

# Politics Of Channels And Geography In Diplomatic Discourse: A Study Of Pakistani Diplomatic Cypher Under Reception Theory

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## Abstract

*The present study aims to understand the themes and politics of the diplomatic discourse inlaid in the Pakistani Diplomatic Cypher written to the Pakistan Foreign Office on March 07, 2022. The study is qualitative based on the analysis of the diplomatic discourse of Pakistani Diplomatic Cypher under the Reception Theory of Cécile Laborde (2002), which includes six different areas of analysis; the themes, politics, areas, channels, temporality, and geography. The study finds that Cypher focuses on different themes and politics based on the different discussion areas. Major discussion areas are the change of chair of Imran Khan, concerns of the US and Western countries about Pakistani foreign policy and remapping it. The study also finds that time and space are much concerned in the discussion of the US representative. The study recommends that the diplomatic Cyphers can be best understood through the knowledge of time, culture, space and history of the nations.*

**Key Terms:** Theme, Channel, Politics Geography, Diplomatic Discourse, Reception Theory.

## 1 Introduction

Pakistani Diplomatic Cypher was sent from the foreign office in the US to the Pakistani foreign office consisting of the discussion of Asad Majeed Khan (Foreign Ambassador) and Donald Lu (the US representative) (Grim & Hussain, 2023). The Cypher was consisted of a bilateral discussion about the visit of Imran Khan (Pakistani Prime Minister of that time) to Russia during the Russia-Ukraine war. Besides the central theme of the visit, the Cypher is consisted of other discussions, too. The major theme of the Cypher was that the US and the Western countries had reservations while the visit of Imran Khan would not be undertaken at that time (The Intercept, 2023). The central theme of the Cypher was “to remove Imran Khan from the Chair of Prime Minister so that all would be forgiven” (actions against Western diplomacy) (Grim & Hussain, 2023). Bukahri et al. (2024) mentioned that the language of the Cypher has consisted of the threats, wrath and power, exercised by the US representative, Mr Donald Lu (Bukahri et al., 2024).

Reception theory presents the reader’s dialectical interpretation of the text under which the world of the text (meanings of the text) is generated (Middeke, 2012). Reception is the process of interpreting the meanings of the reader within the culture (Livingstone & Das, 2013). Media

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messages cannot be known alone without contextualizing the time and culture, and these scales are embedded in the reception theory (Ang, 1985).

The present study is conducted to analyze the diplomatic discourse of Pakistani Diplomatic Cypher under the reception theory of Cécile Laborde (2002), which includes the themes, politics, areas, channels, temporality, and geography.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Diplomatic discourse is embedded with the political themes and channels through which directions or suggestions are interpreted. Interpreting political discourse to explore the significant stressed aspects requires a reader to study the current situation. Reception theory critically elaborates the cognitive and self-narrativization of political discourse concerning its channels, politics, geography and directions. Interpretation of diplomatic discourse under reception theory can lead towards the exposition of intended meanings of political discourse in given circumstances.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

- To understand the themes and politics in the diplomatic discourse of Pakistani Diplomatic Cypher.
- To explore the temporality and the geographical interpretations in the diplomatic discourse of Pakistani Diplomatic Cypher.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. What significant themes exist in the diplomatic discourse of the Cypher?
2. How can the readers interpret the significant tenets of Cypher's political discourse under the Reception Theory?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The present study can help to understand the diplomatic Cypher's core themes. It can also be helpful to understand the interpretation of the text, its areas of discussion and the channels of discussion. The study can help to understand the geographical (cultural) interpretations under which the specific themes are generated as particular practices.

## **2 Literature Review**

Hutabarai (2023) study "Political Discourse Analysis in Translation of Speech Texts on "One Belt One Road (OBOR)": A Dialectical Cognitive Approach". The study told that the central theme of Chinese President Xi Jinping's political speeches, which have been delivered at both bilateral and multilateral cooperation forums since 2013, is "One Belt One Road (OBOR)." The speech texts used in the OBOR case study are examined using a dialectical cognitive approach and qualitative analysis. The primary goals of the analysis were to identify the key traits and attributes of the speech texts and their effects on cognitive aspects. The PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs's official websites in Brisbane and the UN Mission provided data for this study. The translators of the diplomatic missions have translated 3,261 English words of speech and 6,722 Chinese characters that can be examined.

Consequently, the study delineated the aim of a Political Discourse in diplomatic speech texts to secure audiences' acceptance and pinpoints their linguistic characteristics and implications. To put it briefly, China used "three plus one" dialectics as the structural method of the OBOR speech texts to accomplish its goal. Part of Van Dijk's cognitive rhetorical models, the dialectics principles are grounded in Chinese culture and include the following:

1. Change principle.
2. Contradiction principle.
3. General relationship or holistic principle.
4. Compromise-based justification or harmony principle.

It was also demonstrated that China used distinct structural dialectic techniques in its bilateral cooperation with Brisbane, Australia, and on the UN multilateral platform. Consequently, it is more convincing or simpler to be accepted. Khan et al. (2017) have expressed that media especially print media acts as a tool in the hands of capitalists. Ramzan and Khan (2019) have suggested that stereotyped ideological constructions are enhanced by nawabs and politicians. Further, Ramzan et al. (2020) suggest that the power of mass media for the last few decades has been considerably influencing our lives directly or indirectly, so the role of media discourse has become very significant in the lives of people in the digital age. Bhutto and Ramzan (2021) have claimed that there is a collusive stance and pacifier agenda of media wrapped in the strategy of power. Nawaz et al. (2021) have said that power is striving for negative them and positive us

Lamsiah et al. (2020) studied “The Economic and Political Components of Diplomatic Discourse: State Actors in Morocco-UK Free Trade Agreement as a Case Study”. The study described Morocco as 58th among commercial partners with the UK. This fact suggests that a different understanding of the function of state players in diplomacy should be adopted and that the transformative power of economic actors may serve as the observer and appraiser of international relations. The ability of diplomatic and economic actors to reshape their narratives and go beyond the conventional parameters of the dominant institutional narrative is essential to their effective performance. The study questioned, “What actual boundaries do the institutional instructions put on the instrumentality of state actors? And how institutional forces are created, and how much do they influence the speech of state actors?”. To comprehend and assess the interests of the UK and Morocco as defined by their institutional logics, the study performed a textual analysis of political speech based on the interventions made by three interveners. The study found that it doesn’t appear realistically possible for state actors to effectively perform on a diplomatic level above and beyond the norms of the dominant institutional narrative and reshape their own story. State actors are far from enacting change and establishing a more amicable stance about the official diplomatic and economic viewpoint.

Nishikawa-Pacher (2023) studied “Diplomacy Versus Politics: Two Mutually (In)Dependent Systems”. The study mentioned that it is expected to portray diplomacy as being beneath politics, as though it only needed politically motivated “inputs” to generate politically organized “outputs.” However, diplomacy seldom follows political directives. It can even function essentially without taking politics into account. This insight creates the impression that diplomacy and politics function as two distinct systems that are independent and mutually dependent. To shed light on this relationship, the current paper used Modern Systems Theory, particularly the work of Parsons and Luhmann, to argue that diplomacy and politics engage in two different types of exchanges: (1) they implement each other so that diplomatic events can be recorded as political victories and vice versa; and (2) they stimulate each other through the establishment of goals such as “foreign policy goals.” The discussion section described how there are empirical differences in the two systems’ levels of autonomy, such as when politically appointed diplomats are involved. It also described how extreme instances of autonomous operations, such as apolitical diplomacy or diplomatic politics, are subject to adverse consequences.

Pimentel & Panke (2020) researched “Diplomatic discourses: are they an object of Political Communication research?”. The study mentioned that any strategic narrative created by diplomatic discourses must be able to persuade, disseminate, and convince. Therefore, one of the factors that help shape a country’s public image and global positioning is diplomatic discourse. The study was consisted on the question “How much weight does the area of political communication place on the examination of these kinds of discourses?” The study mapped seven national and international databases to determine if diplomatic discourses can be considered a subject of study. Consequently, it was drawn the attention to the fact that diplomatic discourses arise as a component of a more extensive strategic process of international communication by states and governments, given the power conflicts involved in international relations. It was recognized that these discourses are a subject of Political Communication research, but given the paucity of literature on the field of Communication, we offer recommendations for more studies.

Utami & Lestari (2017) researched “Audience Reception Analysis Toward Political Messages In President Joko Widodo’s YouTube Channel”. The study elaborated that the audience on YouTube, regarded as active, can receive and provide direct input. The political messages disseminated via YouTube also hold a wide range of interpretations for the viewers. Specific audiences can understand particular messages immediately, while others will receive the message differently. This study aims to comprehend how the public responds to President Jokowi’s political messages on his YouTube channel and the variables that influence that response. This study was qualitative. This study employed interviews and focus groups (FGDs) to gather data. Stuart Hall’s decoding-encoding theory was applied to examine the audience’s response. The findings of this study suggest that this channel which Joko Widodo selected is a means of communicating with the community and a source of public information and political messages. One audience is in the grey oppositional stance, and five are in the dominating hegemonic position. This research revealed two additional perspectives Stuart Hall claims are not part of the audience’s position. The first scenario, the grey oppositional position, arises when the audience rejects the message provider’s dominant meaning and cannot comprehend the message. Second, when an audience is unable to understand a message but accepts the dominant interpretation that the message provider has provided, they are said to be in the grey dominant position. The following criteria influence President Joko Widodo’s YouTube channel audience: age, education, background, video viewing frequency, likes and dislikes.

### **3 Research Methodology**

The present study is qualitative and based on textual analysis. Textual analysis is the critical qualitative research method widely used in cultural studies (Arya, 2020). Textual analysis explores the complex aspects of life, including creativity, inspiration, culture and history (McKee, 2003). The present study is conducted to analyze the text of the Diplomatic Cypher under Cécile Laborde’s reception model (2002).

#### **3.1 Cécile Laborde’s Model of Reception (2002)**

Cécile Laborde’s model of Reception (2002) includes six significant aspects for analysis themes: politics, areas, channels, temporality, and geography.

**The theme** is a subject of talk, exhibition or core aspect of the results of the discussion (Morgan, 2018).

**Politics** can be defined as resolving conflict, a way of governance, or managing public affairs (Modebadze, 2010).

**Areas** are the critical parts of any discourse.

**Channels** are the platforms of discussion (Constantinescu-Dobra & Coțiu, 2021).

**Temporality** is the experience of time by an individual (Gokmenoglu, 2021).

**Geography** studies the location and distribution of living things (Balasubramanian, 2016).

### **Population**

The population of the study is all those diplomatic Cyphers written to the Pakistani Foreign Office from the Pakistani Foreign Office in the US.

### **3.2 Sample of the Study**

The sample is the representative part of the research, and it has characteristics similar to that of the population (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). The present study is based on the convenient sampling process. Convenient sampling is the method of sample selection based on ease and saves time and resources (Bhardwaj, 2019).

### **3.3 Data Collection and Analysis Process**

Data is collected by repeatedly studying the Cypher, and a sample of three exerts is selected for analysis. The analysis is based on Cécile Laborde's model of Reception (2002), which includes the six significant aspects for analysis; themes, politics, areas, channels, temporality, and geography.

## **4 Data Analysis**

“I replied that this was not a correct reading of the situation as Pakistan's position on Ukraine was a result of intense interagency consultations. Pakistan had never resorted to conducting diplomacy in public sphere. The Prime Minister's remarks during a political rally were in reaction to the public letter by European Ambassadors in Islamabad which was against diplomatic etiquette and protocol. Any political leader, whether in Pakistan or the U.S., would be constrained to give a public reply in such a situation.”

### **Analysis**

Laborde's (2002) model of Reception includes themes, politics, areas, channels, temporality, and geography. The themes are the lines “non-affiliation,” “Secret diplomacy,” “Resistance against Diplomatic Equates violation,” and “Public resistance against Western policy.” The politics of the stretch is that the Pakistani Prime Minister's reaction and actions were confirmed in the national concerns while the Western's claims about Pakistan 's stances are illogical. The areas of concerns are that the “West wants to engage Pakistan in its display and narrative while Pakistan wants to keep its diplomacy and foreign policy according to its own will and preferences. The area of the context is also the Russia-Ukraine war, which is a diplomatic defeat of Western countries to engage Ukraine in NATO. The channel described in the lines is the official conversation made in the foreign office of Pakistan in the USA. According to the lines, the temporality is the “resistance against Western Narrative in an ethical way and under the rules of the United Nations.” The geography is Pakistan and the West, while their clash is presented in the narrative presentation of the Russia-Ukraine War.

“Don was evasive and responded that Washington looked at the U.S.- India relationship very much through the lens of what was happening in China. He added that while India had a close

relationship with Moscow, “I think we will actually see a change in India’s policy once all Indian students are out of Ukraine.””

### **Analysis**

The themes in the present lines are “counter reply, India-US relationships in the lens of China,” “Close Relationship of India with Moscow,” and “Soft Corner for India.” The politics in the line is clear that the US does not consider Pakistan equal to India, and India cannot be measured through the lens of Pakistan. Due to its strategic partnership with India, the US wants to be close with India due to its rivalry with China. In other words, the US wants to engage India in countering China while not considering the “neutral stance of India against Russia-Ukraine war as important as the stance of Pakistan is.” The discussed areas in the lines are the comparative aspects of the narrative and stance of neutrality on the Russia-Ukraine war through the lens of Western countries. The channel of the conversation is the foreign office of Pakistan in the USA where the diplomatic conversation held. Temporality is that the US has close concerns with India compare to Pakistan, while the geography is the current situation of the Russia-Ukraine war and Pakistan’s neutral stance. The other geography is the politics of the subcontinent and its political variations.

“I expressed the hope that the issue of the Prime Minister’s visit to Russia will not impact our bilateral ties. Don replied that “I would argue that it has already created a dent in the relationship from our perspective. Let us wait for a few days to see whether the political situation changes, which would mean that we would not have a big disagreement about this issue and the dent would go away very quickly. Otherwise, we will have to confront this issue head on and decide how to manage it.”

### **Analysis**

Concerning the Laborde (2002) model of reception theory, the first aspects are the themes. The themes in the present lines are “Loyalty of the Ambassador and Closing the bilateral Discussion.” In contrast, in Donald Lu’s reply, the themes are “Dent in Pak-US relationships,” “Political Change in Pakistan,” “Away of Dent,” and “Confronting and Future Planning by the US.” The politics in the lines is that a Pakistani official is intended to open all the channels for discussion. On the other hand, the US is not so much intended till the political change (Regime Change in Pakistan) occurs. The US behaviour is not as soft regarding reconciliation, and future planning is noted as dependent on the political change in Pakistan. It also shows that the direction of Pak-US relationships depends on Pakistan’s political change. There could be offensive behaviour if Imran Khan remained in the regime, and there could be soft if Imran Khan would have been replaced. The area of the discussion is the continuity of the discussion.

In contrast, from the US perspective, the areas are soft or offensive policy if a political change in Pakistan does not replace Imran Khan. The channel of face-to-face conversation between Pakistani and US officials in the US foreign office. The temporality in the discussion is to remove or replace Imran Khan from the regime, and the US would only take a soft stance against Pakistan if the regime is changed. The geography discussed in the line, is Pakistan and the US, while Ukraine’s stance is also in the lines.

## **5 Conclusion**

Diplomatic cyphers consist of diplomatic discussions, which are loaded with different themes and politics. These themes are directions, associations and justifications. The politics of diplomatic discourse embedded in the diplomatic cyphers is based on the power relations and the current situation. Interpretation of the meanings of the Cyphers is only possible through knowledge of time, space, and culture, so the most appropriate meanings can be interpreted in diplomatic cyphers.

## **5,1 Findings**

The findings of the study are as follows:

### **Themes**

- The themes are “non-affiliation,” “Secret diplomacy,” “Resistance against Diplomatic Equates violation,” and “Public resistance against Western policy.
- “Counter reply, India-US relationships in the lens of China,” “Close Relationship of India with Moscow,” and “Soft Corner for India” are also major themes in the Cypher.
- There are also themes “Loyalty of the Ambassador and Closing the bilateral Discussion.” In contrast, in Donald Lu’s reply, the themes are “Dent in Pak-US relationships,” “Political Change in Pakistan,” “Away of Dent,” and “Confronting and Future Planning by the US” in the Cypher.

### **Politics**

- Pakistani Prime Minister’s reaction and actions were confirmed in the national concerns while the Western’s claims about Pakistan are illogical.
- The US does not consider Pakistan equal to India, and India cannot be measured through the lens of Pakistan. Due to its strategic partnership with India, the US wants to close India with it due to its rivalry with China. In other words, the US wants to engage India in countering China while not considering the “neutral stance of India against the Russia-Ukraine war as crucial as the stance of Pakistan is.
- Pakistani official is intended to open all the channels for discussion. On the other hand, the US is only so much intended once the political change (Regime Change in Pakistan) occurs. US behaviour could be softer regarding reconciliation, and future planning is noted as dependent on the political change in Pakistan.
- Direction of Pak-US relationships depended on Pakistan’s political change. There could be offensive behaviour if Imran Khan remained in the regime, and there could be soft if Imran were replaced.

### **Areas**

- “The West wants to engage Pakistan in its display and narrative while Pakistan wants to keep its diplomacy and foreign policy according to its will and preferences.
- The area of the context is also the Russia-Ukraine war, which is a diplomatic defeat of Western countries to engage Ukraine in NATO.
- There are areas of “The comparative aspects of the narrative and stance of neutrality on the Russia-Ukraine war through the lens of Western countries”.
- The area of the discussion is also the continuity of the discussion.
- The areas are soft or offensive policy if a political change in Pakistan does not replace Imran Khan (from the US perspective).
- The area of the discussion is the continuity of the discussion is also evident in the Cypher.

### **Channels**

- The channel described in the Cypher is the official conversation made in the foreign office of Pakistan in the USA.

### **Temporality**

- The is temporality of “resistance against Western Narrative in an ethical way and under the rules of the United Nations.”



- The US has close concerns with India compared to Pakistan.
- The temporality in the discussion is also to remove or replace Imran Khan from the regime, and the US would only take a soft stance against Pakistan if the regime is changed.

### Geography

- The geography is Pakistan and the West, while their clash is presented in the narrative presentation of the Russia-Ukraine War.
- The geography is the current Russia-Ukraine war and Pakistan's neutral stance.
- The other geography is the politics of the subcontinent and its political variations.

### 5.2 Recommendations

- Reception theory can present the time, space, and cultural interpretation inlaid in the diplomatic cyphers for a complete understanding of the intentions of the diplomatic discussions.
- Diplomatic cyphers can provide an in-depth level of relationships which understanding other nation's cultures can understand.
- Themes can be varied in Reception Theory concerning the reader's location, but it can interpret the appropriate meanings too.

### 5.3 Gap for Further Research

There can be future research on the semantic analysis of these, interrelations of themes, and political stretches understanding through critically analyzing the cyphers. There can also be research on the pragmatics of the politics inlaid in the diplomatic cyphers.

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