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**Rhetorical Strategies and Pragmatic Styles in Religious Lectures: A
Comparative Analysis of Javed Ahmad Ghamidi and Engineer
Muhammad Ali Mirza**



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Abstract

Religious communication in Pakistan has taken a new shape with the advent of digital media. Online lectures by such scholars as Javed Ahmad Ghamidi and Engineer Muhammad Ali Mirza influence the discourse of Islam today. Their rhetoric and pragmatic ideologies portray different meanings of faith, power and renovation. The present research seeks to draw a parallel between the rhetorical and pragmatic approaches employed by Ghamidi and Mirza to learn how language constitutes religious power and ideological position in the discourse of a specific population. Ten chosen lectures (5 lectures of each speaker) given between 2018 and 2023 were analyzed using a qualitative comparative discourse analysis. The study used Critical Discourse Analysis and pragmatics frameworks to find out the rhetorical tools, politeness strategy and audience positioning strategies. Evaluation of the analysis showed that Ghamidi uses a rational, inclusive and explanatory tone, focusing on intellectual discussions, whereas Mirza uses assertional, corrective and confrontational rhetoric to claim the authenticity and authority. The present research brings out the differences in linguistic approaches that reflect the opposite ideological orientation in the changing digital religious body in Pakistan.

Keywords: Rhetorical Strategies, Pragmatic Styles, Religious Lectures, Comparative Analysis Javed Ahmad Ghamidi, Engineer Muhammad Ali Mirza

Introduction

In Pakistan, religious lectures turned out to be a leading type of online communication which affects the opinion of people and shapes their religious beliefs. Given the emergence of YouTube and television preaching, religious scholars are now able to communicate to a mass audience outside the conventions of the mosque. Some of the most prolific personalities include Javed Ahmad Ghamidi and Engineer Muhammad Ali Mirza whose lectures have received millions of viewers and brought up controversies on the interpretation of Islam and its power. The two scholars both support reform and intellectual involvement but vary in tunes, argumentation and mode of addressing to the sources of religion. Their rhetorical and pragmatic stylistics provide some interesting insights into the ways in which language is used to create religious ideology and power in the modern media realm of Pakistan.

Although studies have been done on the subject of Islamic preaching and digital religiosity, little has been done to understand how linguistic strategies like rhetoric, pragmatics and discourse structure influence ideological positioning among the contemporary religious speakers. The reason is that most of the literature that exists tends to pay attention to theological material or the reception to the audience and lacks the emphasis on how speakers employ language to convince, justify, and provide a contrast with the traditional clerical authority. This disconnect, renders it hard to comprehend the impacts of the communication styles of Ghamidi and Mirza in terms of their credibility and appeal to the audience in online religious platforms.

Religious power within Islamic settings has been examined in the previous scholarship though scarcely in a comparative and discourse-analytic manner oriented at Pakistani reformist scholars. Very little research has been conducted which

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integrates rhetorical analysis and pragmatic discourse analysis. Therefore, this study fills this gap by analyzing the rhetorical and pragmatic structures in the lectures of Ghamidi and Mirza by connecting the form of language and ideological role.

Research Objectives

To identify the similarities and differences in the major rhetorical strategies and pragmatic styles employed by Javed Ahmad Ghamidi and Engineer Muhammad Ali mirza in their religious lectures.

To explore how do their strategies and styles reflect their religious ideologies and shape their rhetoric

Research Questions

What are the similarities and differences in the major rhetorical strategies and pragmatic styles employed by Javed Ahmad Ghamidi and Engineer Muhammad Ali mirza in their religious lectures?

How do their strategies and styles reflect their religious ideologies and shape their rhetoric?

The study has relevance to the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and pragmatics since it shows that the use of micro-linguistic features reflects ideological contradictions in contemporary Islamic discourse. It also contributes to the knowledge of digital religious power in Pakistan, where rhetoric style can play a bigger role in defining power than status. Theoretically, the research makes the gap between linguistics, media studies and religious communication; in practice, it enlightens how religious messages can be packaged to suit various audiences in the digital age. This study qualitatively examines ten lectures (five lectures by Ghamidi and five by Mirza in the period 2018-2023) on the basis of verbal discourse and linguistic strategies. It does not evaluate the response of the audience and other multimodal characteristics like graphics or gestures. To maintain the contextual nuance, important Urdu or Arabic words (e.g., ijtehad, fatwa) are kept in transcriptions.

Literature Review

Digital religious discourse in Pakistan has transformed the process of developing and consuming religious authority. Online preachers and scholars have become a media personality interpreting Islam to large online audiences (Abbas, 2020). In this dynamic environment, Javed Ahmad Ghamidi and Engineer Muhammad Ali Mirza are opposite yet significant reformist perspectives. In order to contextualize the rhetorical and pragmatic styles of discourse, this review evaluates some of the key themes in five areas; critical discourse analysis (CDA), rhetoric, pragmatics in religious communication, Islamic preaching in South Asia, and media-driven religiosity.

The Ideology and Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the study of the role of language in creating social power and ideology (Fairclough, 2013). Van Dijk (2006) defines discourse as a type of social cognition, in which ideology is reflected as well as reproduced. Fairclough (1995) and Wodak (2001) emphasize the way in which the mainstream ideology is justified with the help of linguistic structures by CDA. Religiously, CDA uncovers the means of assertion and maintenance of sacred power in the form of

interpretive discourse (Khalid, 2021). Thus, the discourse of Ghamidi and Mirza, may be viewed as performances that are ideological in nature as lingual decisions support specific forms of interpretation.

Rhetoric and Ethos in Religious Lectures

The art of persuasion or rhetoric is one of the key elements in religious preaching. The traditional model of ethos, pathos and logos created by Aristotle is still used in contemporary research on the topic of persuasive communication (Charteris-Black, 2011). Ethos is associated with the credibility of the speech-giver which in the religious discourse is commonly connected with the knowledge, piety and humility (Leach, 2019). Pathos is an appeal to the affective side, whereas logos is focused on the logical appeal (Gill, 2018). In the contemporary Islamic discourse, ethos can be manifested in the form of interpretive authority and scriptural reasoning (Asif, 2021). The intellectual tone of Ghamidi is more focused on rational ethos whereas, the confrontational tone of Mirza is based on the moral certitude and corrective authenticity.

Religious Discourse Pragmatic Features

Pragmatics deals with the contextual, intentional and interactive meaning construction (Yule, 2020). The strategies that religious speakers employ to control audience alignment are politeness, presupposition, hedging, and directives (Thomas, 2013). The politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1987) illustrates the impacts of face-saving strategies on power contacts within discourse. Sermons are a frequent use of imperatives and modal verbs as the speakers seek to express authority (Levinson, 2017). The aggressive approach of Mirza can be linked to direct pragmatic approaches, and the explanation tone of Ghamidi can be attributed to cooperative and diluted communication (Riaz, 2022).

Religion and Religious Discourse

A good concept with which religious leadership can be addressed is the concept of charismatic authority as introduced by Weber (1968). The modern religious leaders tend to earn their authority through the skills of rhetoric instead of institutional qualifications (Ali, 2019). Mahmood (2012) believes that religious power in the Islamic societies is becoming more negotiated by discourse but not by lineage. Ghamidi shows himself as a moderate exegete, reaching out to the reformist intelligentsia whereas, the terms used by Mirza are more likely to appeal to ordinary believers who want genuineness (Aziz, 2021). All these rhetorical appeals illustrate that religious authority is pluralized in digital space (Zaman, 2018).

Islamic Preaching South Asia

The South Asian religious discourse has historically developed in the form of oral preaching and television sermons (Ewing, 2008). In Pakistan, such scholars as Dr. Israr Ahmed, Maulana Tariq Jameel and Javed Ghamidi have revolutionized preaching using various rhetoric registers (Shah, 2019). When Islam was connected to nationalism and the discourse of reform, the act of preaching was simultaneously given a moral and sociopolitical commentary (Abbas, 2019). Ghamidi is a discussion that is a continuation of rationalistic reformist with a focus on ijthad and contextual interpretation (Rana, 2020). Conversely, Mirza uses a revivalist corrective tone and

makes the claim of purity in the doctrine but condemns sectarian divisions (Hassan, 2022).

Digital Media and Religion Discourse

The online platforms have transformed the aspect of religious communication through facilitation of emergent interactive relations among the audiences (Campbell, 2013). Specifically, YouTube helps to support the culture of micro-celebrity in which religious legitimacy is created by accessibility and performance (Anderson, 2019). The media stance of Ghamidi is characterized by the focus on civility and interfaith tolerance which is the priority of the discourse of modernists (Rahman, 2021) whereas, Mirza encourages people to remain engaged by the use of directness and controversy (Farooq, 2023). These rhetorical differences are examples of the way digital mediation enhances opposing authority paradigms, rational reformism and populist authenticity (Raza, 2024).

CDA and Religion in Pakistan

The recent research deploys CDA to study sermons, political speeches, and religious discussions in Pakistan. In his analysis, Javed (2022) considered such linguistic techniques as emotional appeals and inclusive pronouns that help to form a sense of togetherness as a component of collective identity. Equally, Ahmed (2020) determined that the discourse of Ghamidi is based on the use of epistemic modality and hedging to achieve the moderation of authority and humility. Instead, in the lectures of Mirza, the element of directive force and negative politeness reduction is observed (Khalid, 2023). The results illustrate the reflection of ideological intention in the form of language an element that is of biggest significance in the comparative context of this study.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study utilises the qualitative comparative discourse analytical design to challenge the rhetoric strategies and pragmatic styles of Javed Ahmad Ghamidi and Engineer Muhammad Ali Mirza in the religious talks. The qualitative strategy is suitable since it enables investigating linguistic, rhetorical and ideological peculiarities in the natural language settings in depth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The work incorporates theories of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Rhetorical Analysis and Pragmatics but specifically uses the three-dimensional framework of discourse proposed by Fairclough (2015) and the theory of politeness developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) to examine how language builds up and reflects ideology. The comparative aspect allows finding out the similarities and differences in the communicative and rhetorical practices of the two scholars, thus showing how individual ideologies are articulated in the discourse. This is an interpretive as opposed to statistical design which does not center on numerical data but processes of meaning-making (Dörnyei, 2021).

Data Collection

The data is ten publicly available religious lectures, 5 by Javed Ahmad Ghamidi and 5 by Engineer Muhammad Ali Mirza, their videos were uploaded in between 2018 and 2023 on YouTube and official websites. These three lectures were deliberately chosen

on the basis of three parameters:

Religion or interpretatio relevance (Islamic law, sectarianism or reform)

Lustration of the typical style of communicative character of each scholar

Popularity and accessibility (popularity of at least 100,000 views of lectures in order to guarantee great engagement with the audience)

The purposive sampling was selected because it was necessary to make sure that the chosen lectures reflect the general discourse practices of each speaker and are not some isolated cases (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2021). The audio data were manually transcribed, paying attention to paralinguistic message, including emphasis, pauses and intonation as they have a pragmatic meaning. Urdu lectures were converted into English but important words were kept (deen, fatwa, ijtihaad etc.) to keep the context.

Analytical Framework

The analysis was based on a three-phase model which was inspired by thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2019) and the discourse model by Fairclough (2015).

Textual Analysis:

This stage considered both rhetorical devices (analogy, repetition, questioning and metaphor), and pragmatic characteristics (hedging, modal and politeness markers). The discussion aimed at determining how the persuasive intent and ideological standpoint is encoded in rhetorical choices.

Discursive Practice Analysis:

In this case, the emphasis was on the way of how every speaker builds relationships with his/her audience by means of turn-taking, the usage of intertextual references, and the evaluation language. Pragmatic markers (e.g., inclusive pronouns, directives, and intensifiers) were used to examine the audience positioning.

The interpretation of Social Practice:

Lastly, the conclusions were deduced within the context of the wider ideological and sociocultural context of the Pakistani religious discourse. The analysis targeted the revelation of the role of rhetoric and pragmatic strategies as religious power vehicles in the digital public (KhosraviNik, 2020). Inductive coding of the data was done so that the patterns could emerge naturally and repeated readings were conducted to ensure consistency and reliability in the themes (Nowell et al., 2017).

Data Analysis

In this work, the information which has been analyzed is chosen words of the religious sermons of Javed Ahmad Ghamidi and Engineer Muhammad Ali Mirza which were broadcasted and also published online during 2018-2023. These two speakers reach the broad digital communities on the YouTube and television platforms whose rhetorical and practical styles are the keys in deciphering the Islamic thinking in the modern context. The analysis recognizes three key rhetorical and pragmatic areas namely, argumentative appeal and ethos construction, discursive positioning and audience interaction and language pragmatics and ideological framing. In every field, convergences and divergences exist in terms of communicative practices.

Ethos Construction and Appeal to Argument

One of the main rhetorical elements of both lectures of Ghamidi and Mirza is the creation of ethos or credibility of the speakers that they develop with the help of various rhetorical strategies and pragmatics. Ghamidi usually uses measured thinking, scriptural intertextuality, and a relaxed explanatory style to prove himself as a rational interpreter of Islam. As an example, when Ghamidi is covering the lecture on Ijtihad (independent reasoning), he opens by saying:

We must understand that Islam is not a collection of fatwas; it is a system of morality grounded in divine wisdom.

This statement is an example of a logos-based rhetorical appeal, the logical exposition that comes first before the authoritative doctrines (Aristotle, 2007). The collective pronouns (we must understand) are used pragmatically in order to lessen the hierarchy between the speaker and the audience by invoking inclusiveness and humility in intellect, which are typical of the Ghamidi style. On the contrary, the ethos of Engineer Muhammad Ali Mirza is created on the basis of force of authority and checking the text. His rhetoric tends to border on corrective discourse which has declarative and imperative sentence structure like:

Main challenge karta hoon ke koi is riwayat ko saheeh sabit kar de” [I challenge anyone to prove this narration authentic.

Such aggressive rhetoric creates the image of Mirza as an orthodox defender by verification whose credibility lies not in moderate interpretation but in rigorous examination. His direct address (aap log dekhiye, sun lijiye) is a pragmatic instrument of immediacy because it puts the listener in the role of an active listener and not a passive one (Sbisà, 2019). Although both scholars use the same means of rational persuasion (logos) and ethical credibility (ethos), their modalities are different: Ghamidi resorts to discursive politeness and philosophical appeal, whereas Mirza resorts to linguistic assertiveness and evidences. These rhetoric oppositions represent their own ideological self-positioning: Ghamidi as a reformist interpreter of modern Islam, Mirza as a textualist challenger of sectarian orthodoxy.

Discursive Positioning and Engagement with the Audience

The second analytical field is related to the way in which both speakers build the audience relationships with the help of the pragmatic discourse markers and rhetorical patterns. Ghamidi is moderately a dialogic and pedagogically moderate person. He often asks rhetorical questions to get people thinking as in:

Kya hum Qur'an ko samajhne ke liye apni soch ko band kar den? [Should we close our minds while understanding the Qur'an?]

This is an excellent example of a Socratic rhetorical strategy which entails intellectual engagement but not the enforcement of dogma. His practical application of interrogatives is indirectly convincing and has a persuasive way of bringing the audience to self-realization by way of reasoning (Hyland, 2019). Also, Ghamidi employs epistemic modality (mujhe lagta hai, mere nazdeek) which dilutes the assertions and forms a discursive ethos of humility and admiration to interpretive plurality.

The engagement strategy of Engineer Mirza is more confrontational/performative. His lectures are usually characterized by the contrastive markers (lekin), repetitive intensifiers (bilkul ghalat, poori duniya mein koi daleel nahi). These linguistic intensifiers do a rhetorical strengthening job, claiming assurance and refuting

opposing interpretations (Barton, 2021). Pragmatically, such utterances deliver high involvement style which tries to keep the attention of the audience with emphatic utterance. Furthermore, Mirza often provides analogies and counter-examples to make the complicated issues in theology easier:

Jaise doctor ilaaj ke liye dawai deta hai, waise Islam bhi masail ka hal deta hai

This analogy is a rhetorical simplification technique which converts abstract concepts in jurisprudence into concrete analogies. Ghamidi, by contrast, usually uses analogies which are philosophical but not illustrative e.g. the revelation is likened to a light which does not replace the reason but guides it. The pragmatist orientation is not the same: Mirza wants to find an answer to a question now, whereas Ghamidi wants to find the answer to a question reflectively.

Pragmatics in Language and Ideological Framing

The third dimension examines the encoding of underlying ideological orientations in the pragmatic style of both speakers. The linguistic pragmatics published by Ghamidi demonstrates a moderate rationalist ideology which is based on coherence and politeness. His constant reliance on mitigative strategies (hedges, politeness markers, and indirect criticism) maintains a civic discourse during discord. To give an example, when opposing the conventional scholars, he proceeds with politeness signs, like:

Bohat azeez ulema ne yeh kaha hai, mein meri rai mein thoda ikhtilaf hai

Such practical diminishment is in line with the politeness theory formulated by Brown and Levinson (1987), which safeguards the positive face of the interlocutors and preserves his own space of interpretation. It shows the ideological inclination of Ghamidi towards dialogic reformism in which opposition is presented in a respectful theological manner. On the other hand, Mirza gets characterized by face-threatening acts (FTAs) which he employs in strategic manners to make himself a non-negotiable truth-seeker. For example:

In maulviyon ne deen ko maslak bana diya hai. [These maulviyas have made a sect out of religion].

This overt criticism acts as an ideological boundary-setting which makes his discourse more distinct than institutional power. The pragmatic outlook of Mirza tends to use the speech acts of challenge and correction which strengthens his anti-sectarianism. Pragmatically, this is a strategy that brings politeness down in the name of the perceived authenticity and truth (Blum-Kulka, 2019).

The discourse modality of both speakers is also different. Ghamidi favors epistemic modality, meaning probability or reasoning (“yani mumkin hai, meri soch yeh hai, farz hai, har Musalman ko maloom hona chahiye, etc.”), whereas Mirza uses deontic modality much more often, meaning obligation or certainty (farz hai). This opposition is part of their ideological coloring: the interpretative malleability of Ghamidi and the determinacy of the text of Mirza.

Rhetorical Framing Compared

The comparative analysis shows that two scholars use rhetorical strategies that are used as different ideological functions in the modern Islamic discourse. Ghamidi has a philosophical, conciliatory and reformist rhetoric where appeals are made rationally, moderation is made in critique and dialogic interaction follows. His pragmatic style is based on what Fairclough (2015) refers to as rational-critical discourse, in which persuasion is achieved by reasoning instead of emotions.

Mirza, in his turn, takes a forensic and corrective rhetoric which focuses on textual validation, polemical challenge and performative authority. His no-nonsense rhetoric is similar to what KhosraviNik (2020) refers to as assertive populist discourse in the realm of digital religion direct, confrontational, and authenticity-based. Interestingly, the two styles overlap in their application of the contemporary digital rhetoric, which is simplification, repetition and vernacular accessibility. They both employ colloquial Urdu with Arabic words in between to create a balance between authenticity and understandability. However, their rhetorical concern is different: the lectures of Ghamidi are focused on rationalization of belief and the aim of Mirza is defense of belief.

Findings and Discussion

The comparative approach to the analysis of religious lectures by Javed Ahmad Ghamidi and Engineer Muhammad Ali Mirza shows that rhetorical strategies and pragmatic styles are being used as the mirror of more profound ideological orientations. The results prove that the two speakers have a similar communicative intention that is rational and reform-oriented but the realization of their rhetoric differs significantly in terms of tone, form and practical implementation.

The study concludes that the rhetoric of Ghamidi is based on intellectual moderation which is resorted to by logical explanation, polite disagreement and reflective interaction. That he is using expressions of hedging (*mere nazdeek, mujhe lagta hai*) and dialogic question forms promotes interpretive plurality which according to Fairclough (2015), constitutes the discourse of rational-critical, in which persuasion is done not through the appeal to the heart but through the appeal to the reason. This strategy places Ghamidi in the history of Islamic philosophical reformism, in which communication is supposed to be enlightening but never confrontational. Pragmatically, his politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987) are to preserve the harmony in the audience and intellectual respect and it is in line with the argument that politeness is considered as a communicative power that preserves the legitimacy and trust (Sbisà, 2019).

In contrast, the rhetoric practice of Engineer Mirza focuses on assertiveness, evidential power and populism. His direct appeals, intensifiers and corrective intonation show what KhosraviNik (2020) terms a digital populist speech which is emotionally sincere and ideologically open. The high use of imperatives and declarative challenges by Mirza makes him a corrective element to the clerical orthodoxy. This rhetorical assertiveness is in line with Blum-Kulka (2019) argument that face-threatening acts that are carried out strategically may lead to increased credibility of the speaker in a context of confrontational discourse. Mirza puts together a rhetoric of religious defiance a populist call to the older scripture over the institutional form of authority by positioning his lecture as a moral and textual defense.

The two scholars employ rhetorical and pragmatic tools to bring theology down to the layman, through simplification, repetition and use of the vernacular Urdu. Nevertheless, they have different ideological directions: Ghamidi advances a reflective, dialogic Islam; Mirza advances a defensive, verification-based Islam. Therefore, their oratory patterns reflect two ends of current religious communication interpretive rationalism and evidential populism each addressing different audience anticipations in the new digital religious realm in Pakistan. Finally, the results confirm

that there is no strictly stylistic nature of rhetorical and pragmatic strategies in religious discourse; on the contrary, it is strongly connected with ideological positioning, audience construction, and negotiation of authority in the contemporary Islamic public discourse.

Conclusion

This comparative research on the religious talks of Javed Ahmad Ghamidi and Engineer Muhammad Ali Mirza comes to the conclusion that the rhetorical strategies and pragmatic styles closely relate to the ideological interpretation, communicative purpose of each speaker and formation of authority. The comparison has shown that despite the fact that both theorists seek to explain and justify Islamic thinking to the modern communities, their rhetoric tendencies and practical gains differ significantly in significant ways which indicate different religious epistemologies and expectations of their audience.

The discourse provided by Ghamidi can be seen as an example of a rational, dialogic and reformist rhetoric. His dependency on rational arguments, signs of politeness and thoughtful-questioning displays his intellectual humility and rational persuasion style of communication. Ghamidi creates the ethos of a scholar who facilitates critical thinking instead of being a mindless follower by focusing on coherence, respect and interpretive flexibility. This mode of rhetoric does not only bring the traditional Islamic argumentation up to date but it also creates an intellectual pluralism and civil discourse in religious interpretation. On the contrary, the lectures of Mirza are characterized by a forensic, assertive and populist way of rhetoric. His imperatives, challenges and emphatic words are frequently used which gives out a discourse of textual authenticity and opposition to the institutionalized authority. His non-hypocritical direct speech acts and limited mitigation create an image of pragmatism and defiance that attracts his audiences who are likely to find some assurance and change amid an imagined world of religious misinterpretation. Therefore, the rhetorical aggressiveness of Mirza represents an example of digital populism and establishes him as a reformist corrective figure in the field of religious media in Pakistan.

After all, both scholars use rhetoric as an instrument of ideological transmission, Ghamidi to reaffirm Islam in a rationalized version and Mirza to justify it in a genuine one. The difference in their pragmatic approach, one of conciliatory and the other of confrontational style, demonstrates the variety of persuasive methods in the contemporary Islamic preaching. These results indicate that religious discourse is a subject of rhetorical analysis that can shed light not just on the communication patterns but also on more in-depth socioreligious processes which shape the modern faith discourse. In future studies, it might be extended to multimodal dimensions (visual cues and audience feedback) in order to learn more about the mechanisms behind religious authority and persuasion in the digital environment.

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