

STYLISTIC AND ECO CRITICAL LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON THE MARGALLA HILLS URBANIZATION DEBATE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand the ways in which environmental ideology was formed in the public debates on the urbanization process in Margalla Hills, Islamabad, Pakistan. The research uses a combination of ecocriticism, stylistics, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore the ways in which language shapes the public consciousness about ecological awareness and protection/preservation issues in relation to urban development. The data consists of a number of screenshots from social media postings, public comments, and digital news discussions about the development and construction activities around Margalla Hills. The research focuses on the language choices (lexicon selection, metaphoric expressions, stylistic devices), transitivity patterns and ideological structuring of the discourse as revealed by the qualitative analysis. The results indicate that the Margalla Hills are being viewed as a life-giving ecosystem with metaphors such as “lungs of the capital”, “green heritage” and “protective shield”. Meanwhile, urbanization is frequently viewed as a harmful process with terms such as “ecological degradation”, “unchecked deforestation” and “irreversible damage”. The discourse also highlights the ideological struggles between the agenda of modernization and that of protecting the environment. Citizens and environmental groups are seen as defenders of nature while state institutions and developers are associated with commercial development and infrastructural expansion. Eventually, the study identifies the relevance of language in the formation of ecological consciousness, public opinion, and environmental resistance in the digital discourse of the Margalla Hills urbanization debate.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, urbanization and the expansion of infrastructure are a serious environmental issues in the modern world. The development of commercial and residential real estate increasingly occupies natural habitats, leading to deforestation, loss of biodiversity, ecological collapse, and climate change (Stibbe 14). Language plays a central role in ecological awareness and ideological positioning (Fairclough 27). Margalla Hills urbanization is a prominent conservation-development discourse conflict in Pakistan. Margalla Hills National Park, located in Islamabad, is considered a natural treasure with significant ecological and cultural and aesthetic value. It is a habitat for rare species of flora and fauna and essential ecological safety zone in the

capital of Pakistan.. However, expanding infrastructure, road construction, commercial development of this area is proceeding at a steady pace. The discussion of the urbanization of Margalla Hills is not an objective presentation of the issue but reflects public opinion, ideologies, and power structures through language discourse (Fairclough 27). This study explores the role of language in constructing environmental ideologies within public discourse about the urbanization of Margalla Hills. The methods of ecocriticism, stylistics, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) are used to explore how language shapes environmental attitudes and public opinion on the issue of the urbanization of Margalla Hills (Glottfelty and Fromm xviii; Widdowson 18).

The concepts of ecolinguistics, which relate linguistic structures to ecological consciousness and environmental ethics, were also introduced to the analysis (Stibbe 14). Discourse can either normalize urban expansion or imagine resistance to environmental destruction by means of linguistic framing and foregrounding (Halliday 106). This research analyzes selected screenshots from social media discourse related to the Margalla Hills urbanization debate.

Literature Review

Ecocriticism examines the relationship between language, literature and the natural world. It examines the manner in which nature is formed in literature and how discourse affects people's perception of ecological realities. Cheryl Glottfelty defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment". It emphasizes that literature not only describes nature but also helps in shaping environmental values and attitudes. From this perspective, literature is a potent cultural instrument capable of either perpetuating exploitative practices or fostering consciousness of the environment (Wajid, 2025b).

In a similar vein, Lawrence Buell argues that environmental writing should make the nonhuman environment itself the focus, rather than as a mere backdrop for human action. Buell's work shows the influence of speech on ecological consciousness that affects the ways in which readers perceive environmental crises (The Future of Environmental Criticism, 2026b). This view of the world presents the problem of anthropocentrism, the idea that humans are the central or most important entities. To justify environmental destruction, anthropocentric narratives tend to frame nature as a resource for human use (Acha, 2022). But nature-centered rhetoric questions this hierarchy by affirming the intrinsic value of ecosystems.

Ecological representation in speech is an analysis of how environmental issues are linguistically framed. Language can normalize things like deforestation, urban growth and pollution by presenting them as unavoidable signs of "development". Alternatively, foregrounding sustainability, biodiversity and interdependence can promote ecological consciousness (Coupland, 2010b). Therefore, apart from the thematic representations of nature, Eco critical studies also focus on the rhetorical strategies that shape public perceptions of the environment. From this point of view, discourse is a place where ecological values are negotiated and contested.

Language and Text: Stylistics explores the meaning and effects of linguistic and textual decisions. It focuses on features such as word choice, sentence structure, figurative language, and tone. In stylistics, Geoffrey Leech points out, the linguistic form is related to interpretation, specifically through foregrounding and deviation, Leech (2014). Emotional language, metaphors and repetition can influence the response of an audience in the digital environment of discourse. Using the term "war" to describe a climate change, for instance, signals a sense of urgency, and frequent slogans or hashtags can help drive main messages home. Using emotional language to create a response of fear, urgency, or hope with audience for digital

environmental discourse. Audiences can better understand difficult concepts through metaphors. Climate change can be thought of as a “war” making it an urgent problem. Repeating certain statements, taglines and hashtags can help reinforce messages and foster a feeling of collective interest.

This analysis is further reinforced by M. A. K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics that correlates the social function of language choices. Halliday recognizes three levels of meaning: textual, interpersonal and ideational. They are helpful in understanding how reality is constructed, how attitudes are expressed in environmental discourses, and how messages are constructed. There is also persuasive language and tone that reveals an author's ideological stance, and formal or urgent language that can shape the perception of environmental issues (Schleppegrell & Oteiza, 2023).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach that analyses the role of language in power and ideology systems. The work of Norman Fairclough understands discourse as social practice which is produced by power relations. He claims that dominant discourses can shape the framing of an issue and the voices that are heard in the public arena. In environmental debates, such stories could be told from the corporate, political or economic point of view to the exclusion of other ecological viewpoints (Fairclough 2003).

Teun A. van Dijk is one of the researchers who highlights the cognitive side of discourse, which states that the frequent use of linguistic patterns can recreate ideologies (van Dijk, 2011). The environmental discourse tends to occlude ecological impacts and marginalize impacted communities by framing urbanization as a “progress”. CDA also looks at the ways in which the passive construction and nominalisation can be used to deflect responsibility for environmental damage. These strategies indicate the ways in which political and commercial concerns can influence environmental debates (Kaufman & Smith, 1999).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical approach to this study will be grounded in three theories: ecocriticism, stylistics, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The three theories will be integrated in order to understand how language is used to create an environmental ideology in public discourse on the Margalla Hills urbanization debate. These strategies simplify how ecological meaning, style, and ideology are formed in digital environmental discourse.

Ecocritical Framework

Eco-Criticism is an interdisciplinary field that studies the interaction of the natural world, language, and culture by examining the discourse of nature (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). The dichotomy of anthropocentrism vs. ecocentrism is a major issue in ecocriticism. Anthropocentrism means sees man as superior to nature and considers the environment as a source of economic growth and urban expansion. Ecocentrism, by contrast, places emphasis on the intrinsic value of nature, promotes a balance, sustainability, and conservation of nature. These conflicting ideologies are present in public discourse in the Margalla Hills urbanization debate, with development being seen as 'progress' or 'environmental destruction'. Ecocriticism analyzes green issues in digital public debate.

Stylistic Framework

Stylistics focuses on the language style and language options create meaning, emotion, and ideological effects in discourse (Widdowson, 1975). It emphasizes words used, imagery, metaphor, tone, repetition, and vocabulary of emotion. The terms used in environmental debates, like deforestation, “concrete jungle,” or “green identity,” are important to public perceptions of urbanization and ecology. Metaphorical expressions

and emotive language are used to emphasize environmental issues, and changes in tonal pitch indicate support or criticism for development projects or urgency. Modality is also used to indicate certainty, obligation, and ideology with words such as “must,” “should,” or “will.” These stylistic elements not only help to define environmental issues, but they also help to influence the understanding and public evaluation of environmental issues.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a method that explores the ways in which language is used to reflect and construct power, ideology, and social meaning in society (Fairclough, 2015). Linguistic framing in the Margalla Hills urbanization discourse is urban development as “progress and modernization” or as “ecological destruction and environmental threat.” These opposing accounts spotlight the tension between development policies and environmental protection. CDA also uncovers the roles played by other social actors like government bodies, developers, environmental groups, and citizens in the discourse, thereby directing social consciousness and environmental decisions.

In all, the use of ecocriticism, stylistics, and CDA enables a holistic understanding of the role of language in the construction of environmental ideology in the Margalla Hills urbanization debate.

Methodology:

This research has a qualitative research design and involves Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and ecolinguistic analysis to analyze public discourse on the proposed urbanization of Margalla Hills, Islamabad. This approach is guided by the findings of the earlier works on environmental discourse in the Pakistani media, in urban planning discourse, and in the ecological representation of digital texts.

Both Ecolinguistic Analysis of Environmental Discourse in Pakistani Print and Digital Media and Critical Discourse Analysis of Urban Park and Public Space Development, which examine the role of language in constructing environmental issues, power relations, and ideological perspectives, have the greatest impact on the study.

Research Design:

This is descriptive qualitative research. Because meanings, attitudes and ideological assumptions within public discourse are to be interpreted, it is appropriate to use a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative approach to measure linguistic frequency.

To understand the connection among language, ideology and power in texts of Margalla Hills development, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used. Discourse is not neutral, as it is a representation of social struggles, institutional power, and conflicting interests, CDA says.



For the Margalla Hills, discourse on urbanization is about a conflict of:

Environmental protection and up-to-date technology

Public opposition and governmental development plans

A concern for ecological ethics and commercial growth.

Furthermore, the concept of ecolinguistics is introduced to examine the linguistic nature of the representation of nature and how discourse contributes to its sustainability.

Data Collection:

Data is comprised of 7 screenshots taken from publicly available digital platforms. These include: social media posts, digital news headlines, public commentary. A series of visual-textual opinion letters on the development and construction projects in Margalla Hills. Data collection was conducted through purposive sampling, which is commonly used in discourse studies, in which texts are selected based on their relevance to the research problem.

Selection criteria included:

1. The screenshot should contain one of these: Margalla Hills, urbanization in Islamabad, and the environment.
2. Text should include recognizable linguistic features such as evaluative language, metaphor, irony, or ideological positioning
3. There should be a clear social positioning in the post, e.g., criticism, support, concern, activism, etc



One of the chosen screenshots from Google reads: “Yes, let’s destroy the remaining green space in Islamabad, as concrete felt like it had been underrepresented all over the city.”

The following screenshot has been chosen as it includes sarcasm, negative lexical elements, the framing of the environment, and implicit criticism of urban planning policies.

Analysis

Data Analysis Procedure

The collected screenshots are analyzed manually using five analytical levels based on the literature selected.

Lexical Analysis

Lexical analysis is about the word selection and the implied meaning. This step helps to locate words that create specific attitudes to urbanization and ecology. Important words are “bulldozed” means “forced,” or “violent,” or “destroyed,” “ruin” which means irreversible damage, “green” refers to nature, sustainability, life, and Industrialization refers to urban dominance; concrete. Based on ecolinguistic approaches, lexical choices are analyzed to see if they are in favor of ecological harmony or environmental degradation.

Stylistic Analysis

Stylistic analysis involves analysing tone, sentence structure, punctuation and rhetorical devices. The following are considered: sarcasm, irony, metaphor, personification, informal digital language.

It follows, therefore, that the word: “Concrete was feeling underrepresented.”

Personifies and satirizes over-construction in the city. These stylistic decisions contribute to the emotional impact and influence audience interpretation.

Transitivity Analysis

This study is based on the framework of transitivity analysis developed by M. A. K. Halliday to analyze the agents and actions in representation. The analysis identifies: *Actors* those who do the action. The process in the form of an action (*type of action*). Who or what is being affected (Goals)

Example: "Let's bulldoze and destroy the last green field." So here actor is implied authorities/developers, process/ action is bulldoze and ruin, and the final goal is area that is still green "last patch of green". This shows the responsibility of discourse for environmental destruction.

Ecocritical Representation of the Margalla Hills

An ecocritical approach is used to view nature through the discourse. This stage is dedicated to symbolic constructions of Margalla Hills as endangered ecological space, natural heritage. The dialogue of the public view of Margalla Hills is that the hills are an integral part of the ecology and not merely geographical space. The hills are represented as life-sustaining, having a green identity and being a green heritage through the use of expressions like "protective shield", "green heritage", "lungs and natural water filter". PPP's leader Malaika Raza says that the Margalla Hills serve as a protective shield, maintaining temperature, keeping ground water intact and providing important ecological services. This metaphor conveys humanisation of nature and emphasises on its role in safeguarding urban-life. Likewise, WWF-Pakistan says that it is "the lungs and natural water filter to the capital city" (WWF-PAKISTAN), a metaphor that juxtaposes nature as a living organ with the need to survive. It enriches ecological awareness and evokes feelings of involvement with the environment. Scientific and environmental terms like "ecosystem services", "groundwater recharge", "micro-climate regulation" and "wildlife corridors" are also used in the discourse. This analytical step is underpinned by environmental discourse studies, which consider language as playing a central role in the development of ecological awareness and raising voice against ecological damage done by urban development.

Ideological Analysis

The last step is to uncover the underlying ideologies, assumptions and power structures.

An analysis of the discourse in terms of oppositional binaries: nature vs. development, citizens vs. policymakers, preservation vs. commercialization. Numerous texts place environmental activists and citizens as protectors of nature, and authorities are implicitly linked with modernization agendas and business interests. This stage is where it can be seen how discourse shapes greater political significance than merely in environmental commentary.

Theoretical Foundation

This approach is based on: CDA for language, ideology, and power relations. Ecolinguistics for the ecological framing and nature representation. The expanded field of urban discourse studies, city planning narratives, and development rhetoric. These frameworks enable a multidimensional study of the debates on urbanization in the Margalla Hills in the public digital discourse.

Ethical Considerations

All screenshots are taken from public sources. Access to any private or restricted data was not made. The research is limited only to the text and visual discourse for academic purposes.

Urban Forestry and its economic role in cities

The gathered content consistently portrays urbanization as being detrimental to both the environment and to society. The use of strong negative diction all across the discourse links development with the ecological imbalance and the threats to climate and public suffering. Words like "unchecked deforestation" and "irreversible risks", "habitat fragmentation", "ecological degradation", and "development-driven impacts" set the tone for an alarming picture and make urbanization an unsafe process. Malaika Raza cautions **"unchecked deforestation turns forests into concrete and enhances climate risks like floods, heatwaves and droughts"**(Raza). The juxtaposition of the contrast of forested areas and concrete areas symbolically depicts the clash between nature and modernization. Likewise, WWF-Pakistan expresses its worry over the ongoing threat of "potentially irreversible risks" and "measurable ecological degradation" because of the irreversible damage being caused to the environment by infrastructure expansion.

Whenever climate change and public health crises are mentioned, the public is further heightened. Ahmed Saleem states **"In the process of urbanization the city has found itself in a muddle it is contributing to climate change and loss of green spaces from erosion and urban flood"**(Ahmed Saleem, *Dawn*). This reflects how lived experiences of residents contribute to environmental discourse, making urbanization not only an ecological issue but also a socio-spatial concern. This is a matter of ecological anxiety and sees urbanization as a cause of environmental instability.

In addition, the language regularly and consistently associates loss of lives with degradation of the environment, such as with the reference to respiratory stress, poor air quality, cardiac risk, and loss of life. These statements move the debate beyond an environmental one to that of public health and human survival.



Public Discourse: Stylistic Features and Persuasive Language

The discourse used in screenshots is very strong and persuasive to shape public opinion on development projects in the vicinity of the Margalla foothills. Metaphorical constructions remain a key stylistic strategy, metaphors like “protective shield”, “lungs of the capital” or “green identity” embodies nature as a protective and living force, it helps to build emotional connections among people and nature, and foster environmental consciousness. Another key characteristic is the employment of pathos in the diction, words like “serious and escalating concern,” “brutal evictions,” “irreversible damage,” “public outrage” and “furious climate” instill fear, sympathy and urgency in readers. The loaded language helps to influence people's negative perceptions of urban development projects and their positive feelings about environmental protection.

The discourse represents contrastive framing which emphasizes the ideological struggle between development and environmental protection. Urbanization is promoted by government officials as modernization and progress, using terms like “international-standard facilities” and “recreational opportunities”, and “future development schemes.” The environmental groups and residents, on the other hand, see the same projects as harmful and environmentally irresponsible.

The city, in part, has not lost its green image but it has been diminished, Dr Suleri says. This is a personification of the city and highlights the gradual degradation of Islamabad's environmental character. He

also cautions that “The price of replacing natural infrastructure with asphalt, plazas, housing schemes, and parking lots is found in hotter streets, poorer air quality, increased respiratory stress, increased cardiac risk and increased family and hospital stress”(Suleri). This cumulative structure makes the environmental degradation and its impacts on human life more severe. Likewise, WWF-Pakistan has repeatedly called for “transparent environmental review,” “public disclosure” and “stakeholder consultation.” These expressions defy institutional power and emphasize democratic governance of the environment. The organization also calls upon the authorities to create “no-go zones” in which all types of development must be banned, further emphasizing the need to protect the environment.

Ecocritical and Stylistic Analysis of News Paper Article Based On WWF-Pakistan’s Statement on Margalla Hills Urbanization

The present study will examine the ecocritical and stylistic analysis of the article published in The Express Tribune which is shown in screenshot. The online newspaper article, based on WWF-Pakistan's statement, portrays the Margalla Hills as an ecologically important and vulnerable environmental area that is under pressure due to the pace of urban growth and development. The author uses an ecocritical discourse, foregrounding of style, and persuasive choice of its lexicon to establish a dichotomy between environmental preservation and modernization and commercial development.



The discourse, from an ecocritical point of view, is not only about the Margalla Hills as a geographical entity, it is also about a living ecological system that is crucial to environmental sustainability and public survival. The hills have been described as a “critical ecological landscape” and metaphorically as the “Lungs and natural water filter to the capital city” (Web Desk, 2026). This metaphor brings into focus the notion that nature is a living entity that sustains life as well as highlighting its essential role in the ecological systems. The discourse

analogizes hills with human organs, enhancing the emotional bond with nature protection and seducing towards an ecocentric point of view in which nature has a value that goes beyond the commercial use. It also draws from science and environmental jargon to create institutional authority and ecological validity for the discourse. The language of the statement is created and involves the terms "needs," "habitat fragmentation," "wildlife movement corridors," "ecosystem services," and "ecological degradation," which belong to a scientific register (Web Desk, 2026). These words choices highlight the gravity of the destruction of the environment and make WWF-Pakistan a learned and trusted environmental body.

Stylistically, the discourse is highly emotive and alarmist in its diction which is used to create public opinion against the development of the area surrounding Margalla Hills. The use of phrases like "serious and escalating concern," "potentially irreversible risks," "massive clearing" and "public outrage" inject an urgency and an ecological concern (Web Desk, 2026). The lexical items that are used in a negative way are highlighted by their repetition, calling to mind the vulnerability of the environment and resistance to commercial expansion.

The report also shows illustrative cross-cadre ideological differences between the discourse of the conservation of the environment and the discourse of modernization. The concept of government-led development projects is linked to "five-star hotels", "sports facilities" and "future development schemes", which point to anthropocentric ideas on economic growth and modernization. WWF-Pakistan, on the other hand, highlights the importance of preserving the environment, ecological sustainability and transparency in environmental governance. This brings a conflict of interpretation about the balance between development and ecology into the discourse.

In addition, the transitivity patterns in the position development activities in the discourse have positioned the agents of destruction, namely, transitivity patterns, as active and a passive agent, namely, nature, as endangered. The phrase "development activities... pose serious and potentially irreversible risks" and "infrastructure expansion... had already caused measurable ecological degradation" (Web Desk, 2026) imagines urbanization as the source of the environmental damage.

In addition to this, the discourse also involves public health issues, where environmental damage is associated with human suffering through the use of terms such as 'respiratory problems', 'allergies' and 'public health'. This expands environmental concern beyond ecology into questions about human life and human welfare.

The newspaper report in total is filled with metaphorical expressions, scientific terms, emotional words and contrasting ideas to create a conclusive ecocritical discourse against urbanization around Margalla hills. The concept of the nature as vulnerable but at the same time life sustaining fosters awareness of nature and makes it a moral and social obligation to preserve the environment.

Findings

In this study, I have found that, the discourse of the public with regard to the urbanization debate in the Margalla Hills is not only based on ecological concerns, but also on emotional language and ideological conflict. The analysis indicates that the Margalla Hills are consistently and repeatedly portrayed by environmental activists, political leaders, media and citizens as a natural space of value and danger. The reason is that the discourse is metaphorical, rather than using just "lungs of the capital", "green heritage" and "protective shield", it humanizes nature and increases people's emotional connection with nature. The hills are described using these metaphors to foster an ecocentric viewpoint, seeing the hills as integral to ecological equilibrium and human life.

The study goes on to show that urbanization is often discussed in a negative light, using terms like ‘unchecked deforestation’, ‘irreversible risks’, ‘ecological degradation’ and ‘habitat fragmentation’. These words build development into a danger to biodiversity, climate stability, and public health. Environmental issues are given authority and seriousness by scientific terms such as “ecosystem services”, “groundwater recharge” and “micro-climate regulation”. The discourse is sarcastic, ironic, emotive in vocabulary, repetitive and contrastive, stylistically appealing to the public opinion and exaggerating the environmental awareness.

The analysis also shows that there is substantial division between modernization and ecological preservation ideology. Government institutions and developers tout them as evidence of progress and economic development and environmental groups and citizens see them as environmentally harmful. The transitivity patterns also help to situate the development authorities as perpetrators of environmental harm, while nature is seen as weak and threatened. The overall results indicated that the results obtained validate that language plays a significant role in influencing the ecological ideology, public opposition, and environmental awareness of the Margalla Hills issue.

Conclusion

This study highlights the role of language in the environmental ideology and perception in the debate for the urbanization in the Margalla Hills. It emphasizes the work of the integration of ecocriticism, stylistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to depict the public discourse processes of creating competing narratives of development and of preservation of the environment. It shows that these are not just geographical features, but vibrant ecosystems that play a crucial role in maintaining biodiversity, regulating the climate and promoting the health of its inhabitants. The use of metaphorical expressions such as ‘lungs of the capital’ and ‘protective shield’ helps the people to connect and feel responsible for nature.

Moreover, the study unveils that the major negative lexical items, emotive words and persuasive linguistic elements that are used to represent the negative image of urbanization are means to emphasize its environmental destructiveness. The perception of modernization as an enemy of ecological sustainability and health of human beings is reinforced by the use of expressions such as “ecological degradation”, “irreversible damage” and “unchecked deforestation”. Conversely, the official and developmental discourses often frame infrastructure projects as markers of modernity, economic development and urban growth. The difference in ideology underlines the ongoing battle between business and ecology.

Moreover, the research documents the digital discourse’s role of an important forum of environmental resistance and public activism. The citizens and environmental groups can question the institutional power and spread awareness of ecological destruction to others via social media comments, public statements, and online reports. The study thus focuses on the non-neutrality of discourse as it can reveal power dynamics, ideological conflicts and social issues related to environmental issues. In sum, the study advances the study of the role of language in shaping ecological consciousness and environmental debates in the digital public sphere in Pakistan.

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