

Forensic Linguistic Approach to Political Discourse in Kerala: An Analysis of Language, Power, and Politics

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Abstract

Language constitutes one of the most powerful instruments in political communication. Political actors employ linguistic strategies to construct identities, mobilize supporters, delegitimize opponents, and shape public opinion. Kerala, renowned for its high literacy rate and politically conscious electorate, presents a unique environment for examining the relationship between language and politics. This article applies a forensic linguistic approach to selected political issues in Kerala, focusing on political speeches, election campaigns, media statements, social media discourse, and public controversies. The study explores how linguistic evidence can reveal ideological positioning, hidden meanings, persuasive strategies, identity construction, and power relations. The article argues that forensic linguistic analysis offers valuable insights into political communication and contributes to understanding the dynamics of political conflict, misinformation, and public persuasion in contemporary Kerala.

Keywords: Forensic Linguistics, Political Discourse, Kerala Politics, Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Communication, Identity Construction, Media Language.

1. Introduction

Forensic linguistics refers to the application of linguistic knowledge to legal, investigative, and institutional contexts. While traditionally associated with authorship

attribution, courtroom discourse, and criminal investigations, contemporary forensic linguistics has expanded into the study of political communication and public discourse.

Political language is never neutral. Every lexical choice, metaphor, pronoun, slogan, accusation, or narrative frame reflects ideological intentions and strategic goals. Kerala's political landscape, characterized by intense competition among the Left Democratic Front (LDF), United Democratic Front (UDF), and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), provides a fertile ground for examining how language functions as an instrument of political power.

Recent scholarship on political communication demonstrates that linguistic choices shape political perceptions, ideological alignments, and public mobilization. Studies of political discourse further show that metaphors, code-switching, symbolic language, and narrative framing significantly influence audience reception. (Sravani, Kameswari, & Mamidi, 2021).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Forensic Linguistics

Forensic linguistics investigates language as evidence. In political contexts, forensic linguistic analysis examines:

- Speech acts
- Lexical patterns
- Discourse structures
- Pragmatic meanings
- Implicatures
- Narrative strategies
- Ideological framing

The objective is to identify how language constructs political realities and influences public perception.

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides an important theoretical foundation for forensic political analysis. CDA assumes that language both reflects and reproduces social power relations.

Political discourse often reveals:

- Dominance
- Resistance
- Ideological conflict
- Social exclusion
- Identity construction

Through linguistic examination, researchers can uncover hidden structures of power embedded within political communication.

3. Political Communication in Kerala

Kerala's political culture is unique within India due to:

- High literacy rates
- Strong ideological traditions
- Vibrant media culture
- Active civil society participation
- Intense political competition

Political narratives in Kerala frequently revolve around:

- Secularism
- Communalism
- Development
- Welfare politics
- Caste and community identities

- Gender issues
- Environmental concerns

The state's political discourse demonstrates sophisticated linguistic strategies aimed at influencing diverse audiences. Scholars have noted that Kerala's political culture is deeply embedded in symbolic communication, identity narratives, and ideological contestation. (Kannangara & Devarapalli, 2019; Paul, 2026).

4. Linguistic Features of Kerala Political Discourse

4.1 Metaphorical Language

Metaphors play a crucial role in political persuasion.

Examples include:

- "Political tsunami"
- "Development revolution"
- "Communal virus"
- "Corruption network"

Such metaphors transform abstract political issues into emotionally charged narratives. Research demonstrates that metaphorical language increases audience engagement and strengthens ideological framing.

4.2 Pronoun Usage

Political leaders strategically employ pronouns:

- "We" creates solidarity.
- "They" constructs opposition.
- "Our people" creates in-group identity.

Forensic examination of pronoun patterns often reveals ideological boundaries and political polarization.

4.3 Lexical Polarization

Political discourse in Kerala frequently employs polarized lexical categories:

Positive Self-Representation Negative Other-Representation

Progressive	Reactionary
Secular	Communal
Democratic	Authoritarian
Development-oriented	Anti-development
People's movement	Political conspiracy

Such lexical choices contribute to the construction of political identities.

5. Case Studies in Kerala Politics

5.1 The Sabarimala Controversy

The Sabarimala issue generated competing narratives:

One discourse emphasized:

- Constitutional rights
- Gender equality
- Judicial authority

Another emphasized:

- Faith
- Tradition
- Religious autonomy

Forensic linguistic analysis reveals that each side strategically selected lexical items to frame the issue in morally persuasive terms. The controversy illustrates how competing truth claims and narrative management shape public discourse in Kerala. (Paul, 2026).

5.2 Political Violence in Kannur

Political violence in Kannur has long occupied a central position in Kerala's political discourse.

Political actors frequently use linguistic strategies such as:

- Victimhood narratives
- Heroic representation
- Martyrdom discourse
- Moral justification

Ethnographic studies demonstrate that political violence is often accompanied by symbolic and rhetorical struggles over legitimacy and collective memory. (Chaturvedi, 2007).

5.3 Minority Politics and Identity Construction

Minority discourse in Kerala frequently involves:

- Community representation
- Rights discourse
- Secular identity
- Vote-bank allegations

The language used in political debates reflects competing interpretations of citizenship, representation, and social justice. Researchers note that religion and caste continue to influence political communication despite Kerala's reputation for secular politics.

6. Social Media and Digital Political Discourse

The emergence of social media has transformed political communication in Kerala.

Characteristics include:

- Rapid dissemination of narratives
- Meme culture
- Hashtag campaigns
- Digital activism
- Political trolling

Forensic linguistic tools can identify:

- Coordinated messaging
- Narrative repetition
- Linguistic markers of misinformation
- Ideological framing patterns

Recent studies suggest that Kerala's digital political environment increasingly exhibits characteristics associated with post-truth politics and narrative competition. (Paul, 2026).

7. Authorship Attribution and Political Communication

A significant area of forensic linguistic inquiry concerns authorship identification.

Applications include:

- Anonymous political pamphlets
- Social media posts
- Leaked communications
- Campaign materials

Stylometric analysis may examine:

- Vocabulary preferences
- Sentence structure
- Function-word frequency
- Code-switching behavior

Such methods help identify potential authorship patterns and political affiliations.

8. Code-Switching and Political Identity

Kerala politicians frequently switch between:

- Malayalam
- English
- Hindi
- Arabic-derived expressions in Muslim contexts

- Sanskrit-derived expressions in Hindu contexts

Code-switching serves several functions:

- Identity signaling
- Audience adaptation
- Prestige construction
- Emotional appeal

Political discourse research shows that language mixing can effectively communicate ideological positioning and group affiliation. (Sravani, Kameswari, & Mamidi, 2021).

9. Forensic Analysis of Political Misinformation

The forensic linguistic study of misinformation focuses on:

- Narrative construction
- Repetition patterns
- Emotional triggers
- Framing devices

Indicators include:

- Excessive emotional language
- Ambiguous sourcing
- Strategic vagueness
- Presupposition manipulation

Political misinformation often succeeds because it aligns with existing ideological beliefs and group identities rather than factual verification.

10. Findings

The study identifies several recurring patterns:

1. Political discourse in Kerala is highly ideological.
2. Language functions as a tool of identity construction.

3. Metaphors significantly influence public perception.
4. Political actors frequently employ polarization strategies.
5. Social media amplifies linguistic manipulation and narrative competition.
6. Forensic linguistic methods effectively uncover hidden ideological structures.

11. Conclusion

A forensic linguistic approach provides a powerful analytical framework for understanding political issues in Kerala. Political communication in the state is characterized by sophisticated rhetorical strategies, ideological framing, symbolic representation, and identity construction. Through the examination of lexical choices, discourse structures, metaphorical patterns, and digital communication practices, forensic linguistics reveals how language operates as a mechanism of political power.

As political communication increasingly shifts toward digital platforms and narrative-driven campaigns, forensic linguistic methodologies will become even more relevant for analysing political persuasion, misinformation, and democratic discourse. Future research may integrate computational linguistics, corpus analysis, and artificial intelligence to develop more comprehensive models for studying political language in Kerala and beyond.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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