



Research Article

**Discursive Strategies and Political Framing In selected  
Newspapers on Kashmir conflict between Pakistan and India**

**Syed Mudassar Ali<sup>a</sup>**

[1032245408@pfur.ru](mailto:1032245408@pfur.ru)

ORCID: 0009-0006-8644-5466

**Koryst Eden<sup>b\*</sup>**

[1032242242@rudn.ru](mailto:1032242242@rudn.ru)

ORCID: 0009-0009-6111-6318

<sup>ab</sup>RUDN University, Miklukho-Maklaya str., 6, Moscow, 117198, Russia

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**Abstract:**

Language has always been instrumental in shaping peoples' worldview and their ideologies. The text they consume has in it a lot of strategies to make them think the way the editors, publishers want. This, in effect, manipulates people into prejudiced ideologies and instill in them hate or love for nations. News reporting, often textual, on conflicts uses discursive and representational strategies which manipulate the people to feel sympathy or hatred attached to socio-political ideologies and societies they belong to. This paper sheds light on the use of discursive strategies to highlight Kashmir conflict between Pakistan and India in newspapers that manifest socio-political ideologies. "Dawn" and "The Nation" are Pakistani Newspapers while "The Hindu" and "The Indian Express" Indian newspapers. Data comprises of 30 instances of discursive strategies extracted from two newspapers from both the countries that are English-medium national newspapers published between April 2015 and September 2024. Taking into account Van Dijk's (2006) Critical Discourse analysis, both the countries seem to pose polarity of positive In-group and negative out-group ideologies in the reports through two discursive strategies, i.e. Slanted headlining and negative labelling along with corpus-based analysis through Voyant tool. The strategies used are positive self and negative

\*Corresponding author:  
E-mail address: [1032242242@rudn.ru](mailto:1032242242@rudn.ru)

other with respect to the reports covering territorial conflict of Kashmiri region.

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## Introduction

The Kashmir issue has been the bone of contention between Pakistan and India since their inception. The issue is not resolved yet between the two states but there have been many instances within 75 years to come at a final point which would resolve the matter but to no avail. The conflict entails not only the geographical location but also the political and economic perspectives as Kashmir is seen as one of the world's desired tourist destinations. It is not possible for both the states to fully abandon or take the land into their control. The conflict is holistically mentioned by the Pakistani leadership at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to make the world feel the sensitivity of Kashmir conflict and it does not remain unmentioned in media as well. Most news channels assure of the unbiasedness and factual reporting in their newspapers but the language they use in their reports manifests ideology a nation holds because only relating facts is not objective reporting (Fowler 1991; Dellinger 1995; Reah 1998; Beard 2000). Fowler (1991:2) claims that 'news is not a value-free reflection of facts', since the linguistic structure of 'a news text embodies values and beliefs' (Fowler 1991: 66). Taking this into account, the Kashmir conflict between the two sovereign states, the news reports on the situation will have biasness from both the states.

The reason is simple that the language used to report news constitutes ideology and beliefs of the users (Taiwo, 2007) that leads to the fact that news reporting cannot be neutral, fair and unbiased. The result is the news reporting disseminated is manipulated based on the perception and ideology of the reporter. Van Dijk (2006) is of the view that the ambivalent representation has underlying prejudice that tends to represent in-group as positive and out-group as negative.

Manipulation not only serves as an efficient tool to misguide people through power but also it intentionally paves a way for misuse of power culminating to be in favour of the manipulator and against the interest of the manipulated (Chouliaraki, 2005; Martín Rojo and Van Dijk, 1997). In this way, the one who gets manipulated does not know the truth, instead they are misinformed which suits the ideology and psyche of the powerful. In contemporary mode of communication seen as multi-modal, the viewers are influenced through excessive use of photos, colors, sounds, videos or other media (Van Leeuwen, 2005) as a source to heighten the claims offered I.e in advertising (Day,1999; Messaris, 1997). In these ways, the authority remains in the hands of the social actors who exercise the power in accordance with their needs which in turn controls the narrative and mind of the public (Clegg, 1975; Luke, 1989; Van Dijk, 1989; Wartenberg, 1990).

Discourse strategies serve as a basis for representing ideologies and point of views in newspapers. To achieve particular social, political, psychological and

linguistic goal, the discourse strategy is an intentional plan of discursive practices and tactics employed in discourses (Reisigl and Wodak (2009). According to Van Dijk and Kintsch (1983: 11) the strategies have to deal with, ‘Various possible routes in a complete course of action in order to reach a wanted goal’. Hence, in news reporting discourse strategies become important linguistic tool in singling out and framing in-group and out-group memberships.

This paper holistically analyses the discursive strategies propagated by Pakistani and Indian newspapers to portray Kashmir conflict in such a way that the readers are often manipulated when they peruse the texts. The idea is drawn from Van Dijk (2006) to analyze how strategies are “Manipulated” to create loathsome for the out-group and empathy and sympathy for the in-group. The study provides overall schema of how ideology factors the representation of linguistic expression and how that ideology is legitimized and reproduced in a conflict.

### **An Overview of Kashmir Conflict**

Kashmir conflict dates back to the disintegration of the subcontinent and some part of it is under Pakistan’s occupation and greater part under India’s. This is the region of greater importance in terms of economy, location, tourism. When we peruse history, it is often seen that the leaders from both the rival countries tried to resolve this issue bilaterally but to no avail. During the time of independence, there were five hundred and sixty two princely states that were to

either join Pakistan or India or remain as independent entities on the basis of region based on religious majority with the withdrawal of British from the subcontinent on 15 August 1947 and the then Viceroy of India and First Indian Governor General Lord Mountbatten's announcement of two independent states came into effect, although Kashmir was a Muslim majority region which technically would be the part of Pakistan but the maharaja of Kashmir chose not to have accession to either of the state and him being a Sikh took the decision to remain isolated from both the states as it was an option for the princely states to remain independent (G.H Khan, 1998). On 22 October 1947, right after the independence the tribesman from North West Frontiers of Pakistan now known as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa started jihad against Indian occupation of Kashmir which led to the process of engaging in wars to resolve the conflict (G.H Khan, 1998).

Following the war, on 20 January 1948, the Security Council established there member UN commission on India and Pakistan (UNCIP) and sent their members to assess the war situation and to bring it to a halt. In January of the next year, both the countries agreed for a ceasefire but did not withdraw their troops from the territories. It was decided that a plebiscite would happen in Kashmir for their right to self-determination and the Kashmiri people would choose independently which country to embrace under UN supervision. On January 24, 1949 UNCIP sent a United Nations monitoring group for India and Pakistan

(UNMGIP) to the region in order to monitor the 840 km long cease fire line across Jammu and Kashmir. The ceasefire was later renamed as line of control (LOC) following the Shimla agreement between India and Pakistan in July 1972 (Suddepto Adhikari, Mukul kamie, 2010).

On august 5, 2019, India unilaterally abrogated article 370 and 35A of its constitution by revoking special status of Jammu and Kashmir violating United Nations security Council resolutions on Kashmir and annexed Kashmir to the Indian territory. (Sughra Alam et.al, 2020). This unilateral action of India resulted in severed ties between both the states and calling of United Nations Security Council meetings on the issue to resolve the conflict. Till now, the issue remains unresolved and the people of Kashmir are the one bearing the brunt of the failed policies exercised by the both states.

### **Methodology**

The data comprises of news reports on Kashmir conflict drawn from two Pakistani (Dawn and The Nation) and two Indians English-medium newspapers (The Hindu and The Indian Express) through the method of purposive sampling. The selection of newspapers is based on the wide range of circulation in both countries and most perused outlets, at the same time these were considered to be unbiased outlets than other newspapers. Out of multiple news reports on the conflict which still exists, 30 (15 Pakistani and 15 Indian) published between 2015 till 2024 were taken as purposive sampling. This era is significant in terms

of Pulwama attack in Kashmir in 2019 which brought two nuclear countries at the brink of nuclear war and total destruction and India's stripping of article 370 thus revoking the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. Multiple trade of firing across the LOC happened this period which only became the mouthpiece of every military spokesperson to blame the other country for violating ceasefire. The data will be observed through critical discourse analysis to portray how the discourse strategies reveal polarization and Voyant tool to see the frequent negative words ascribed to the other state and positive words to its own by creating text corpus collected from respective news reporting on the Kashmir conflict. Voyant tool also mentions the use of number of words frequently by the newspapers. The choice of words and diction collected from the corpus clearly manifest the political framing and setting a direction for the common public to either empathy or scorn for a nation. The extraction of discourse strategies from these 30 instances will be numbered as PDS1\_PDS55 (PDS= Pakistani Discourse Strategy and IDS1\_IDS45 (IDS= Indian Discourse strategy).

### **Analysis of Discursive Strategies in the News Reports on Kashmir Discourse**

The conflict can be seen in the deployment of two strategies by Pakistani and Indian newspaper reports. These are, slanted headlining and negative labelling.

#### **Slanted Headlining**

Headlines in newspapers are distributed in a way which create the space for ideological manipulation and framing of political biasness. Van Dijk (1995) states that headlines in the newspapers contain ideological content, which are gist of the news reports. The news reporting use slanted headlines to discredit the out-group and to favor the in-group regarding Kashmir conflict. For instance, PDS1, PDS2, PDS3, PDS4, PDS5, PDS6, and PDS7 clearly manifest slanted headlining in Pakistani newspapers:

**PDS1:** Pakistan lodges protest with India over ceasefire violations (*Dawn*, February 8, 2017);

**PDS2:** Four killed in occupied Kashmir shootout (*Dawn*, June 13, 2021);

**PDS3:** Another six killed in occupied Kashmir (*Dawn*, October 17, 2021);

**PDS4:** India turns more brutal by gagging Kashmiris (*The Nation*, December 27, 2023);

**PDS5:** Indian troops martyr Kashmiri youth in Pulwama (*The Nation*, April 12, 2024);

**PDS6:** Kashmiris being faced with worse nightmare of terror at IIOJK (*The Nation*, June 5, 2020);

**PDS7:** Pakistan condemns custodial killing of 3 Kashmiris in IIOJK (*The Nation*, December 25, 2023).

The choice of lexical items in PDS6 and PDS7 “IIOJK”, which stands for Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, is reflective of the fact that the

area is under illegal occupation. “Custodial killing” refers to the idea that even those who are undergoing trials are not safe from the forces. The use of passive voice in PDS6 clearly foregrounds the victims and brings to the limelight the persecutions faced by them. The choice “killed/killing” points to the ruthlessness and tyranny against common public. “Another” used at the beginning of the headline PDS3 suggests there is repeated killing of innocent people and it has become the new normal. “Brutal, Worst nightmare” have been chosen to reveal the frequency of psychological trauma the Kashmir is faced. Active sentences are also used in PDS4 and PDS5 to foreground the cruelty unleashed by the agency.

Similar instances and sentence make up can be seen in Indian newspapers where concern remains the human right violations by Pakistani forces in Pakistan administered Kashmir the way the Pakistani newspapers are focused on brutal acts unleashed to the Kashmiri people under Indian administration. IDS8, IDS9, IDS10, IDS11, IDS12, IDS13 and IDS14 have similar lexical choices to somehow appeal the common people in framing the narrative. These slanted headlines are:

**IDS8:** Parrikar warns Pakistan (*The Hindu*, April 1, 2016);

**IDS9:** Pakistan home to 12 foreign terrorist organizations (*The Hindu*, October 18, 2021);

**IDS10:** J&K terror attack: Pakistani terrorists deliberately targeting locals to evoke fear (*The Hindu*, October 26, 2024);

**IDS11:** Kashmiri youth desperate to return from PoK (*The Hindu*, February 27, 2023);

**IDS12:** Militant killed in J&K encounter (*The Indian Express*, August 6, 2023);

**IDS13:** 3 soldiers dead in encounter with militants in Kulgam (*The Indian Express*, August 4, 2023);

**IDS14:** 2,000 terrorists across LoC waiting to infiltrate: army (*The Indian Express*, October 7, 2015).

The diction “terrorists/militants” used in IDS9, 10, 12, 13 and 14 shows that allegedly it is the Pakistani public that terrorize Kashmiri region under Indian administration and are involved in killing soldiers. The use of active voice in most of the reports bring forth the perpetrators of violence and their involvement in spreading fear and terror.

### **Negative Labelling**

Labelling is often tagging an organization or people with linguistic identification. Negative labelling deals with portraying of people or organizations as evil and the root of every problem. In news reports, negative labelling becomes an important tool to disregard any organization through repeatedly use of lexical items which frame the ideology and ideological manipulation.

Pakistani newspapers deploy negative labelling in PDS15-PDS22:

**PDS15:** In the **worst civilian violence** to hit the restive region of IHK since 2010, at least 90 Kashmiri civilians have been **killed** and thousands more injured in Indian-held Kashmir in clashes with security forces after the killing of a prominent Kashmiri separatist leader Burhan Wani, in a **military operation** on July 8. (*Dawn*, November 30, 2016);

**PDS16:** In the days following the **attack**, India claimed to have conducted a cross-border '**surgical strike**' against '**launch pads of terror**' in Azad Jammu and Kashmir — a claim Pakistan strongly rejected. 1 injured as Pakistani, Indian border troops exchange fire across LoC: official (*Dawn*, April 3, 2017);

**PDS17:** With an **indefinite security lockdown** in Indian-occupied Kashmir (IoK) and elected representatives under house arrest, India's ruling Baratiya Janata Party (BJP) **stripped** Kashmiris of the special autonomy they had for seven decades through a **rushed presidential order** on Monday (*Dawn*, August 5, 2019);

**PDS18:** Pakistan on Thursday strongly condemned **the extra-judicial killings** of five more Kashmiris by Indian occupation forces a day earlier in **Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK)**, and called on the international community to take notice of New Delhi's **state-terrorism** in the valley. (*Dawn*, November 18, 2021);

**PDS19:** Prime Minister Imran Khan and Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa on Thursday called out India over its continuous

**"inhuman military siege"** and **"unprecedented oppression"** in occupied Kashmir. Their rebuke came as the country observed Youm-e-Istehsal Kashmir (**the day of exploitation**) to mark two years since New Delhi **stripped the valley of its special autonomy**. (*Dawn*, August 5, 2021);

All the bolded words carefully chosen have in them an intense form of labelling that portray a country in a very negative sense. All these events describe how ruthless the administration is and how mercilessly the government has oppressed, exploited, killed the people of Jammu and Kashmir with much impunity that the world watches it silently.

**PDS20:** The true face of India and its **conspiracy** behind the Pulwama attack and Balakot strikes has been **exposed, vindicating** Pakistan's stance on the attacks. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi tried to use the deaths of his country's soldiers to gain **sympathy**, and in turn, **votes**, for the 2019 elections. (*The Nation*, January 16, 2021);

The text from the news PDS20 negatively labels India with positive Pakistani posture. "Exposed" has been used for India while "Vindicating" for Pakistan.

**PDS21:Media blackout, censorship, internet shutdown, illegal detentions, extrajudicial killings and massacres** have just become some of the features commonly seen in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). (*The Nation*, October 03, 2022);

**PDS22:** Reportedly, Indian forces on Tuesday **killed** 13 Kashmiris in IOK in **fake encounters** and the **so-called** anti-infiltration operations. Pakistan, while condemning these **extra-judicial killings**, has again urged the international community to take immediate action to dissuade India from committing such **heinous crimes** against the people of IIOJK, who are struggling for their right of self-determination for the last 73 years. (*The Nation*, June 05, 2020);

With all these extractions of texts, it leads credence to the fact that Indian Army and Administration want to force the people of Kashmir into submission through violence. All those lexical items are used to negatively label India as the perpetrator of aggression, murderers, involved in heinous crimes against humanity, sieging the whole Kashmiri region through army deployment and internet blackout which is the worst form of robbing off the peoples' right to information, association and gathering. All these instances, thus, frame the ideology of common public to hate the state which does not respect human dignity and independence. The text and structure of the text also influence our thinking and perception.

Similar strategies are also used by Indian newspapers in targeting Pakistan by labelling them as actors of violence. Few instances from the texts are:

**IDS23:** The recent **strikes by terrorists** not only reflect their desperation but are also a grim reminder that the **terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan** is intact

and its support to the **proxy war** in Jammu and Kashmir continues unabated in spite of casualties to its own people (*The Hindu*, November 16, 2021);

**IDS24:** India will never give up its claim on **Pakistan-Occupied-Kashmir** (PoK) but it won't have to capture it with force because its people, on their own, would want to be part of India after seeing the **development** in Kashmir, Defense Minister Rajnath Singh has said. (*The Hindu*, 5 may, 2024);

The lexicon “Development” is the manifestation of positive labelling to one’s own country and the whole structure entails that it is Pakistan which lags far behind in development in comparison with India. Indirectly, Pakistan has been labelled in a negative note.

**IDS25:** Continued **terrorist attacks** against India **sponsored by Pakistan** cannot coexist with bilateral talks, the Bhartiya Janata Party said on Sunday. Islamabad has **failed** to keep its promise to dismantle **the terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan occupied Kashmir** (POK) in joined statement in January. (*The Hindu*, November 17, 2021);

**IDS26:** Pakistan has not taken “**sufficient action**” against **terror groups** like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, blamed for **attacks** in India, the United States has said while noting that these outfits continue to **operate, train, organize and fundraise** in that country. (*The Hindu*, December 2021);

Perusing the selected news samples, the highlighted words raise questions about Pakistan being the whole responsible entity of terrorism in India

specifically in Indian administered Kashmir. It has illegally occupied part of Kashmir which is Indian Territory the same way Pakistani newspapers accuse India of occupying the land which is part of Pakistan.

**IDS27:** A day after **seven persons were killed** in a terror attack in Ganderbal, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Monday said **Pakistan was still trying to kill innocent people and disrupt peace** in Jammu and Kashmir. (*The Indian Express*, October 21, 2024);

**IDS28:** Army chief says **PoK is illegally occupied**, is run by terrorists.

(*The Indian Express*, October 21, 2024);

**IDS29:** More than **2,000 terrorists** are waiting across the LoC in the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) **to infiltrate** into the Indian Territory, according to army estimates. (*The Indian Express*, October 07, 2015);

**IDS30:PoK and Gilgit Baltistan**, parts of J&K **under Pak occupation**. (*The Indian Express*, September 19, 2019).

All the discursive strategies used here show the illegal occupation of land, terrorist, peace spoilers, killers belong to Pakistan who continuously pose an existential threat to the region.

### **Analysis and Result from Voyant Tool**

The assorted texts from each newspaper were uploaded to the application to see the frequency of words used. All the newspapers choose lexical items that positively picture their own country and negatively the other. “Occupied” was the

word used mostly by all newspapers but with different contexts. For Indian newspapers, Kashmir under Pakistan’s Administration is occupied while Pakistani newspaper termed Kashmir under Indian Administration to be occupied with strong adverbs (illegally). Graphs from the four newspapers taken through the application are;

### Dawn

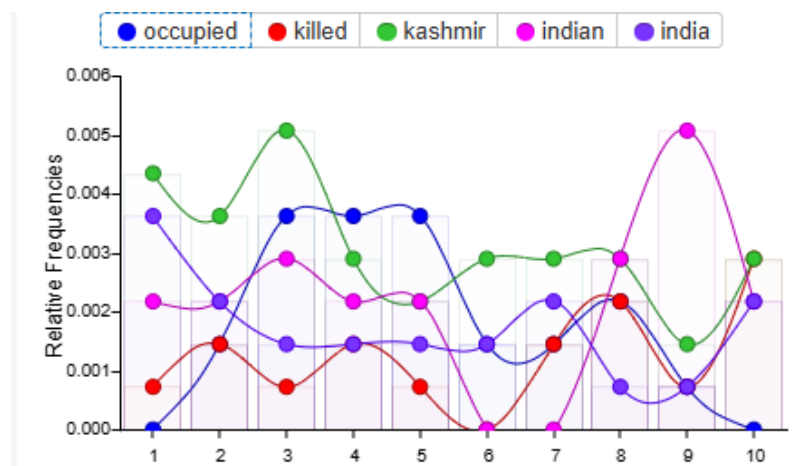


Figure 1. Line graph depicting the relative frequency of the most commonly used words in the corpus of the Dawn newspaper.

This corpus contains 1,397 total words and 516 unique word forms. Most frequent words in the corpus:

Kashmir (43); Indian (31); occupied (25); India (24); killed (17); Pakistan (14); held (13); Kashmiri (12); forces (11); violence (9); Kashmiris (9); region (7); people (7); security (6); killing (6).

### The Hindu

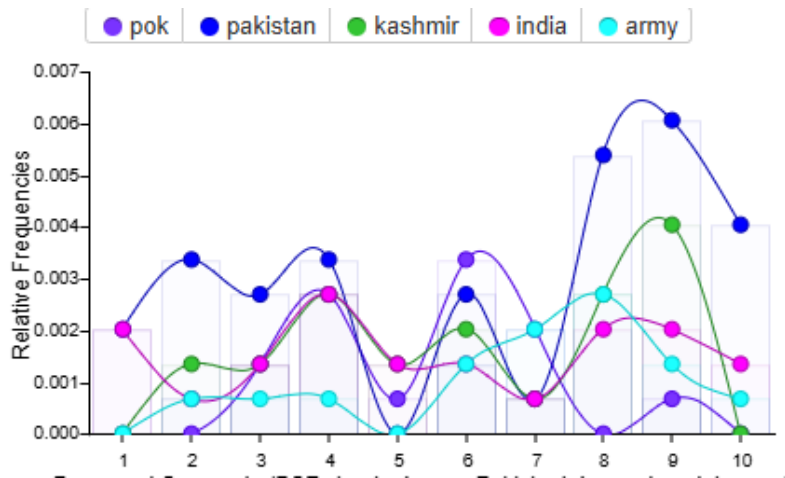


Figure 2. Line graph depicting the relative frequency of the most commonly used words in the corpus of The Hindu newspaper.

This corpus has 1,486 total words and 624 unique word forms. Most frequent words in the corpus:

Pakistan (45); Kashmir (24); India (23); pok (16); army (15); terror (11); says (10); occupied (10); loc (10)

### The Nation

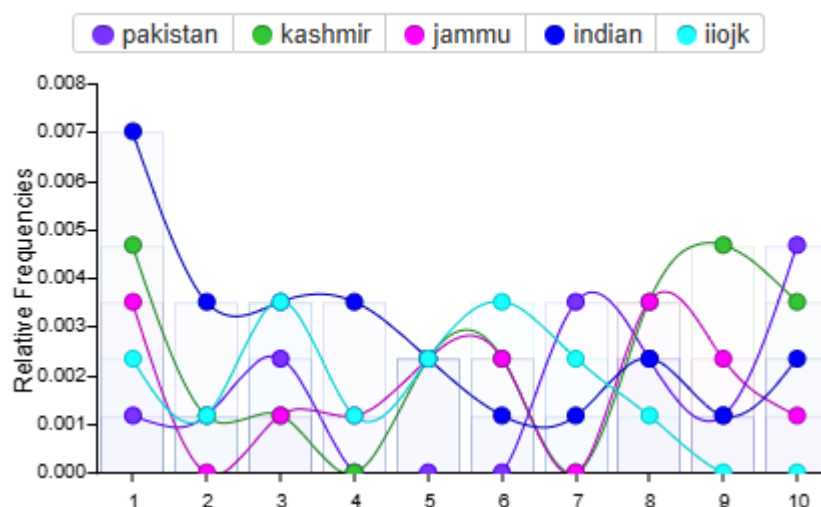


Figure 3. Line graph depicting the relative frequency of the most commonly used words in the corpus of *The Nation* newspaper.

This corpus has 856 total words and 418 unique word forms. Most frequent words in the corpus:

Indian (24); Kashmir (20); Jammu (15); iiojk (15); Pakistan (14); illegally (10); occupied (8); Kashmiris (8); India (8); rights (6); state (5); killings (5); Kashmiri

### The Indian Express

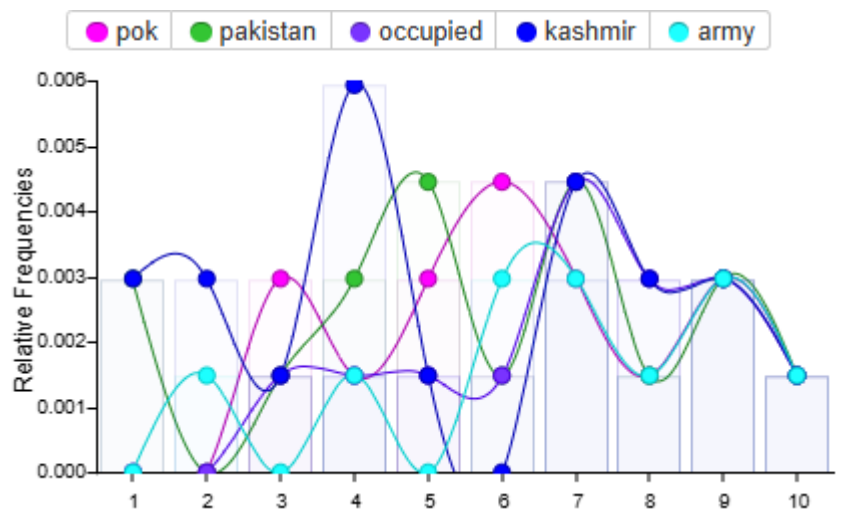


Figure 4. Line graph depicting the relative frequency of the most commonly used words in the corpus of *The Indian Express* newspaper.

This corpus has 675 total words and 294 unique word forms. Most frequent words in the corpus:

Kashmir (18); Pakistan (16); pok (14); occupied (12); army (10); said (8); loc (7); militants (6); killed (5); district (5); terrorists (4); soldiers (4); Pak (4); Indian (4); India (4)

### **Conclusion**

This article has discussed the discursive strategies employed by newspapers to portray the Kashmir conflict between Pakistan and India. The paper highlighted the framing of political narrative and ideology by deploying the two strategies i.e. slanted headlining and negative labelling by the Pakistani and Indian news reports with regard to Kashmir conflict. The paper argues that there is a strong connection between strategies and choice of words used by the newspapers in framing political narrative and ideology because the structure of texts and diction impact the way we think and frame our narrative. The deployment of same strategies even differs from newspapers to newspapers. While Pakistani newspapers focus on passive construction to portray the brunt borne by the victims, the Indian newspapers focus on active construction to bring forth the agent likely Pakistan as the aggressor that terrorizes neighboring the nation. The use of negative labelling also shows ideological differences. Pakistani newspapers mainly focus on extrajudicial killings, siege, lockdown, and terrorism while Indian newspapers give a lot of attention to cross border terrorism, militants, infiltration, and terror groups. For Pakistan administered Kashmir, India terms it Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) but the Kashmir under Indian administration

is portrayed with harsh adjectives by Pakistani newspapers like Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) which manifests Pakistan's doctrine that the region is usurped illegally by India and it belongs to Pakistan. The lexical choices and frequency found using Voyant Tool also clearly explains that how newspapers use common words for different contexts. "Occupation" refers both the parts of Kashmir under administration of neighboring state. Similarly, the militants for India in Kashmir are freedom fighters for Pakistan. Positive in-group and negative out-group hence are the products of ideological manipulation strengthened by the discursive strategies through these texts.

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