in the first case through the commemorative calendar and in the second through doctrine (Billig, 1995; Nora, 1989).

5.3 The Temporal Asymmetry of Negated Modality

A distinguishing finding of this present investigation is the positioning of denied modality in time. In the Pakistani sub-corpus, the categorical negation "will not" was limited to the pre-war phase, where it was a restraint signal combined with a conditional warning; in the Indian sub-corpus, by contrast, the structurally comparable "will not tolerate any nuclear blackmail" occurred in the post-war phase, where it was a forward-looking deterrence doctrine (Palmer, 2001; Chilton, 2004). This asymmetry is argued to reflect the different rhetorical positions taken by the two states: Pakistan, having constructed itself throughout as the reactive party, used negation before hostilities to disclaim initiative, while India, having constructed itself as the initiator of a named operation, used negation after hostilities to fix the terms of future conduct. Interestingly, the Indian pre-war rhetoric also utilized negation, but in a punishing sense ("will not be spared" "will never succeed"), but the Pakistani pre-war discourse used negation in both a restraining and a warning sense ("will not initiate" "won't sit idle"). Thus the same grammatical resource was shown to be available for restraint, threat, punishment and deterrence depending upon the position of the speaker and the phase of the conflict, a finding that supports the systemic functional view that the meaning of a modal choice is realized only in relation to its context of situation (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). This is on a limited amount of tokens, and should be seen as a hypothesis to be tested against bigger corpora.

5.4 Relation to Existing Scholarship

That pre-war and post-war discourse systematically differ in modality, register and speech act is broadly compatible with the accounts by Hodges (2011) and Dunmire (2005) of the shift from anticipatory to retrospective legitimation. The present study extends these accounts by specifying the lexico-grammatical mechanisms through which the transition was realized in the India-Pakistan case. Likewise, the discovery that Pakistani post-war discourse celebrated concepts of honor, professionalism and commemoration aligns with Jalbani's (2025) discussion of memory

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and identity construction in relation to Operation Bunyan-um-Marsoos, though the present analysis contextualizes these meanings within specific grammatical choices, namely commemorative nominalization and triadic evaluation.

However, the present data justify the observation of Sabir and Naeem (2025) that references to negotiated peace were virtually absent from the 2025 discourse. In the corpus examined here, few Pakistani post-war remarks coupled claims of strength with explicit references to dialog ("war is not a solution", "resolve disputes through dialogue"), however such references remained subordinated to the prevalent triumphal register. This difference is argued to be the result of the different composition and temporal span of the corpora, and the fact that the phase-sensitive architecture chosen here makes such subordinated voices more prominent (Wodak, 2009). Moreover, the religious-mythological references found in the Indian post-war address confound any simple characterization of Indian state discourse as universally secular in register, at least as far as the address analyzed is concerned (Rajagopal, 2001).

6. Conclusion

This study has investigated the textual features of the Pakistani and Indian state discourse in the pre-war and post-war phases of the 2025 conflict. The study has demonstrated that the beginning of hostilities was marked by the systematic restructuring of modality, transitivity, naming and evaluation in both national sub-corpora (Fairclough, 2013; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In a nut shell, Pakistani discourse shifted from negated and conditional warning in evidentiary register to agentive, declarative and commemorative self-presentation. Indian discourse shifted from condemnation, punitive pursuit and administrative directive to doctrinal declaration underwritten by religious-cultural and technological-nationalist legitimation. These textual changes have also been connected with a general repositioning of national identity from a defensive, law-based self-image to an assertive, historically consequential one.

The study contributes to CDA by showing the utility of a phase-sensitive and cross-national design in identifying discursive change at the level of grammar, and contributes to the study of India-Pakistan relations by documenting the particular linguistic resources through which various constructions of the 2025 conflict were expressed (Wodak, 2015; Van Leeuwen, 2008). The results of a temporal asymmetry in negated modality and of the recycling of administrative lexis into the military domain in Indian post-war discourse are proposed as testable in other conflict dyads.

It is important to recognize some restrictions. The corpus is small and unbalanced, some items enter the corpus as reported speech or headline paraphrase rather than verbatim transcript and the post-war phase conflates the period of hostilities with its aftermath. Therefore, the frequency data are descriptive and the findings are not statistically generalizable to Pakistani or Indian political discourse as a whole (Baker et al., 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Future research may therefore apply corpus-assisted methods to larger collections of verbatim official transcripts, extend the analysis to television, parliamentary and social media discourse, and compare the 2025 conflict with the Kargil and Pulwama and Balakot episodes so as to establish which of the patterns identified here are recurrent features of the dyad and which are specific to 2025 (Raghavan, 2010; Wodak, 2015).

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