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CONSTRUCTING GUILT, INNOCENCE, AND RESPONSIBILITY: A CORPUS-ASSISTED FORENSIC DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PAKISTANI SUPREME COURT CRIMINAL JUDGMENTS

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Abstract

Judicial judgments are consequential institutional texts in which legal facts, evidential claims, participant identities, credibility, responsibility, and legal conclusions are constructed through language. This study proposes a corpus-assisted forensic discourse analysis of Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgments to investigate how guilt, innocence, doubt, credibility, and responsibility are linguistically produced. The study combines forensic linguistics with Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Appraisal Theory. A specialized corpus of approximately 80–120 publicly available criminal judgments from the Supreme Court of Pakistan is proposed for the period 2010–2025, subject to final corpus verification and balancing. Corpus techniques will identify frequency, keywords, clusters, collocations, concordances, and recurrent evaluative expressions, while qualitative analysis will examine transitivity, modality, participant representation, agency, evidentiality, evaluation, and judicial authority. Recent Pakistani research has examined modality, hedging, metaphors, lexical density, performatives, and evaluative language in Supreme Court judgments, but comparatively less attention has been given to the integrated construction of guilt, innocence, and responsibility across a substantial criminal-judgment corpus. The study therefore proposes a multi-layered model in which quantitative corpus evidence guides close forensic interpretation. The article argues that judicial language should be treated neither as a transparent container of legal facts nor as purely rhetorical language: it is an institutional resource through which evidence is organized, voices are prioritized, agency is assigned or backgrounded, and legal conclusions are justified. The proposed model can contribute to forensic linguistics, corpus-assisted discourse analysis, legal English, and Pakistani judicial-language research.

CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

Language is inseparable from the administration of justice. Courts do not encounter facts in an unmediated form; facts enter the judicial process through statements, documents, testimony, submissions, investigative reports, medical evidence, precedents, and judicial narration. A judgment subsequently reorganizes this evidential material into an authoritative account of what happened, what was proved, what remained uncertain, and what legal consequences follow. Judicial judgments are consequently not merely repositories of legal rules. They are institutional discourse events in which linguistic choices participate in the production and communication of legal meaning.

In criminal adjudication, this linguistic dimension becomes especially significant because the central questions concern guilt, innocence, culpability, credibility, intention, evidence, doubt, and responsibility. A judgment may describe an accused as having committed an offence, as being allegedly involved, as having been falsely implicated, or as receiving the benefit of doubt. These formulations do more than vary stylistically. They position participants differently in relation to agency, evidence, certainty, and legal responsibility. Similarly, a witness may be characterized as trustworthy, natural, confidence-inspiring, interested, unreliable, inconsistent, or improved. Such labels function as evaluative resources through which testimony is accepted, weakened, or rejected.

The proposed research, titled "Constructing Guilt, Innocence, and Responsibility: A Corpus-Assisted Forensic Discourse Analysis of Pakistani Supreme Court Criminal Judgments," addresses this relationship between language and legal judgment. It focuses specifically on written criminal judgments of the Supreme Court of Pakistan and asks how recurrent linguistic patterns contribute to the representation of legal actors and the construction of evidential and moral positions. The study is located primarily within forensic linguistics but draws on corpus linguistics, SFL, CDA, and Appraisal Theory to develop a multi-dimensional analytical framework.

The Pakistani context is particularly valuable because English occupies a major role in formal judicial writing while legal reasoning operates within a multilingual social environment. Judicial texts therefore constitute an important site for investigating institutional English, legal formulaicity, evidential reasoning, and power. Recent Pakistani scholarship demonstrates growing interest in the linguistic analysis of Supreme Court judgments. Studies have examined metaphors, hedges, lexical density, modality, judicial performatives, evaluative language, and corpus-forensic approaches. However, these studies generally isolate a particular linguistic feature or a small set of judgments. The present study proposes to connect several dimensions within one analytical model and to focus specifically on the discourse construction of guilt, innocence, and responsibility.

The central problem is therefore not whether judicial language contains linguistic patterns; it clearly does. The more important question is what those patterns do within the legal reasoning process. For example, passive constructions can background an actor; nominalizations can compress complex actions into abstract legal entities; modality can calibrate certainty or obligation; reporting verbs can position competing voices; evaluative expressions can strengthen or weaken witness credibility; and evidential collocations can establish the apparent rationality of a conclusion. A corpus-assisted approach makes it possible to identify these patterns systematically rather than selecting isolated quotations impressionistically.

Objectives:

1.To identify recurring lexical and grammatical patterns in Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgments.

2.To examine how these patterns construct guilt, innocence, doubt, credibility, and responsibility.

3.To investigate the representation of accused persons, victims, witnesses, police, prosecution, defence counsel, and the court.

4.To develop a corpus-assisted forensic model for judicial discourse in Pakistan.

Research Questions:

1. How do Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgments linguistically construct guilt, innocence, and responsibility?
2. What linguistic resources are used to represent accused persons, victims, witnesses, police officials, prosecution, defence, and the court?
3. What recurring corpus patterns—lexical, collocational, grammatical, modal, and evaluative—characterize the construction of legal responsibility?
4. How do corpus patterns interact with transitivity, modality, appraisal, and institutional authority in judicial reasoning?

The study is significant because judgments can affect liberty, reputation, punishment, compensation, and public understandings of justice. A forensic linguistic account does not replace legal interpretation; instead, it makes visible the linguistic mechanisms through which legal reasoning is communicated. The study may therefore be relevant to linguists, legal scholars, lawyers, judges, legal translators, law students, and researchers working at the intersection of language and law.

The proposed contribution is also methodological. Rather than treating corpus linguistics and discourse analysis as competing methods, the study uses corpus evidence to locate salient patterns and qualitative analysis to explain their discourse functions. This combination can reduce cherry-picking while retaining the contextual sensitivity necessary for forensic interpretation.

CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Forensic linguistics and judicial discourse

Forensic linguistics examines language in legal and investigative contexts. Its scope includes police interviews, courtroom interaction, legal drafting, disputed authorship, confessions, emergency calls, witness statements, and judicial texts. Within this field, judicial discourse is particularly important because judges exercise institutional authority through language. The judgment is simultaneously a record of reasoning, a response to arguments, an evaluation of evidence, and a performative institutional act.

Recent work confirms the growing value of corpus-assisted approaches to legal discourse. Rodríguez-Puente and Hernández-Coalla (2023) describe the Corpus of Contemporary English Legal Decisions (CoCELD), a resource containing judicial decision samples from 1950–2021 and demonstrating the value of specialized corpora for diachronic research on legal language. Their work is important methodologically because it shows how judicial language can be studied systematically across a substantial body of authentic decisions rather than through isolated examples.

Su et al. (2023) investigated epistemic modality in translated and non-translated Hong Kong court judgments using a corpus-based approach. Their findings emphasize the role of modality in expressing probability, managing propositions, and recognizing alternative viewpoints. This is directly relevant to the present study because criminal judgments frequently distinguish between what is established, what appears probable, what cannot be accepted, and what remains doubtful. Modality can therefore be treated as a linguistic mechanism for calibrating judicial commitment.

Ye and McKeown (2023) examined targeted agreement and disagreement in appellate decisions in Hong Kong through Appraisal Theory and corpus-assisted discourse analysis. Their study demonstrates that judicial disagreement is not random; judges use patterned evaluative resources to endorse, counter, or reject legal positions. This supports the present study's interest in how judgments organize competing voices and construct institutional authority.

Philippine courtroom research has likewise demonstrated the importance of evaluation. A 2022 study of evaluative language in a Philippine drug trial found that Judgment resources were prominent in courtroom discourse, especially in the assessment of witness-related issues. This is theoretically significant for the present project because credibility is central to criminal adjudication and is inherently evaluative.

Within Pakistan, Ahmad and Jami (2023) conducted a corpus-based analysis of metaphors in Supreme Court judgments using a specialized corpus of Pakistani legal discourse. Their work shows that metaphor is not absent from highly formal judicial language and that corpus methods

can reveal systematic conceptual patterns in judgments. The present study extends this corpus orientation from metaphor toward responsibility, evidence, agency, and participant representation.

Khaleel, Sana-e-Zahra, and Ahmed (2023) investigated lexical polarity in Pakistani legal drafting and identified patterns involving modality, contradiction, legal disparity, metaphor, and evaluative meanings. Their findings support the view that Pakistani legal language cannot be understood solely as neutral technical vocabulary; lexical choices participate in institutional evaluation and social positioning.

Mughal, Rashid, and Chohan (2025) analyzed hedges in 113 Supreme Court of Pakistan judgments comprising more than 770,000 tokens. Their corpus-based findings indicate that hedges can increase precision while also mitigating the intensity of judicial propositions. This is highly relevant to the proposed analysis of doubt and certainty. Expressions of qualification may distinguish a proposition that is legally established from one that is merely inferred.

A 2025 study by Ullah and colleagues applied Grice's maxims to a 2024 Supreme Court case and argued that judicial language can be examined in terms of information quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. Although the theoretical framework differs from the present study, it reinforces the broader point that judicial language can be evaluated as a structured communicative practice rather than simply as a collection of legal rules.

Recent research has also examined lexical density. Ahmad, Rubab, and Faiz (2026) reported a corpus-based analysis of 25 Pakistani Supreme Court decisions and identified high lexical density and substantial nominalization. Such findings are relevant to responsibility analysis because nominalization can transform processes into abstract entities, potentially reducing the visibility of human agency. A sentence that foregrounds "investigation failure," for instance, may linguistically compress a chain of actions involving identifiable institutional actors.

Rabbani, Sharif, and Qasim (2026) examined modality in Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgments using SFL. Their analysis distinguished modalisation and modulation and reported that obligation was particularly prominent in dispositional sections, whereas evidential reasoning employed modal resources to construct certainty and caution. This directly supports the proposed focus on modality as a bridge between evidence and judicial commitment.

Shahzadi, Tabassum, and Qasim (2025) applied SFL transitivity analysis to Pakistani High Court criminal judgments. Their work demonstrates how transitivity can be used to examine meaning and power in authentic judicial texts. The present study extends this analytical interest to Supreme Court criminal judgments and connects transitivity specifically to responsibility and participant representation.

Ahmad, Anwar, and Shaffaqat (2025) examined judicial performatives in 80 Supreme Court of Pakistan decisions and used computational extraction to identify declarative and directive expressions. Their work is important because it highlights the performative dimension of judicial authority: the court does not only describe legal reality but institutionally declares and directs within the limits of its jurisdiction.

Malik (2026) combined CDA, corpus linguistics, and Appraisal Theory in the analysis of high-profile Pakistani judicial verdicts, including the Panama Papers and Cypher cases. This recent study is particularly close to the present proposal because it demonstrates the feasibility of a corpus-forensic-CDA approach in Pakistan. The distinction, however, is that the present study focuses on a broader criminal corpus and explicitly organizes the analysis around guilt, innocence, responsibility, evidence, and participant representation.

Akhtar, Din, and Naqvi (2025) conducted a forensic linguistic analysis of a Pakistani murder-trial judgment and used sociocognitive discourse analysis and legal stylistics to investigate narrative construction and credibility. While their study demonstrates the value of close qualitative examination, a multi-judgment corpus is needed to determine whether observed patterns are recurring genre features or case-specific choices.

Finally, recent research on courtroom discourse in Pakistan has examined language, power, institutional identity, and legal bilingualism. Such work highlights the asymmetric nature of legal communication and provides a wider

sociolinguistic context for interpreting judicial language.

2.2 Research gap

The literature demonstrates three important developments. First, Pakistani researchers increasingly use corpus methods to examine authentic judicial language. Second, individual linguistic resources such as modality, hedging, metaphor, lexical density, appraisal, and performatives are receiving attention. Third, forensic and critical perspectives are increasingly being combined.

Nevertheless, a clear gap remains. There is limited integrated corpus-assisted research on how Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgments construct the three interrelated categories of guilt, innocence, and responsibility. Existing studies often focus on one linguistic feature, a small number of cases, a single constitutional controversy, or a different legal genre. There is therefore a need for a systematic criminal-judgment corpus in which transitivity, modality, evaluation, evidentiality, participant representation, and recurrent lexical patterns are interpreted together.

2.3 Systemic Functional Linguistics

Hallidayan SFL views language as a resource for making meaning. The present study uses two metafunctionally relevant areas: transitivity and modality. Transitivity concerns the representation of processes, participants, and circumstances. It is useful for identifying who is represented as acting, who is affected, and which actors are backgrounded. Material processes may foreground actions attributed to an accused; mental processes may represent beliefs or intentions; verbal processes can identify who said what; relational processes can assign identities or qualities.

Modality concerns degrees of certainty, probability, obligation, and inclination. In judicial discourse, modal expressions can indicate how strongly the court commits itself to an evidential proposition or how strongly it states an obligation. The distinction between modalisation and modulation is therefore relevant to the construction of evidential certainty and institutional directives.

2.4 Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA treats discourse as socially situated and connected with power. Judicial discourse is a particularly strong form of institutional discourse because it can impose legally recognized consequences. The present study does not assume that judges intentionally manipulate language. Instead, it investigates how institutional power becomes linguistically visible through participant selection, evaluation, quotation, presupposition, agency, and modality. CDA therefore provides the interpretive level necessary for explaining what corpus patterns may mean within institutional relations.

2.5 Appraisal Theory

Appraisal Theory provides tools for examining evaluation, engagement, and graduation. In criminal judgments, evaluative resources can be used to assess witnesses, evidence, arguments, investigative conduct, and legal propositions. Judgment resources are particularly important when the court evaluates human behavior and credibility. Engagement is relevant when judges acknowledge, endorse, reject, or counter propositions. Graduation helps identify how strongly evaluations are expressed.

2.6 Integrated analytical model

The study therefore proposes the following analytical sequence:

Corpus evidence → salient lexical patterns → collocation/concordance → transitivity and agency → modality and evidential commitment → appraisal and evaluation → participant representation → construction of guilt/innocence/responsibility → institutional authority.

This model is intended to prevent purely impressionistic discourse analysis while preserving contextual interpretation.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

The study adopts a corpus-assisted qualitative research design. Quantitative corpus procedures will be used to identify recurrent linguistic patterns, while qualitative forensic discourse

analysis will interpret their contextual functions. The design is appropriate because the research questions concern both frequency and meaning.

3.2 Data source and corpus construction

The primary data will consist of publicly available criminal judgments of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The proposed sampling period is 2010–2025. Approximately 80–120 judgments will be selected, subject to final verification, accessibility, text quality, and corpus balance. Selection criteria will include: (a) Supreme Court authorship; (b) criminal jurisdiction; (c) availability of complete judgment text; (d) sufficient reasoning sections for discourse analysis; and (e) representation of more than one criminal-law category.

Possible case categories include murder, terrorism, narcotics, kidnapping, rape, corruption, honour-related offences, and other serious criminal matters. The final corpus should avoid over-representing a single case type. A metadata spreadsheet will record judgment year, case category, procedural posture, outcome, judgment length, and relevant legal issues.

The corpus should be divided into meaningful subcorpora where possible, for example conviction/affirmation versus acquittal/reversal, or prosecution-success versus prosecution-failure decisions. Such subcorpora can support comparison of the language associated with guilt and innocence.

3.3 Data preparation

Judgments will be downloaded from authoritative public sources and converted into plain-text format. Headers, page numbers, repeated citations, website navigation material, and obvious OCR artifacts will be removed. Case names and legally meaningful references should be preserved. Where PDF-to-text conversion creates uncertainty, the original judgment should be consulted.

The cleaned corpus will be stored in UTF-8 text files. A corpus log will document source, date accessed, cleaning decisions, exclusions, and file versions. This reproducibility record is important for publication.

3.4 Corpus tools

AntConc, LancsBox, Sketch Engine, or an equivalent corpus platform may be used. Frequency lists will identify high-frequency lexical items. Keywords will compare the criminal-judgment corpus with an appropriate reference corpus where available. N-grams and clusters will identify recurrent legal phrases. Collocation analysis will investigate words surrounding key items such as accused, witness, evidence, prosecution, doubt, proved, failed, reliable, and responsible. Concordance lines will provide contextual evidence.

The study will not treat frequency as meaning by itself. A frequent expression becomes analytically significant when its distribution, collocational environment, grammatical realization, and discourse function are considered together.

3.5 Transitivity analysis

Selected concordance lines will be coded according to process type, participant roles, and circumstances. Particular attention will be paid to material processes involving accused persons, police, witnesses, prosecution, and defence. The analysis will ask whether responsibility is explicitly assigned or grammatically backgrounded.

For example, active constructions may foreground an actor, while passive constructions may foreground an event or affected participant. Nominalizations may compress processes into abstract nouns. These patterns will be examined in relation to evidential reasoning rather than automatically interpreted as ideological manipulation.

3.6 Modality and evidentiality

Modal verbs, modal adverbs, epistemic expressions, evidential verbs, and certainty markers will be identified. Items such as may, might, must, cannot, appears, seems, established, proved, doubtful, failed, and possible will be examined in context. The analysis will distinguish between epistemic commitment and deontic obligation.

Special attention will be given to sections in which judges move from evidence to conclusion. The research will examine whether certainty is increased through cumulative evidential statements and whether doubt is linguistically constructed

through qualification, contradiction, inconsistency, or insufficiency.

3.7 Appraisal and evaluation

Evaluative expressions concerning witnesses, evidence, accused persons, police, and counsel will be coded using Appraisal Theory. Judgment resources will be particularly important for credibility and behavioral assessment. Engagement resources will be examined in reported arguments, precedent citation, and judicial disagreement. Graduation will identify strengthening and weakening of evaluations.

3.8 Participant representation

The study will construct a representation matrix for the major legal actors. The accused will be examined in terms of agency, intention, action, denial, and evaluation. Victims will be examined in terms of narrative visibility and evidential positioning. Witnesses will be analyzed through credibility labels, reported speech, and evaluative descriptions. Police and prosecution will be examined through representations of investigation, procedural compliance, evidence production, and institutional reliability. Defence counsel will be represented through argumentation and attributed claims. The court will be examined through first-person and impersonal constructions, reporting verbs, modal expressions, and authoritative declaratives.

3.9 Reliability and validity

Reliability will be strengthened through transparent coding categories, repeated checking of selected concordance samples, and, where feasible, second-coder comparison. A coding manual will define process types, modality categories, appraisal categories, and participant roles. Quantitative results will be cross-checked against concordance contexts.

Validity will be strengthened through methodological triangulation. Corpus frequency identifies recurring patterns; SFL explains grammatical representation; Appraisal Theory explains evaluation; and CDA explains institutional positioning and power. No single framework will be treated as sufficient on its own.

3.10 Ethical considerations

The study uses public judgments rather than confidential interviews or private legal files. Nevertheless, criminal cases may involve victims, minors, allegations of sexual violence, and other sensitive information. The article should therefore avoid unnecessary repetition of identifying details and should discuss cases only for analytical purposes. The distinction between an allegation and a judicially established fact must be maintained throughout the research.

3.11 Limitations

The study will be limited to written Supreme Court judgments and will not directly analyze courtroom interaction, police interviews, or media reporting. The findings will therefore describe judicial written discourse rather than the entire Pakistani criminal justice system. Another limitation is that judicial judgments are authored within institutional conventions; they should not automatically be interpreted as direct expressions of a judge's personal ideology. Finally, corpus composition can influence frequency results, so sampling decisions must be reported transparently.

CHAPTER 4:
ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Analytical dimensions

Because the final corpus has not yet been supplied or processed, this section does not claim fabricated numerical findings. Instead, it specifies the publication-ready analytical dimensions and the types of findings that should be reported after corpus analysis.

First, lexical patterns are expected to show the institutional character of criminal judgments. Terms associated with evidence, prosecution, witness, accused, offence, counsel, court, appeal, conviction, acquittal, doubt, and proof are likely to form important lexical fields. The analytical question is not simply which words occur most often, but how their collocates and grammatical environments organize legal reasoning.

Second, responsibility can be examined through agency. If accused persons frequently occur as grammatical actors in material processes associated with violence, possession, killing, concealment, or

other offences, the discourse may strongly foreground agency. Conversely, passive constructions may foreground the event or evidence while backgrounding an actor. Neither active nor passive voice is inherently biased; interpretation must depend on distribution and context.

Third, guilt and innocence are likely to be constructed through evidential sequences. Judicial reasoning often moves from an evidential proposition to an evaluative assessment and then to a legal conclusion. A typical discourse pattern may therefore be represented as:

Evidence → credibility assessment → inference → legal standard → conclusion.

For example, a witness account may first be narrated, then tested against medical evidence, then evaluated for contradiction, and finally accepted or rejected. The linguistic construction of guilt or innocence thus emerges through a chain of discourse rather than a single lexical item.

Fourth, doubt is expected to be linguistically important. Expressions such as doubtful, not established, cannot safely be relied upon, contradiction, inconsistency, failure, and benefit of doubt may cluster around acquittal-oriented reasoning. By contrast, proved, established, confidence-inspiring, corroborated, consistent, and reliable may occur in reasoning supporting conviction. These are analytical expectations, not empirical findings, and must be verified through the final corpus.

Fifth, modality can reveal degrees of judicial commitment. High-value expressions may strengthen institutional authority, while epistemic qualification may indicate caution. The interaction between modality and evidence is especially important: a judgment may avoid categorical language when evidence is contested but use stronger formulations after corroboration has been established.

Sixth, Appraisal Theory can explain credibility construction. Witnesses may be evaluated through Judgment resources, evidence through Appreciation and valuation, and competing arguments through Engagement. The court may also use graduation to intensify or soften assessments. This makes evaluation a bridge between linguistic form and legal decision-making.

4.2 Guilt as discourse construction

Guilt in a judgment should be understood as a legal conclusion supported by a discourse architecture. The accused is not linguistically "guilty" simply because a particular adjective appears. Rather, guilt is constructed through the accumulation and organization of propositions about actions, intention, evidence, credibility, corroboration, and legal standards.

A corpus-assisted analysis can identify recurring lexical bundles around conviction. If expressions relating to proof, consistency, corroboration, and reliability systematically cluster in conviction-supporting passages, this may indicate a recurrent evidential discourse pattern. Transitivity can then show how accused agency is represented within those passages, while modality can reveal the strength of judicial commitment.

4.3 Innocence and acquittal-oriented discourse

Innocence-related discourse may be linguistically associated with insufficient proof, contradictions, unreliable testimony, procedural defects, alternative explanations, or reasonable doubt. Importantly, legal acquittal does not always linguistically construct factual innocence in an absolute sense; it may construct failure of proof. The distinction between "the accused did not commit the offence" and "the prosecution failed to prove the charge" is therefore crucial.

This distinction should be a central analytical category. Corpus comparison between conviction and acquittal decisions can identify whether the court relies on different lexical fields, modal patterns, and evidential sequences when moving toward different outcomes.

4.4 Responsibility and agency

Responsibility is broader than guilt. A judgment may assign responsibility to an accused, police officer, investigator, witness, prosecution, institution, or procedural actor. The linguistic representation of responsibility therefore requires analysis beyond the accused.

Transitivity is particularly useful here. Material processes reveal action; verbal processes reveal attribution; mental processes reveal perception and knowledge; relational processes assign identities or qualities. Passive voice and nominalization should

be examined because they can reduce explicit agency. For instance, "the investigation was conducted improperly" foregrounds the investigation while leaving the responsible actor unspecified. A corpus can establish whether such structures are occasional or recurrent.

4.5 Institutional authority

The court constructs institutional authority through more than legal terminology. Authority can be enacted through declarative formulations, modal obligation, citation of precedent, evaluative judgments, and the organization of competing voices. The court may report a party's argument and then reject it using verbs and constructions that distinguish the institutional voice from external voices.

Recent Pakistani research on judicial performatives, modality, and appraisal suggests that this dimension deserves explicit attention. The present framework integrates these resources so that authority is analyzed as a discourse configuration rather than as one grammatical category.

4.6 Contribution to forensic linguistics

The proposed model contributes to forensic linguistics in three ways. First, it treats judgments as forensic data in their own right rather than merely as background material for legal interpretation. Second, it combines corpus scale with qualitative discourse interpretation. Third, it focuses on the construction of responsibility, an issue with direct relevance to criminal justice.

The study also contributes to Pakistani English research by documenting recurring lexical, grammatical, and evaluative patterns in an important institutional genre. A carefully constructed corpus could become a reusable research resource for subsequent studies of judicial English in Pakistan.

4.7 Conclusion

This study proposes a corpus-assisted forensic discourse analysis of Pakistani Supreme Court criminal judgments to investigate how guilt, innocence, and responsibility are constructed through language. Its central premise is that legal conclusions are communicated through patterned linguistic choices. Evidence is narrated, participants are represented, credibility is evaluated, certainty is calibrated, competing voices are managed, and institutional authority is enacted through discourse.

The proposed combination of forensic linguistics, corpus linguistics, SFL, CDA, and Appraisal Theory offers a systematic way of examining these processes. Corpus tools can identify recurrent patterns that might remain invisible in close reading alone, while discourse analysis can explain why those patterns matter within judicial reasoning. The study therefore moves beyond a purely lexical description of legal language and toward an integrated account of how linguistic form participates in the construction of legal reality.

For publication, the next empirical stage is essential: the proposed 80–120 judgments must be collected, cleaned, coded, and statistically summarized. The article should then replace the expected-pattern discussion in Chapter 4 with actual frequency, keyword, collocation, concordance, transitivity, modality, and appraisal results. Only after that stage can the manuscript legitimately claim empirical findings.

The broader implication is that forensic linguistics can make an important contribution to the study of justice in Pakistan. Judicial language deserves examination not because linguistic analysis can replace law, but because law is communicated, reasoned, evaluated, and institutionally enacted through language. A corpus-assisted analysis can make these mechanisms more visible and provide a stronger empirical foundation for interdisciplinary dialogue between linguistics and legal studies.

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Note: Before journal submission, each reference should be cross-checked against the journal's official metadata page and formatted with complete volume, issue, page range, DOI/URL, and author details where available. Older foundational works such as Halliday and Matthiessen's SFL framework, Fairclough's CDA, and Martin and White's Appraisal framework should also be included in the final reference list because they are theoretical foundations, even though the literature-review emphasis here is on 2021–2026 research.