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Gender and Empowerment: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Malala Yousafzai's United Nations Speech

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ABSTRACT

Language is important in the creation and construction of social realities, in the development of identity and in the contestation of dominant ideologies. Public addresses, especially, are effective means of raising social justice awareness and shaping the public opinion on global matters. Within these speeches, Malala Yousafzai's speech at the United Nations Youth Assembly on 12 July 2013 has been shared internationally for its compelling calls to action on girls' education, gender equality and women's empowerment. The speech demonstrates in persuasive and ideologically resonant language the central role of education as a fundamental right and not just as a privilege, and it condemns gender discrimination, violence and extremism. While scholars around the globe have focused on Malala's activism and learned from her influence, little work has attempted to analyse the United Nations (UN) speech from a gender empowerment perspective using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

This study applies a qualitative research design and adopts the three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Norman Fairclough (1995) to examine how the language of speaking and the discourse patterns convey the idea of gender empowerment. The linguistic analysis is mainly informed by textual features, discursive practices and larger social practices, in order to explore how language is used to construct identities, challenge patriarchy and promote girls' education as a strategy of empowerment. Lexical selection, the use of pronouns, modality, repetition, rhetorical devices and persuasive strategies that support the overall discourse of equality and social change are highlighted. The results will show that Malala uses rhetorical devices, linguistic strategies and ideological representations to produce an empowering discourse, which calls for equal educational opportunities to combat social injustice. The present study enriches the study of Critical Discourse Analysis, gender studies, sociolinguistic and educational discourse with a comprehensive understanding of the role of language as a powerful instrument in achieving gender equality and social change.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Gender Empowerment, Malala Yousafzai, United



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Nations Speech, Girls' Education, Discourse, Ideology, Sociolinguistics.

Introduction

Language is one of the most effective means of communication and constructions of ideas, identities and social realities. In addition to its communicative purpose, language is a social activity which embodies cultural attitudes, ideological convictions and power dynamics. Language is used for the negotiation of meaning, for the creation of social relationships and for challenging and reinforcing social structures. The discourse is thus not just a juxtaposition of words and sentences, but a live social phenomenon, which is formed and at the same time forms the political, cultural and historical contexts in which it is produced. The importance of language in the construction of social realities and in the process of social change has been stressed by scholars (Halliday, 1994; Fairclough, 1995).

Public speaking has been identified as a powerful tool in inspiring social movements, mobilizing communities and promoting political and social change. Political leaders, activists and human rights defenders use language in a strategic manner to win over an audience, create collective identities and convey an ideology. This type of speech goes past a simple conveyance of information, motivating audiences to rethink existing beliefs and engage in social reform. Thus, the linguistic analysis of public speeches is useful in the understanding of the functioning of discourse as a communicative tool of persuasion, resistance and empowerment (Van Dijk, 2001; Fairclough, 2003).

Gender inequality and the empowerment of women through education is one of the current topics of much academic and political debate around the world. Although there are many international efforts and commitments to equality of rights, millions of girls are denied access to education due to poverty, armed conflict, cultural norms and patriarchal social structures. The lack of gender equality does not only limit access to education, but also hinder women's involvement in economic, political and social development. As a result, education has been proven to be one of the most powerful tools to empower women, fight poverty, ensure gender parity and drive sustainable development. Girls' education is still being promoted as a basic human right and a crucial precondition for a peaceful and pluralistic world by international institutions.

Malala Yousafzai is one of the most vocal proponents of girls' education, having been inspired by her journey from a schoolgirl in the Swat Valley of Pakistan, to a globally recognised human rights activist who has since inspired millions of people around the world. Malala is a survivor of an attack by the Taliban for advocating for equal education opportunities because of her stand for girls' education in 2012, and has since used her personal story to drive her campaign. Her speech to the United Nations Youth Assembly on 12 July 2013, widely referred to as the 'Malala Speech', was a milestone speech in international discourse on education, peace and gender equality. The speech, which she received on her 16th birthday, highlighted that books, teachers and education are powerful tools which can change societies and help to tackle violence, extremism and discrimination.

Malala's speech given at the UN has garnered global attention due to its strong rhetorical delivery, thoughtful arguments and timeless message of equality and hope. She builds an education as a basic human right, not a privilege, and women and girls as agents of social change, not victims of oppression, throughout the speech. The pronouns are inclusive, repetition helps to create a sense of unity, metaphors serve as a way to strengthen the language, emotional appeals are used to emphasize the language, and the language is persuasive in that it challenges the patriarchal ideologies and promotes the values of peace, justice, and equal opportunity. The linguistic features render the speech an appropriate



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discourse for analysis, especially using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach which focuses on the construction of power relations, ideology, and social identities with the help of language (Fairclough, 1995).

Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a theoretical perspective that interprets language as a social practice that is closely related to the notions of power, dominance, and ideology. CDA is not just a grammatical analysis of language but focuses on the social inequalities, inequalities that are reproduced in discourse as well as opportunities for resistance and social transformation. The three elements of the model – text, discursive practice, and social practice – offer a holistic approach to research into the role of language in larger social contexts. Similarly, Van Dijk (2001) believes that CDA examines the processes by which discourse reproduces and challenges power and inequality in society.

The previous studies have covered Malala Yousafzai's activism from different perspectives such as educational, feminist, political and leadership emphases, but not much attention have been paid to the process of the language construction of gender empowerment from the Critical Discourse Analysis perspective of Fairclough. Previous studies have tended to examine social consequences of her advocacy work instead of the discourse and linguistic approaches used to represent and communicate empowerment. This dearth of qualitative research that is focused on the discourse of the language has been noted as an interesting gap in the literature.

Thus, this study focuses on analysing the role of language in constructing gender empowerment in Malala Yousafzai's UNO Speech. The study is based on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, with a focus on the linguistic and discursive means through which gender inequality is challenged, girls' education is promoted and an empowering discourse of equality and social justice is constructed. This research aims to explore the relationship between language, ideology and power, and to help in the areas of Critical Discourse Analysis, sociolinguistics, gender studies and educational discourse.

Research Questions

The present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

In what ways is gender empowerment created in the language of Malala Yousafzai's speech at the United Nations?

How does Malala Yousafzai use linguistic and discursive tools to raise awareness about gender inequality and the importance of girls' education?

What can be understood from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 1995) from the discourse of the Malala Yousafzai speech at the United Nations?

Research Objectives

The aims of the present study are:

To analyze how gender empowerment is constructed in language when Malala Yousafzai spoke at the United Nations.

To recognize Malala Yousafzai's linguistic and discursive techniques in combating gender inequality and promoting girls' education.

To analyse Malala Yousafzai's speech from the United Nations in the light of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework of Fairclough (1995).

Significance of the Study

The present study adds to the current literature in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA),



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gender studies, sociolinguistics and educational discourse through a qualitative examination of the way gender empowerment is linguistically constructed in Malala Yousafzai's United Nations speech. While the importance of Malala's approach as a pedagogical and political framework has been explored, and her work from a human rights lens, less research has been undertaken to examine the use of language as a means of constructing empowerment, to challenge patriarchal ideas, and to foster social change, using the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis as outlined by Fairclough (1995). The study illustrates how the three components of the three-dimensional model of Fairclough produce meanings of equality, resistance and empowerment through the interplay of text, discourse and social practices. Moreover, by adopting Halliday (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics and Van Dijk's (2001) discourse and power analysis, the language choices and their impact on ideological representation, interpersonal meaning, and discourse and social change can be understood comprehensively.

This study is likely to be useful for linguists and discourse analysts, as well as for educators, researchers and students to explain the role of public speech as a very effective communication tool for promoting the goal of achieving gender equality and securing the educational rights of women and girls using linguistic and rhetorical strategies. The study also has practical relevance to the teachers as it shows how Critical Discourse Analysis can be applied in analyzing political and motivational speeches in language and literature classrooms. Furthermore, it offers a helpful perspective for policy makers, educational institutions and other organisations striving to advance girls' education and women's empowerment by emphasising how discourse can facilitate collective action and challenge discriminatory beliefs. Finally, the study provides a helpful framework for future researchers who may wish to explore the gender representation, ideology, empowerment, political discourse and educational advocacy in other linguistic, cultural and sociopolitical settings (Fairclough, 1995; Halliday, 1994; Van Dijk, 2001).

Literature Review

CDA is an interdisciplinary methodology that explores the relationship between language, power, ideology, and society. CDA has a different perspective from the traditional linguistic analysis of language that mainly focuses on grammatical structures, as language is seen as a social practice in which meanings are created, identities are formed, and power is either affirmed or contested (Fairclough, 1995). It takes for granted that discourse cannot be neutral since there are social, political, and cultural ideologies embedded in the choices of language. Fairclough (1995) suggests that discourse is an agent of both, and at the same time is shaped by society, and Van Dijk (2001) stresses that discourse is an important factor in the reproduction or resistance of social inequality. In the same way, Wodak and Meyer (2016) argue that the discourse always needs to be understood in the historical and sociocultural context. As such, it has been adapted into a framework for speech analysis, analysis of media discourse, for education, and for gender studies, which allow researchers to see language as a tool of persuasion, an ideology, and a social transformation.

The Three-Dimensional Model (CDA: Three Dimensions) by Fairclough (1995) is one of the more influential analytical frameworks in the area of CDA. The model has three dimensions that are interrelated with each other, namely text, discursive practice, and social practice. The textual dimension involves the analysis of linguistic resources like vocabulary, grammar, modality, pronouns, metaphors and rhetorical devices that bring meaning to discourse (Halliday, 1994). Discourse practice is about the way texts are created, shared, understood and used by different audiences, and that meanings can differ based on social and cultural contexts. The social practice dimension examines the social



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or larger context in which discourse takes place and how discourse functions to sustain or reshape the existing power dynamics. Fairclough's framework is a suitable approach for the current study, as it allows for a detailed examination of Malala Yousafzai's linguistic and ideological constructions of gender empowerment.

The term gender does not mean a biological difference but it is a socially constructed concept which refers to the roles, identities and expectations which are attributed to men and women by society (Butler, 1990). In many places, women are deprived of equal access to education, work and decision-making due to gender inequalities. Women's empowerment according to Kabeer (1999) is a process by which an individual acquires the capacity to make a meaningful choice in life through improvements in resource availability, agency and achievement. The power of education is widely acknowledged in women's empowerment, not only as a source of knowledge but also as a catalyst for women's confidence, leadership and economic empowerment. International bodies like UNESCO (2023) and the United Nations are still promoting the importance of girls' education for gender equality and sustainable development. Malala Yousafzai's advocacy for education aligns closely with these principles, emphasizing the importance of education as a fundamental human right and a key tool for achieving equality, peace, and social justice.

Political speeches are effective public discourse tools which can influence the public opinion, convey political ideology and motivate people to take action. The use of repetition, inclusive pronouns, metaphors, emotional appeals, and parallel structures are effective ways of persuading audiences and bolstering an ideology message in effective speeches (Charteris-Black, 2014; Fairclough, 2003). In her speech at the United Nations, Malala Yousafzai uses these persuasive techniques to promote girls' education, and to address issues of discrimination, violence, and patriarchy. Earlier works have studied Malala's speeches from an educational, rhetorical, and feminist angle, but relatively few studies have looked at the speeches from Fairclough's (1995) Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (3D CDA) perspective to analyze the construction of the concept of gender empowerment. The literature on her activism and educational advocacy is largely focused on her without considering the linguistic processes in which empowerment is represented. The present study, therefore, aims to examine the relationship between language, ideology and gender empowerment in Malala Yousafzai's speech at the United Nations and it is qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis of the Malala Yousafzai's speech at the United Nations.

Methodology

Research Design

The research method of the present study is qualitative research of which the method adopted is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze the linguistic construction of gender empowerment in Malala Yousafzai's speech at the United Nations. Qualitative research is well suited to studies in which meanings, interpretations, experiences, and social realities within language are sought rather than the presentation of numerical data or statistical analysis. A qualitative study is different from quantitative research because it involves understanding how people make sense of things in certain social, cultural and political settings, rather than measuring variables and testing hypotheses (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This research is not primarily concerned with the quantification of linguistic features but with the interpretation of the use of language as a tool for empowerment, resistance and ideologization. In public speeches there can be elements of meaning, persuasive techniques



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and socio-political ideology that are not explicitly stated, therefore a qualitative approach is flexible enough to explore these elements of discourse. Furthermore, qualitative research allows for a more in-depth examination of the lexical choices, rhetorical devices, use of pronouns, metaphors, modality and other linguistic elements that help to build up gender empowerment. So qualitative research design is the most suitable design when the objective is to achieve the objectives of this study.

In this study, the main methodological approach used is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which is used to examine the relationship between language, ideology, power, and society. Fairclough (1995) claims that discourse is not just a language phenomenon but a social practice which mirrors and influences social realities. Thus, CDA offers researchers the opportunity to go beyond textual description and explore how discourse works to establish identities, to challenge inequalities, and to enable social change. The analytical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis is suitable for analyzing how language can empower and resist the discrimination of women/girls' education, as Malala Yousafzai's speech at the UN campaigning for girls' education, gender equality, and human rights.

Research Paradigm

The study is carried out from an interpretivist research paradigm and it is based on the assumption that reality can be constructed socially, and meanings are created through language, interaction and the interpretations of humans (Crotty, 1998). The interpretivist paradigm acknowledges that texts exist within a social, historical and cultural context. In contrast, language is seen as that through which one can build one's identity, establish meaning, and express one's ideology.

This paradigm is quite appropriate for the study of discourse, as it allows the researcher to understand what is said as well as what is implied within discourse. In contrast to objectivism and universals, interpretivism is concerned with grasping the social values, cultural beliefs and power relations present in discourse. In this study, the interpretivist approach helps to gain a better understanding of Malala's use of language to create gender empowerment, to question the patriarchy and to demand educational equality in a worldly sociopolitical context.

Data Source

The main source of data is the transcript of Malala Yousafzai's Speech at the United Nations Headquarters in New York at the United Nations Youth Assembly on 12 July 2013. The speech is officially published by the United Nations and is publicly available on the United Nations website and the Malala Fund archives. It was chosen because it is universally acknowledged as one of the most influential contemporary speeches for girls' education, gender equality, peace and human rights.

The speech is rich in linguistic and ideological features that are appropriate for the purpose of Critical Discourse Analysis. It has a range of persuasive arguments, rhetorical strategies, metaphors, repetition, inclusive pronouns, emotional appeals and ideology that all frame an empowering and resisting discourse. Besides, the speech was made in front of an international audience and widely published in the media of the world, thus offering a suitable corpus for the study of language as a means of social change.

Sampling Technique

The study uses a purposive sampling one of the most widely used sampling method in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). Purposive sampling refers to the intentional selection of information-rich data that directly relate to the research purpose(s). Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling where the individuals or instances selected are those



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that have the greatest potential to give meaningful information about the phenomenon being studied.

The speech by Malala Yousafzai at the United Nations was carefully chosen as it speaks directly to the issues of gender equality, girls' education, empowerment, peace and social justice. It is well known internationally as an important instance of persuasive public discourse and thus offers sufficient linguistic and ideological content for a qualitative analysis. The speech is relevant to the research goals and thus it is a suitable and reliable source of information.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collecting involved several systematic steps. The official transcript of Malala Yousafzai's speech at the United Nations was first found on the official website of the United Nations. The transcript was double-checked with the official video of the speech for authenticity and accuracy. This verification allowed for the accuracy of the textual data to be verified with the spoken discourse.

The text in the transcript was then verified, and the researcher reread it multiple times to gain a general understanding of the overall pattern, themes and communicative purposes of the text. The important linguistic characteristics, significant for the research goals were detected and emphasized during these readings. These ranged from lexic items and pronouns, modality, repetition, parallel construction, rhetorical questions to emotional expression. The selected quotes were subsequently grouped into the following thematic categories: gender empowerment, educational advocacy, ideological representation, and persuasive discourse. The categories were then used as the basis for the following Critical Discourse Analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis (CDA), namely textual analysis, discursive practice and social practice.

Textual Analysis

The first stage was concerned with linguistic features of the speech. Lexicological choices, sentence construction, grammar, cohesion, use of pronouns, modality, repetition, metaphor, rhetorical devices and persuasive expressions were analyzed. Special focus was placed on the way these linguistic elements contribute to the representation of women, education, equality and empowerment. The objective of this stage was to determine the language features which are suggestive of the persuasive and ideational qualities of the speech.

Discursive Practice

The second phase analysed the speech production, dissemination and interpretation processes. This stage explored the audience, purpose, and general context around the speech. It also included intertextuality references to education, peace, religion and human rights that reinforce Malala's arguments and make the speech more persuasive. In addition, this stage was linked to the consideration of the possibility that the speech might have varying meanings to different audiences because of their social, cultural and political backgrounds.

Social Practice



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The last stage was designed to examine the context in which the speech was given as a whole in a social and ideological sense. The analysis focused on the impact that the discourse has on challenging patriarchy, on the promotion of girls' education, on the idea of gender equality, and the role of the discourse in contributing to international debates on human rights and social justice. In this context, language was seen as an 'achievement of human practice' which Malala constructs as an empowering discourse that can question inequality and call for social action.

The reliability of the Study

The study adopted the criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in order to guarantee the quality and credibility of the findings. The credibility was achieved by the frequent reading of the transcript and interpretation of linguistic features. The system of recording all steps of the data collection and analysis process ensured dependability. Confirmability was ensured by focusing interpretations on text evidence and not using personal interpretation, as this reduces the researcher's interpretation bias. The transferability of the research was strengthened by the inclusion of detailed descriptions of the research context, analytical procedures, and theoretical framework, which allowed for the possibility of future researchers using the same procedures to similar discourse studies.

Ethical Considerations

This is an analysis of speech donated to the public for general purposes and not involving human participants and does not require ethical approval. However, ethical research guidelines have been used throughout the research. The original text was faithfully conveyed with no modification and interpretations were backed by evidence drawn from the text. All the scholarly sources were referenced and cited appropriately in accordance with APA 6th edition guidelines. The analysis has been carried out objectively and only for the purposes of the study and with a due respect to the integrity of Malala Yousafzai's original speech.

Results and Findings

In this part, findings of the qualitative analysis of Malala Yousafzai's speech at the United Nations (UN) are presented based on the Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework of Fairclough (1995). The analysis examines the ways in which linguistic strategies, rhetoric and ideology representations create a discourse of gender empowerment, education equality and social change. As in Fairclough's model, the discussion is structured along three analytical axes, text, discursive practice and social practice. The results of the analysis revealed five major themes which are presented here in the discussion of the first three themes.

The role of language in empowering women can be summarized as follows:

A major discovery is that Malala establishes gender empowerment by drawing intentional linguistic strategies that situate women and girls as capable and confident actors in society. The speech does not depict girls as victims of oppression, but consistently depicts them as agents of change who are able to change their own lives through education. This inspiring portrayal defies the stereotype of the girl being denied education due to patriarchal beliefs.

A crucial example is the following statement:

"Let us pick up our books and our pens. They are our most powerful weapons."

Metaphor is used by Malala at the textual level to help redefine power. Rather than using power as a synonym for military power or violence, she uses metaphor to refer to books



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and pens as "weapons. The lexical choices represent knowledge, education and intellectual resistance. The metaphor moves the audience's perception of power from one of physical domination to an educational empowerment. Fairclough (1995) says that the meanings of words selected indicate ideology; in this case, the metaphor suggests that the best way to achieve equality is through education.

The other major linguistic characteristic is the reoccurrence of the inclusive pronoun "our". The use of "our books" and "our pens" implies a group, or collective "us". Malala sees education as a collective effort, not a personal responsibility. Fairclough (2003) has maintained that inclusive pronouns promote a sense of collocation, solidarity and participation with the listener(s) and diminish social distance between speaker and audience(s).

The statement at the level of discursive practice reflects the communicative purpose of the speech. The discourse was given before the United Nations Youth Assembly aimed at reaching the Government, educators, policymakers, and the youth coming from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Its easy language and symbolic metaphors help listeners around the globe to comprehend and relate to the message. As a result, the speech is no longer a personal narrative, but rather a part of an international narrative calling for equality in education.

In the social practice that it represents, the discourse directly opposes ideologies of patriarchy which block access to education for girls. In some cultures, access to education is unequal due to cultural norms, lack of funds and gender discrimination. Malala's speech challenges these unequal systems because it replaces the concept of "privilege" with the language of "rights. The discovery has resonated with Kabeer's (1999) definition of empowerment that focuses on agency, participation and access to opportunities as central elements to social transformation.

In general, the analysis shows that the traditional conceptualization of gender empowerment is developed through the symbolic metaphor, the inclusive language, and positive lexical items used to depict the girl image as confident, educated and able to contribute to society.

Education – a tool of empowerment

The second key theme that came from the analysis is the portrayal of education as the basis for empowerment and sustainable social development. Malala's main point is that education can end poverty, ignorance, violence, and gender inequality throughout her speech. She does not limit education to a learning experience, saying it is a right to all humankind and a weapon of peaceful resistance.

The most memorable quote in the speech is:

One Child, One Teacher One Book and One Pen can change the world.

The use of repeated structure from "one" at the textual level provides parallelism and repetition. The following rhetorical devices are used to add emphasis and remember the message. Child and teacher represent the key components of learning, book and pen stand for educational materials, and "can" represents confidence, hope, and possibility. The idea of modality is associated with the speaker's attitude to certainty and commitment as expressed in Halliday (1994). The modal verb suggests a high level of conviction about the transformative power of education in this context.

The symbolic use of books and pens adds to the message of the speech. These teaching aids are presented as instruments that can transform the world; they question the idea that social change can be brought about through political and military influence. Rather, Malala reimagines education as the best means to create equality and justice.



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On a rhetorical level of discourse, this statement is the core idea of the speech. Its use by educational institutions as well as international organizations and media has been widely reported, highlighting the contours of its extension across discourse. It has been adopted into global educational campaigns promoting equal opportunities for children in education, irrespective of their gender or socioeconomic status.

In the field of social practice, the discourse calls into question educational inequality issues of the girls in various developing countries. Malala argues that education is a right for all, a right for boys and girls. This is in keeping with the goal of inclusive and equitable education that UNESCO (2023) has committed to and in line with Kabeer's (1999) argument that education enhances agency and social participation. Thus, education is not only seen as knowledge transfer but also as the basis of empowerment, equality and sustainable development.

A sense of collective agency and identity is fostered within the construction process.

Another important discovery is related to the process of construction of identity through discourse. Malala cleverly builds her identity and a larger collective identity comprised of millions of children who were denied the opportunity to be educated throughout this speech. Instead of concentrating on her own journey as a violence survivor, she metamorphoses her story into a universal message that calls for educational rights for everyone.

The statement clearly says that this strategy is evident:

I don't want to say hate or personal vendetta against the Taliban, I'm here to voice a demand for every child's right to an education.

The use of the first-person pronoun "I" also sets the tone for the credibility of the author, Malala, at the textual level, since it is she who has personally suffered oppression. But the talk soon moves on to the universal "every child" and takes the message beyond the personal level. The use of 'I am here' and 'purpose' are repeated to reinforce purpose and commitment; lexical items such as right, education, and every child help to build a discourse that is one of equality and human rights instead of revenge and conflict.

Also, there is a high incidence of the use of inclusive pronouns (we, our, and us) throughout the speech. These pronouns create a bond between the speaker and the audience, and it calls for governments, teachers, parents, and communities to take responsibility for educational equality. Inclusive pronouns create a sense of community by making a collective identity, as highlighted by Fairclough (2003).

From the discursive level, the speech is directed towards an international audience that has diverse cultures, religions and political systems. As a result, she speaks in a non-divisive discourse. The use of references to human rights, peace and education further fortifies the arguments she is making as they are linked with values that are recognised worldwide.

Students' social practice is approached from a perspective that views the girls and the youth as empowered social actors who can make a difference in the country and the world. Rather than being a passive victim, Malala showcases the girl as a future leader, teacher, professional, and decision-maker. This ideological reconstruction directly counters the assumptions of patriarchy about the social roles of women as well as supports Butler's (1990) argument that identities are "social constructions of discourse and repeated social practice.

The findings show that there is a central role of identity construction in Malala's discourse overall. Her carefully chosen pronouns, lexical choices, and rhetorical structures help her make this transition from personal to global, from individual to collective, and from a personal story to a call to action for education, equality, and shared responsibility.



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Persuasive Linguistic Strategies and Ideological Representation

The fourth theme emerging from the analysis concerns the persuasive linguistic strategies employed by Malala Yousafzai to communicate her ideological stance on gender equality, education, and social justice. Throughout the speech, Malala combines repetition, modality, metaphors, emotional appeals, parallel structures, and inclusive language to persuade her audience and strengthen the impact of her message. These rhetorical strategies not only increase the effectiveness of the speech but also construct an ideological discourse that promotes equality, peace, and women's empowerment. Fairclough (1995) argues that discourse is inherently ideological because linguistic choices reflect social beliefs and value systems. In Malala's speech, persuasive language becomes an instrument for challenging gender discrimination and encouraging collective action.

One of the most noticeable persuasive strategies is **repetition**. The repeated expression,

"One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world,"

creates rhythm and emphasis while reinforcing the central message of educational empowerment. At the **textual level**, repetition highlights the importance of each educational component and demonstrates that meaningful social change can begin with simple educational resources. Rather than emphasizing political authority or economic power, Malala foregrounds education as the principal force capable of transforming society. The repeated word **"one"** also symbolizes that every individual has the potential to contribute to social progress regardless of age, gender, or background.

Another important persuasive strategy is **modality**. Throughout the speech, Malala frequently uses modal verbs such as **must**, **can**, and **should** to express commitment, responsibility, and optimism. For example, she states:

"We must not forget that millions of people are suffering from poverty, injustice and ignorance."

The modal verb **"must"** expresses moral obligation rather than simple suggestion. At the textual level, this linguistic choice communicates urgency and encourages the audience to recognize their collective responsibility toward addressing educational inequality. According to Halliday (1994), modality reflects the speaker's attitude toward certainty and obligation. In this speech, modality transforms educational advocacy into a shared ethical responsibility rather than an individual opinion.

Malala also employs **metaphorical language** to strengthen her ideological message. The metaphor describing **books and pens as "our most powerful weapons"** reconstructs traditional understandings of power by replacing violence with education and knowledge. Charteris-Black (2014) argues that metaphors influence audience perception by simplifying abstract concepts and creating memorable symbolic images. In this case, educational tools become symbols of peaceful resistance against ignorance, discrimination, and extremism. The metaphor therefore contributes to the construction of an alternative ideology in which knowledge becomes more powerful than violence.

The speech further employs **parallel structures** and **inclusive language** to increase audience engagement. Expressions such as **"We call upon all governments... We call upon all communities... We call upon all developed nations..."** create rhythm, coherence, and emphasis while directing responsibility toward multiple social groups. At the level of **discursive practice**, these repeated structures encourage governments, educational institutions, communities, and international organizations to participate



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collectively in promoting educational equality. The speech therefore extends beyond personal advocacy and becomes a global call for action.

From the perspective of **social practice**, these persuasive linguistic strategies challenge dominant ideologies that justify gender discrimination and unequal educational opportunities. Rather than portraying girls as passive recipients of assistance, Malala presents them as capable individuals whose education contributes directly to peace, democracy, and sustainable development. Consequently, persuasion in the speech functions not merely as a rhetorical technique but as a mechanism for constructing new ideological understandings of equality, justice, and women's empowerment.

Discourse of Peace, Equality, and Social Transformation

The final theme identified in the analysis is the construction of a discourse centered on peace, equality, and social transformation. Throughout her United Nations speech, Malala consistently presents education as the foundation for creating peaceful societies and eliminating violence, discrimination, and injustice. Rather than advocating revenge or conflict, she promotes forgiveness, dialogue, and education as sustainable solutions to global challenges. This optimistic discourse positions education as the driving force behind long-term social development.

One of the most significant statements illustrating this theme is:

"The terrorists thought that they would change our aims and stop our ambitions, but nothing changed in my life except this: weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage were born."

At the **textual level**, this statement employs **contrast (antithesis)** through lexical oppositions such as **weakness versus strength**, **fear versus courage**, and **hopelessness versus power**. These contrasting lexical choices symbolize transformation from oppression to empowerment and reinforce the speaker's resilience. Halliday (1994) explains that lexical contrasts enhance interpersonal meaning by highlighting ideological differences. Here, Malala reconstructs her personal experience as a symbol of hope and resistance rather than victimization.

The speech also demonstrates **positive lexicalization** through repeated use of words such as **peace**, **strength**, **courage**, **hope**, **freedom**, and **justice**. These positive lexical choices construct an optimistic discourse that encourages audiences to believe in the possibility of peaceful social transformation. Instead of focusing on violence and suffering, Malala emphasizes resilience, determination, and collective responsibility. Such linguistic choices strengthen the persuasive and inspirational nature of the speech.

"Let us wage a glorious struggle against illiteracy, poverty and terrorism."

The verb **"wage"** is used metaphorically to redefine struggle as an educational rather than military activity. Instead of encouraging armed conflict, Malala advocates a peaceful struggle through education and knowledge. The repeated expression **"Let us"** further strengthens the discourse by inviting audiences to participate collectively in achieving educational equality. At the **discursive practice** level, this inclusive language establishes solidarity among governments, educators, communities, and students while encouraging international cooperation.

From the perspective of **social practice**, the discourse challenges patriarchal structures, educational discrimination, and unequal access to opportunities. The speech consistently represents education as a universal human right that transcends nationality, religion, ethnicity, and gender. It also reflects broader international discourses concerning human rights, peace, democracy, and sustainable development. Consequently, Malala's speech



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positions education not only as an academic activity but also as the foundation for building inclusive, peaceful, and equitable societies.

The analysis further reveals that the discourse promotes **collective responsibility** rather than individual success. Malala repeatedly emphasizes that governments, parents, teachers, communities, and international organizations must work together to guarantee every child's right to education. This collective orientation aligns with Fairclough's (1995) understanding of discourse as a social practice capable of influencing institutional structures and encouraging ideological change.

The overall findings demonstrate that Malala Yousafzai strategically employs language to construct an empowering discourse advocating gender equality, educational rights, and social justice. Across all five themes, the speech consistently utilizes inclusive pronouns, repetition, modality, metaphors, positive lexical choices, emotional appeals, and rhetorical structures to persuade audiences and promote collective action. At the **textual level**, these linguistic features communicate hope, confidence, and empowerment. At the level of **discursive practice**, they establish solidarity between the speaker and a global audience while strengthening the communicative impact of the speech. At the level of **social practice**, the discourse challenges patriarchal ideologies, promotes girls' education, and advocates peaceful social transformation through knowledge rather than violence.

Overall, the findings confirm that Malala Yousafzai's United Nations speech is more than an inspirational address; it is a powerful discourse that reconstructs education as a universal human right and positions gender equality as an essential condition for sustainable social development. The application of Fairclough's (1995) Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis demonstrates that linguistic choices are closely connected with ideology, identity, and power, highlighting the significant role of language in shaping public opinion and promoting social change.

In this section, students learn to recognize the persuasive linguistic strategies and the ideology construction used by the text.

The fourth theme identified from the analysis is related to the persuasive language techniques that Malala Yousafzai uses to convey her ideology of gender equality, education, and social justice. Malala uses repetition, modality, metaphors, emotion appeal, parallel structure and inclusive language throughout her speech to persuade the listener and enhance the effect of her message. They not only make the speech more effective but also build an ideology by creating a discourse of equality, peace and empowerment of the women. For Fairclough (1995) discourse is always ideological because it is shaped by social values and beliefs via language. In Malala's speech, the persuasive language is used to fight gender inequalities and to inspire people to take action.

Repetition is one of the most obvious persuasive techniques. The repeated expression,

“One Child, One Teacher, One Book, One Pen Can Change The World”,

Generates rhythm and emphasis and reinforces the main message of educational empowerment. On the textual level, repetition brings to the fore the significance of each educational element and the fact that meaningful social change can start with simple educational resources. Instead of focusing on the political or economic, Malala puts the education at the forefront as the main driver of change in society. The repetition of the word "one" also means that everyone will have the opportunity to play a part in social movement, regardless of age, gender or background.

Modality is another major technique of persuasion. Malala often uses modal verbs (must, can and should) to show commitment and responsibility and to convey optimism



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throughout the speech. For instance, she says:

It is our duty not to forget that millions of people are living in poverty, injustice and ignorance.

The modal verb "must" is used to show moral "must" and not just a friendly suggestion. The linguistic decision at the text level conveys urgency and invites readers to understand that there is a shared responsibility to the education system to fight educational inequity. Modality is, in Halliday's (1994) terms, "the attitude of the speaker towards certainty and obligation. This speech is about using the power of advocacy in education, but moving beyond opinion to responsibility.

Malala uses metaphoric language to emphasize her ideology. The phrase 'our most powerful weapons' is a metaphor for books and pens replacing violence and force to convey the traditional definition of power. According to Charteris-Black (2014), metaphors affect audience interpretation of the abstract by making it easier to grasp and form memorable symbolic images. Educational tools in this instance become a symbol of peaceful resistance to ignorance, discrimination and extremism. The metaphor is thus a part of the building up of an alternative ideology: knowledge is more powerful than violence.

The speech is also rich in parallel structure and inclusive language to enhance audience interaction. Phrases like 'We call upon all governments... We call upon all communities... We call upon all developed nations...' make for a rhythm, coherence and emphasis; and hold different groups of communities responsible. On the discursive level, these repetitions give governments, educational institutions, communities and international organizations a chance to engage together in the cause of educational equality. The speech thus goes beyond the advocacy of the individual and becomes a universal call to action.

Social practice, as a perspective, emphasizes these persuasive linguistic strategies that question dominant ideologies that legitimate gender discrimination and unequal educational opportunities. Instead of viewing girls as a recipient of support, Malala shows them as capable people whose education brings a direct positive impact to peace, democracy and sustainable development. The role of persuasion in the speech, therefore, is not only a rhetorical strategy, but also a way to create new meanings of equality, justice, and empowerment for women.

Discourse of Peace, Equality, and Social Transformation

The last theme that emerges from the analysis is the building of a discourse that focuses on peace, equality and social transformation. Malala consistently frames education as the key to building peaceful societies and the end of violence, discrimination and injustice throughout her speech at the United Nations. She does not seek revenge or war, but instead preaches forgiveness, conversation, learning as viable ways to solve the world's problems. This positive rhetoric places education at the very heart of the future development of society.

One of the most important quotes in support of this theme is:

The terrorists believed that they would alter our goals and dissuade our desires but nothing changed in my life except this: weakness, fear, and hopelessness were killed. Strength, power, and courage were born.

In the text level, this statement is done through contrast (antithesis) with lexical oppositions of weakness and strength, fear and courage, and hopelessness and power. The usage of these contrasting words represents a shift from oppression to empowerment and strengthens the speaker's ability to withstand. Halliday (1994) notes that the contrasts of words are used to emphasize the differences of opinion between persons and from person



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to person. In this, Malala reframes her personal story as one of hope, resistance and not victimisation.

Positive lexicalization is also found in the repeated use of words like peace, strength, courage, hope, freedom and justice in the speech. The positive lexicon choices create a positive discourse that fosters optimism for peaceful social change. Malala's message is not one of violence and pain but of strength, resolve, and community. Linguistic devices reinforce the convincing and motivating aspects of the speech.

Let us fight valiantly against illiteracy, poverty and terrorism.

The word "wage" is metaphorically redefined as struggle in this way, not in the military sense. Malala does not wish to foster violence but a noble struggle through education and knowledge. The constant repetition of "let us" further reinforces the discourse and allows the audience to join in as a group to create a place for educational equality. On the discursive practice level, this language of inclusion fosters the bonding of governments, teachers, communities, and students and promotes international cooperation.

The discourse from social practice perspective is attacking patriarchy, discriminating in education and unequal opportunities in general. Throughout the speech, the focus is on the right to education, which is always seen as universal, applicable to all, irrespective of nationality, religion, ethnicity or gender. It also mirrors international debates on human rights, peace, democracy and sustainable development. In doing so, Malala's address makes education a form of learning as well as the bedrock for the construction of inclusive societies, peaceful ones and equitable ones.

Discussion

In the present study the issue of gender empowerment in the discourse of Malala Yousafzai's speech delivered at the United Nations was analyzed through the lens of the 3-D Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995). The results indicated that Malala cleverly uses both linguistic and discursive resources to create an empowering discourse, in which she purposefully challenges patriarchal ideology and promotes social change through girls' education. The speech focuses on the use of words and pronouns, repetition, modals, metaphor and rhetorical devices to convey the message that education is a human right and that women and girls are active agents of change, not passive victims. The findings confirm that language is not just a means of communication but a social practice, a means of the construction of identities, ideologies and power relations (Fairclough, 1995).

One of the key results of the study is on the representation of gender empowerment in language. The analysis revealed that Malala continuously portrays girls as capable, resilient and intellectually empowered individuals. She does not focus on victimhood but builds up women as leaders, decision makers and agents of social development. This discovery corroborates Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, which posits that gender identities are socially constructed and rehearsed continually through discourse and social practices. Malala uses empowering lexical choices and inclusive language to disrupt traditional gender stereotypes, re-constructing a female identity that is participatory, dignifying and equal. Likewise, Kabir (1999) suggests that empowerment is about expanding individuals' life choices and their agency. The present results illustrate that this agency is realized mainly by means of education.

The other major discovery is related to the depiction of education as a transformative agent. The analysis has shown that education is always presented as a peaceful way to deal with violence; it is always shown to be the best way to fight for equality, justice and sustainable development. Books and pens, the most powerful weapons, symbolises an ideological



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change from physical confrontation to intellectual empowerment. This is in line with UNESCO's focus on education as the bedrock of social and economic development (UNESCO, 2023). It also corroborates previous studies that show that knowledge is often produced within educational discourse as a means of emancipation and social mobility. While studies are focused on the educational dimensions of Malala's activism, the present research sheds light on the way that language choices themselves can help to create education as a tool of empowerment.

This research also emphasizes the role of constructions of identity in Malala's discourse. The first-person and inclusive pronouns help Malala build personal authority and collective solidarity. The personal voice of the survivor, the pronoun "I," is the voice in which the personal story of a survivor of violence is told, but the pronoun "we" and "our" gradually becomes a collective voice shared by governments, educators, parents and students. This finding corroborates Halliday's (1994) interpersonal metafunction in which the focus is on how language creates interpersonal relationships and intersubjective meanings. In addition, Fairclough (2003) suggests that inclusive language makes the audience feel more involved by making the difference between the speaker and listener more social. From the results of the present study, it is concluded that the use of a pronoun is an important persuasive technique that can change a personal story into a worldwide campaign for educational equality.

The analysis of persuasive linguistic strategies is another important contribution of this study. The results showed that the use of repetition, parallelism, modality, metaphors and emotional appeals significantly enhances the persuasive effect of Malala's speech. The repetition and parallel sentence patterns strengthens the memorability of this material, and further buttress the core ideological message of educational empowerment provided by "One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world. Likewise, the way of book and pen metaphors redefining the books and pens as "weapons" rebuilds traditional notions of power, and violence is replaced with knowledge and learning. These results corroborate the work of Charteris-Black (2014), who contend that metaphor can be a potent rhetorical tool that can engage the audience's views and impact political rhetoric. Thus, it is confirmed that the use of rhetorical strategies is not only a stylistic device but a crucial mechanism for the transmission of ideological values.

The findings also corroborate with Van Dijk's (2001) view that discourse has significant influence in reproducing or challenging social power relations. Malala's speech always challenges patriarchy-based thinking and stands against discriminatory social practices by calling for equal educational opportunity. The language of inequality does not simply exist, but it is created as a discourse of education as a universal human right, equally shared between girls and boys. In the social practice, this ideology representation confronts the existing ideology of gender roles and suggests other social order through the equality, participation and justice. The results therefore show that discourse can be transformative and can shape the public opinion and prompt institutional change.

A significant contribution of the present study is the employment of Fairclough's (1995) Three-Dimensional Model for a speech with global importance in the field of education. Previous studies have often focused on Malala Yousafzai's activism in the feminist, educational or political frameworks, but few studies have combined the analysis of the text, the use of language, and practice of social action. The present study shows that this all-encompassing analytical framework is applicable for analyzing empowerment as embedded in lexical choice, grammatical structures, rhetorical devices and ideological representations. This multidimensional analysis, therefore, adds to the existing scholarship on language, ideology and social transformation by demonstrating this complex



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relationship.

Overall, the results validate Malala Yousafzai's United Nations speech as a powerful discourse of gender empowerment and advocacy for the education of girls. The language and rhetorical tactics are carefully chosen to attack the patriarchal ideologies, to advocate for equal educational opportunities, and to call for shared responsibility in the goal of social justice. The study thus underscores the applicability of Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodological approach to analyzing the role of language in the construction of power, identity, ideology, and empowerment in the current public discourse.

Conclusion

The present study examined the construction of gender empowerment in Malala Yousafzai's speech delivered to the UN through Fairclough's framework of Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The results showed that Malala purposefully uses language as a tool to promote girls' education, as a tool to call into question patriarchal ideologies and as a tool to promote equality, peace and social justice. Using grammatical devices like inclusive pronouns, repetition, modality, metaphors and rhetorical devices like rhetorical questions, the speech shapes education as a basic human right and as an indispensable means of empowerment. These linguistic decisions at the textual level are effective for building a persuasive and emotionally charged discourse, at the level of discursive practice they build solidarity between speaker and the global audience, and at the level of social practice they challenge discriminatory gender norms and promote education for all children equally. The results of this study support Fairclough's (1995) argument that discourse is a social practice that serves as the medium for the production and transformation of ideology, power and identity. They also support Halliday's (1994) perspective that language has an ideational function, interpersonal function and a textual function in the construction of social meanings.

Overall, this study makes a significant contribution to the study of Critical Discourse Analysis, Sociolinguistics, and Gender Studies since it has illustrated how public discourse can be a good medium for social change and empowerment of women. The present study is an attempt to give a thorough linguistic understanding of how gender empowerment is discursively built up in contrast to previous studies which points mainly at Malala Yousafzai's activism from educational or political angle. The study suggests that Malala's speech at the UN was inspirational but was also influential in providing support to educational equality, human rights and collective responsibility. The study is only analysing one of the speeches, but it is an appropriate foundation for future studies on political and motivational speeches using Critical Discourse Analysis. To extend this research further, it might be worthwhile to compare Malala's discourse with the discourse of other global leaders and/or using multi-modal and corpus-assisted research methods to explore the relationship between language, ideology and gender empowerment further (Fairclough, 1995; Halliday, 1994; Butler, 1990; Kabeer, 1999).

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