

Framing Action Through Embodiment: The Function of verbs in News Reporting

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of action verbs in Urdu news media discourse through the theoretical framework of Embodied Cognition (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; 1999) and Linguistic Framing (Entman, 1993). Gathering a corpus of Urdu news texts from 2019-2020, the analysis of this study shows how verbs selection systematically maps abstract sociopolitical realities onto sensorimotor schemas including construction, movement, verticality, force, consumption, and communication. Certain verbs including *banana* (to make), *chalna* (to walk), *uthna* (to rise), and *peena* (to drink) demonstrate embodied logic of meaning-making and exhibit how readers cognitively simulate physical actions to interpret complex events. Additionally, these verbs function as framing devices that allocate agency, imply volition, and direct moral evaluation, thereby shaping public perceptions of legitimacy, authority, and cultural values. These findings reveal that Urdu journalism is not linguistically neutral but strategically employs metaphors to shape meaning, reinforce social norms, and guide ideological positioning. By integrating corpus-based analysis with qualitative schema interpretation, this study contributes radical instances to scholarship on language, cognition, and media, giving new insights into the cognitive foundations of framing in South Asian news reporting.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a neutral tool of communication; it functions as a dynamic force that shapes how individuals perceive, interpret, and interact with social realities (Ali et al., 2020; Fiedler, 2008; Kumari, 2024). Within the domain of media discourse, particularly news reporting, linguistic choices play a pivotal role in constructing meaning and influencing public opinion (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 1980; Kumari, 2024; Zafar et al., 2025). This study specifically investigates embodied cognition (EC) and linguistic framing (LF) to examine how action verbs in Urdu news discourse operate as mechanism of embodied simulation and sub-conscious framing (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2019; Hart, 2023). Employing corpus linguistics, this research seeks to empirically analyze how verb selection in Urdu news reports reflects sensorimotor logic while simultaneously framing events, actors, and issues in ways that subtly guide readers' interpretations (Willems & Francken, 2012; Shapiro, 2019).

The theory of Embodied Cognition (EC) challenges the conventional Cartesian view of the mind as a disembodied symbol-processing system, instead it posits that cognition is deeply rooted in bodily experience and sensorimotor interaction with the environment (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999; Varela et al., 1991; Gibbs, 2005; Gibbs, 2006). Central to embodied cognition (EC) are image schemes—recurring embodied patterns such as CONTAINER, SOURCE-PATH-GOAL, and FORCE—that structure conceptual understanding. Language comprehension, particularly verbs involve embodied simulation, whereby readers reflexively engage sensorimotor system to stimulate action described (1a-1b).

1a. The students *grasp* my lecture's crux.

1b. Prices of milk *rise* abruptly.

In (1a-1b), metaphorical extensions of verbs such as "grasping an idea" or "rising prices" are not arbitrary linguistic phenomena; rather they are systematically motivated by embodied experiences and recurrent image schemas, thereby positioning action verbs serve as embodiment hubs that anchor abstract concepts in bodily logic while simultaneously shaping cognitive processing of events. Complementing this perspective, the theory of Linguistic Framing focuses on how lexical and grammatical choices shape perception by foregrounding certain aspects of reality while simultaneously obscuring others (Goffman, 1974; Hart, 2023). Frames, understood as cognitive structures,

organize experience and direct attention, thereby influencing conclusions and moral evaluations (Gitlin, 1980; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Entman, 1993). Within the domain of news discourse, verbs frequently operate as potent framing devices: they assign agency, imply transgression, and characterize actions as powerful or violent, legitimate or illegitimate (Ali et al., 2021a; 2021b; Jabbar et al., 2021; Nazeer et al., 2023). Consider (2a-2d).

- 2a. The protesters were *demanding* fair wages.
- 2b. The protesters were *begging* the authorities to listen to their pleas for justice.
- 2c. The government *cracked down* the protestants.
- 2d. The government *restored* orders in the city after few days.

In (2a-2d), describing protesters as “demanding” conveys a different frame than portraying them as “begging,” while reporting that a government “cracked down” differs significantly from stating it “restored order.” Such subtle lexical choices influence emotional responses, attribution of blame, and support for policies, underscoring that news discourse is not a transparent reflection of reality, but a constructed representation shaped by linguistic framing (Raza & Akram, 2023).

By integrating the theoretical perspectives of embodied cognition (EC) and linguistic framing (LF), this study argues that the selection of the dynamically active verb in Urdu news discourse is simultaneously grounded in sensorimotor embodiment and functions as a framing mechanism. This dual perspective offers a nuanced account of how meaning is constructed in media *texts* and how readers’ interpretations are subtly guided. In doing so, this study makes a significant contribution to bridging a gap in empirical research on Urdu media discourse by demonstrating how embodied cognition and linguistic framing converge to shape public understanding through verbs usage (Hart, 2023; Shapiro, 2019; Willems & Francken, 2012; Raza & Akram, 2023; Zafar et al., 2025).

Research Questions

1. How do action verbs in Urdu news discourse show sensorimotor logic as depicted by Embodied Cognition Theory?
2. In what ways do the choices of action verbs in Urdu news reporting function as framing devices that construct reader’s interpretation of event, action, process and issue?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theory of Embodied Cognition (EC) challenges the traditional Cartesian notion of the mind as a detached symbol-processing system. Instead, positing that cognition is fundamentally grounded in bodily experience and sensorimotor interaction with the environment (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Varela et al., 1991). Central to EC, *image schemas*—recurring embodied patterns such as CONTAINER, SOURCE-PATH-GOAL, and FORCE—structure conceptual understanding and motivate metaphorical extensions of verbs (See Figure 1). As Lakoff and Johnson (1980;1999) famously argued, “*Our conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical in nature,*” highlighting how abstract meanings such as “*grasping an idea*” or “*rising prices*” are systematically rooted in bodily logic. In media discourse, verbs act as embodiment hubs, anchoring abstract concepts in bodily logic. The choice between verbs such as “march” versus “walk” or “attack” versus “clash” activates distinct sensorimotor schemas, shaping how readers conceptualize events (Alghamdi et al., 2025; Ali et al., 2025a; 2025b). This perspective underscores that verb selection in news reporting is not neutral but deeply tied to embodied cognition.

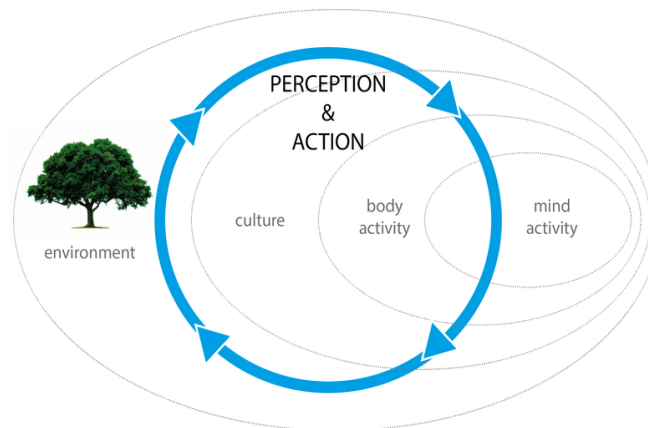


Figure 1: Embodied Cognition

Complementing this idea, the theory of Linguistic Framing (LF) typically focuses on how lexical and grammatical choices foreground certain aspects of reality while obscuring others, thereby shaping interpretation and moral evaluation (Goffman, 1974; Gitlin, 1980; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Entman, 1993). Entman (1993) opines framing as the process of “*selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text,*” a mechanism that gives audiences in defining problems, diagnosing causes, and evaluating legitimacy. Within news discourse, verbs often function as powerful framing linguistic devices: they allocate agency, imply violation, and characterize actions as legitimate or illegitimate, violent or peaceful (Hart, 2023; Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2019). Based on the concepts of Linguistic Framing (LF), verbs are specifically and strongly potent framing devices within news discourse. They allocate agency, imply volition, and characterize actions in ways that shape public interpretation. As Entman (1993) extends, framing involves “*selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text*” (p. 52), and verbs often serve as the linguistic resources through which this salience is accepted and achieved. For instance, describing protesters as “*demanding*” conveys legitimacy, while portraying them as “*begging*” diminishes their agency. Similarly, reporting that a government “*cracked down*” frames the action as coercive, whereas “*restored order*” suggests legitimacy (See Figure 2). These subtle lexical choices influence emotional responses, attribution of blame, and support for policies (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 1980; Hart, 2023; Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2019).

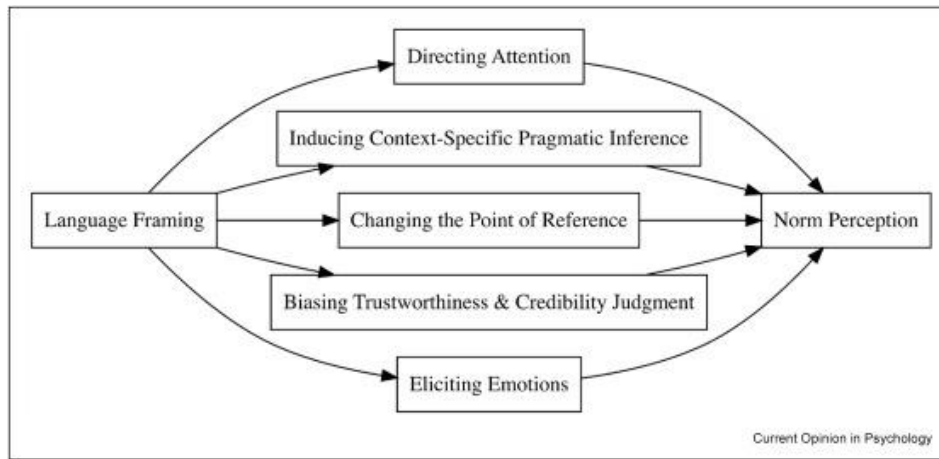


Figure 2: Linguistic Framing

On linguistic framing, many studies (e.g., Raza & Akram, 2023; Zafar et al., 2025; Kumari, 2024; and Nazeer et al., 2023) have recently been conducted focusing on diversified domain of event and language framing including increasingly the intersection of embodied cognition (EC), linguistic framing (LF) and media discourse, with particular investigation on Urdu and South Asian contexts. Such studies depicted how verb choice and framing strategies shape public interpretation, ideological positioning, and social norms (Ashraf et al., 2021; 2025). Firstly, Raza & Akram (2023) conducted a comparative analysis of Eastern and Western media discourse, showing that linguistic framing significantly influences perceptual constructs (Jamil et al., 2025). They articulated that “*framing practices are not neutral but actively shape how audiences perceive legitimacy and agency*” (p. 92), a finding that underscores the importance of verb selection in shaping evaluative judgments. Establishing on this concept, Nazeer et al. (2023) examine the evolution of linguistic strategies in digital news discourse, observing that Pakistani online newspapers increasingly follow and imply dynamic verbs in headlines to capture attention and frame events. Their corpus-based results reveal that “*lexical shifts in digital reporting reflect broader socio-political transformations*” (p. 920), proposing that embodied and framing mechanisms are adapting to digital contexts (Aqsa, 2023; Ali, 2025; Dar et al., 2024; Ilyas et al., 2023; Niaz & Ali, 2023; Saram et al., 2023).

Contrary to Nazeer et al. (2023), Zafar et al. (2025) examined a comparative corpus study of English and Urdu newspaper editorials, integrating ideological positioning. They show that verb choice encodes political stance, with Urdu editorials often employing verbs that emphasize collective agency, while English editorials foreground institutional authority. Their findings confirm that “*ideological leanings are embedded in the micro-level choices of verbs and evaluative lexis*” (p. 50). Furthermore, Kumari (2024) explored language within the broader context of social norms and cultural realities, positing that linguistic framing is a dynamic force in shaping societal values. She emphasizes that “*language functions as a tool for constructing and reinforcing social norms*” (p. 120), aligning with EC’s claim that meaning is grounded in embodied experience. Finally, Nazeer et al. (2023) analyzed linguistic shifts in political discourse in the digital age, demonstrating how rhetorical strategies, particularly verb usage, have evolved to reflect changing modes of political communication. Their study concludes that “*verbs in political rhetoric serve as framing devices that both embody action and direct public interpretation*” (p. 215).

Together, these recently conducted studies demonstrate that *action verbs* in Urdu media discourse are not merely grammatical elements but embodiment hubs and framing mechanisms (Gibbs, 2005). They anchor abstract concepts in bodily logic (EC) while simultaneously shaping ideological and evaluative perspectives (LF). Despite these advances, few studies explicitly integrate EC and LF within Urdu media analysis, leaving a gap that this study pays attention to fill through a corpus-based examination of action verbs in Urdu news discourse.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study selects a *mixed-methods design*, integrating quantitative corpus-based analysis with qualitative interpretive techniques. Such combination licenses both statistical and theoretical depth, permitting the research to capture not only the frequency of linguistic forms but also their cognitive and discursive implications. As Creswell & Plano Clark (2018) argue, “*mixed methods research provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone*” (p. 5), getting more understandable the value of methodological rigor. This design is significantly aligned to examining how *action verbs* in Urdu journalism simultaneously function as embodiment hubs and framing devices. Regarding Cognitive theory, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claim that “*our conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical in nature*” (p. 3), verbs are analyzed for their embodied grounding, while Entman (1993) defined framing as “*selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text*” (p. 52) gives the interpretive lens for their discursive role. This dual strategy ensures that the analysis bridges corpus-based frequency patterns with theoretical insights from Embodied Cognition (EC) and Linguistic Framing (LF), thereby offering a comprehensive account of verb usage in contemporary Urdu journalism.

Data Collection

The dataset for this study is drawn from the Urdu News Dataset available on Kaggle (Shahane, 2021). This corpus compiles texts from a wide range of Urdu news outlets, including 92 News, Aaj TV News, Ab Tak News, APP News, BBC Urdu News, Dawn News, Geo News, HUM News, Khabrain News, Khauj News, Nawai Waqt News, News One, PTV News, Radio Pakistan News, Siasat PK News, and Urdu Point News. The inclusion of both national and international sources provides a representative sample of contemporary Urdu journalistic language, ensuring diversity in style, ideology, and reporting practices. From the dataset, a *stratified sampling* was employed to ensure balanced representation across different media outlets and genres of reporting (political, economic, social, and international news). This approach minimizes bias and allows general insights into verb usage patterns (See Figure 3).

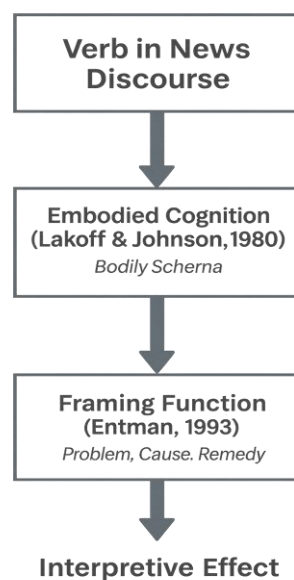


Figure 3: Conceptual Framework

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted using corpus linguistics software---AntConc (Version 3.5.9) for statistical analysis (Anthony, 2024). For this study employed *concordance test* to get the mostly occurring collocation patterns, and frequency distributions. Building upon this quantitative foundation, the qualitative analysis consisted of two interpretive layers---an Embodied Cognition (EC) analysis examined action verbs and a Linguistic Framing (LF) analysis explored how verbs function as framing devices (Alnuzaili et al., 2024; 2025). For qualitative analysis, a *close-reading* technique which involves “*a careful, context-sensitive examination of language use in texts, allowing*

researchers to uncover implicit meanings, framing devices, and ideological positioning” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 7) is employed for textual analysis.

Analysis and Results

The quantitative analysis of the Urdu News Corpus (2019–2020) demonstrated a set of highly recurrent action verbs, including بنانا (to make), کھیلنا (to play), چلنا (to walk/move), چلانا (to drive/run), and بولنا (to speak). Frequency counts and concordance lines generated through AntConc and Sketch Engine highlighted the dominance of verbs associated with construction, movement, and communication. These verbs were not randomly distributed but clustered around specific domains such as politics, economics, and social issues, suggesting patterned linguistic choices in journalistic discourse. Consider Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency Table of Urdu Action Verbs Used in Urdu News Corpus

Rank	Verb (Urdu)	Gloss (English)	Frequency	Normalized Freq
1	بنانا	to make/build	1448	78.816
2	کھیلنا	to play	1357	73.863
3	چلنا	to walk/move	238	12.955
4	چلانا	to drive/run	195	10.614
5	بولنا	to speak	89	4.844
6	پینا	to drink	73	3.973
7	پڑھنا	to read	56	3.048
8	ٹوڑنا	to break	46	2.504
9	اترنا	to descend/fall	44	2.395
10	کھولنا	to open	42	2.286
11	اٹھنا	to rise	32	1.742
12	پکانا	to cook	29	1.578
13	پکڑنا	to catch/hold	28	1.524
14	دوڑنا	to run	13	0.708
15	گھومنا	to wander/spin	12	0.653

Table 1 demonstrates that Urdu journalism relies heavily on embodied verbs to frame abstract sociopolitical realities. High-frequency verbs cluster around construction, movement, and force, reflecting embodied schemas that resonate with readers lived experiences. At the same time, subtle lexical choices (e.g., *attack* vs. *clash*) function as framing devices, shaping perceptions of legitimacy, responsibility, and moral evaluation. Different types of verbs are used in the news discourse. The differences are observed and highlighted in the Figure 4.

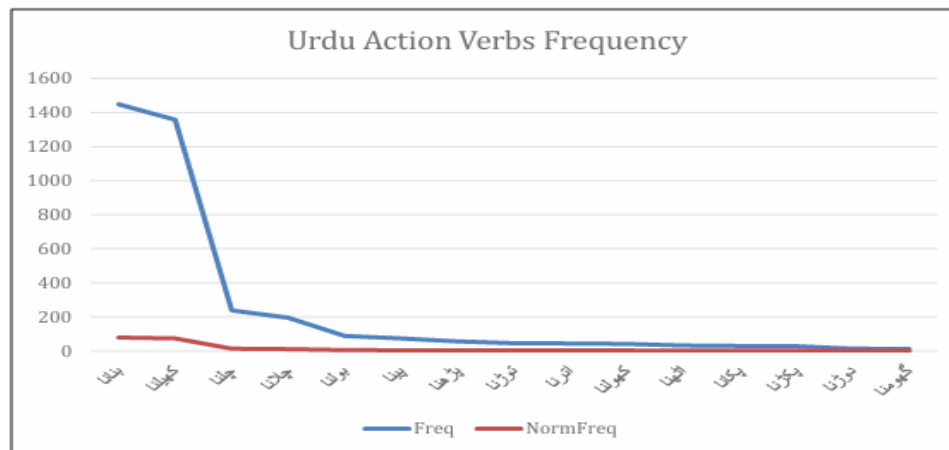


Figure 4: Graphical Description of Urdu News Corpus

The Table 2 that organizes the analysis of corpus verbs according to the Embodied Cognition (EC) and Linguistic Framing (LF) frameworks. Urdu verbs, Urdu sentences are separately shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Action Verbs in Urdu News Discourse

Urdu Verbs	Urdu Sentences	Embodied Cognition	Linguistic Framing
Banana (to make/build)	<i>Awam k mayar-e-zindagi ko behtar banana</i>	CONSTRUCTION schema – life quality as something built	Frames policymakers as active builders, legitimizing governance
Pakarna (to catch/hold)	<i>Drones ne traffic qanoon ki khilaf warzi karne walon ko pakarna shuru kar diya</i>	FORCE schema – law enforcement as grasping	Frames state as enforcer, emphasizing control and deterrence
Torna (to break)	<i>Main logon ki umeedon ko torna nahi chahta</i>	FRAGILITY schema – hopes as breakable objects	Frames hope as vulnerable, speaker as morally responsible
Kholna (to open)	<i>Kam umri mein hi un par kamiyabi ke darwazay kholna shuru kar diye</i>	CONTAINER schema – success as a door	Frames opportunity as accessible, legitimizing achievement
Chalna (to walk/move)	<i>Main duniya ke sath mazhab ko lekar chalna chahta hoon</i>	SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema – religion as journey	Frames coexistence as forward movement, legitimizing harmony
Utarna (to descend/fall)	<i>Yeh jaahil aurat mulk dushmani par utar aayi hai</i>	DOWNWARD schema – decline as fall	Frames anti-nationalism as moral decline, delegitimizing actor
Uthna (to rise)	<i>Is par Bharat ke andar se awazain uthna shuru ho gayi hain</i>	UPWARD schema – resistance as ascent	Frames dissent as legitimate, empowering collective agency
Bolna (to speak)	<i>Humein sach bolna chahiye</i>	COMMUNICATION schema – truth as utterance	Frames honesty as moral obligation, legitimizing speech
Peena (to drink)	<i>Unhein Afghanistan ke haathon shikast ka karwa ghont peena pada</i>	CONSUMPTION schema – defeat as bitter liquid	Frames loss as forced acceptance, shaping humiliation
Parhna (to read)	<i>Apna manshoor ek martaba parhna zaroori hai</i>	VISION schema – knowledge as visual intake	Frames literacy as civic responsibility
Khelna (to play)	<i>Malik Zulfiqar khel nahi hai</i>	GAME schema – politics as play	Frames politics as serious, rejecting trivialization
Chalana (to drive/run)	<i>Wazir-e-azam ka kaam mulk ko chalana hai</i>	MECHANICAL CONTROL schema – governance as steering	Frames leadership as technical operation, legitimizing authority

In Table 2, the analysis of Urdu *action verbs* show that they function simultaneously as embodiment hubs and framing devices, grounding abstract sociopolitical realities in bodily schemas while shaping perceptions of agency, legitimacy, and morality (Agar, 1985). Verbs such as *banana* (to make) and *pakarna* (to catch) evoke construction and force schemas, framing governance and law enforcement as acts of building and grasping, while *chalna* (to walk) and *chalana* (to run/drive) activate source-path-goal schemas, mapping politics onto journeys and mechanical control. Similarly, *uthna* (to rise) and *utarna* (to descend) embody vertical metaphors of success and decline, while *bolna* (to speak) and *peena* (to drink) extend communication and consumption schemas to truth-telling and defeat. These embodied meanings are not neutral; they frame events by allocating agency, implying volition, and directing moral evaluation—*torna* (to break) frames hope as fragile and morally protected, *peena* frames loss as bitter acceptance, and *chalana* legitimizes leadership as technical operation. In a nutshell, the corpus analysis confirms that Urdu journalism relies on embodied verbs to construct reality, subtly guiding readers' interpretations of politics, society, and morality through everyday bodily experiences that resonate cognitively and emotionally.

Discussions

Recent studies (e.g. Raza & Akram, 2023; Zafar et al., 2025; Kumari, 2024; and Nazeer et al., 2023) on linguistic framing and embodied cognition highlights a very strong foundation for representing the results of the current study. The corpus analysis of Urdu news verbs confirms that verb *selection* is never neutral but actively constructs perceptions of legitimacy, agency, and moral evaluation. Raza and Akram (2023) argue that “*framing practices are not neutral but actively shape how audiences perceive legitimacy and agency*” (p. 92). This is evident in the frequent use of verbs such as *banana* (to make) and *chalana* (to run/drive), which frame governance as constructive and mechanical control, thereby legitimizing institutional authority.

Nazeer et al. (2023) demonstrate how Pakistani digital newspapers increasingly employ dynamic verbs in headlines to capture attention and dramatize events. The corpus results provide a strong reason with this observation, as verbs like *uthna* (to rise) and *utarna* (to descend) dominate reporting, activating embodied schemas of vertical movement to frame political fortunes as ascent or decline. Their perception that “*lexical shifts in digital reporting reflect broader socio-political transformations*” (p. 920) is supported by the way embodied metaphors in Urdu journalism adapt to digital contexts, predicting the evolving nature of political communication.

Zafar et al. (2025) put a strong emphasis on ideological positioning in verb selection, observing that Urdu editorials often highlight collective agency while English editorials foreground institutional authority. This distinction is visible in the corpus, where verbs such as *chalna* (to walk) and *uthna* (to rise) frame dissent and collective action as legitimate, embedding ideological leanings in micro-level lexical choices (See Table 2). Kumari (2024) in addition underscores the role of language in reinforcing social norms, stating that “*language functions as a tool for constructing and reinforcing social norms*” (p. 120). Verbs like *bolna* (to speak truth) and *peena* (to swallow defeat) embody this

dynamic, framing honesty as moral obligation and defeat as bitter acceptance, thus reinforcing cultural values of resilience and integrity.

Finally, Nazeer et al. (2023) demonstrate that verbs in political rhetoric serve as framing devices that both embody action and direct public interpretation. This idea is confirmed in the corpus through contrasts such as *hamla karna* (to attack) versus *takrana* (to clash), where the former delegitimizes state action by framing it as coercive, while the latter distributes responsibility by framing conflict as mutual. These findings collectively show that Urdu journalism systematically employs embodied schemas—construction, movement, force, consumption—and framing functions—agency allocation, volition, moral evaluation—to construct reality.

This study radically give one the first systematic, corpus-based picture of embodied framing in Urdu journalism, integrating quantitative frequency counts with qualitative schema analysis to demonstrate how everyday bodily actions—such as *banana* (to make), *chalna* (to walk), *uthna* (to rise), and *peena* (to drink)—are consistently employed to frame abstract political, social, and economic realities. Unlike earlier studies (Zafar et al., 2025; Kumari, 2024) that focused mainly on comparative discourse, headline strategies, or ideological positioning, the findings of this study demonstrate how embodied cognition and linguistic framing operate together at the micro-level of verb choice across multiple domains of Urdu news, representing not only ideological bias but also the cognitive mechanisms through which the common readers simulate meaning. This integration of corpus linguistics with embodied schemas and framing functions makes the study distinctive, facilitating radial empirical evidence that verb choices in Urdu media are both cognitively embodied and discursively strategic.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the study concludes that action verbs in Urdu *news discourse* vividly embody sensorimotor logic, grounding abstract sociopolitical realities in everyday bodily experiences. Certain verbs including *banana* (to make), *chalna* (to walk), *uthna* (to rise), and *peena* (to drink) activate schemas of construction, movement, verticality, and consumption, representing how readers cognitively simulate these actions to understand complex action and events. In this way, the discourse relies on embodied metaphors that construct physical experiences onto intangible domains like governance, resistance, decline, and defeat. At the same time, the *selection* of action verbs functions as powerful *framing devices* that shape readers' interpretations of events, actions, processes, and issues. Using verbs of building and control, agency is allocated to leaders and institutions; through verbs of rise and fall, legitimacy and moral evaluation are implied; and utilizing verbs of speech and consumption, cultural values such as honesty and resilience are reinforced. Thus, verb choice in Urdu journalism is not neutral—it is both cognitively embodied and discursively strategic, mapping how audiences understand legitimacy, agency, and morality while guiding their emotional and ideological responses to news events.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the contributions of this study, the study bears certain limitations. The corpus is restricted to Urdu news texts from 2019–2020, which may not fully capture diachronic shifts or variations across other genres such as literature, social media, or spoken discourse (Agar, 2021). Furthermore, while the analysis shows embodied schemas and framing functions, it does not account for reader reception or cognitive processing in real-world contexts, putting aside questions about how audiences interpret these verbs. Lastly, the emphasis on verb selection, though revealing, excludes other linguistic elements such as adjectives, metaphors, or syntactic structures that may also contribute to framing. These limitations suggest that future research should expand the dataset, incorporate multimodal analysis, and explore audience studies to provide a more comprehensive understanding of embodied framing in Urdu media.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication, financial, institutional, or personal relationships associated with this study.

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