

A Critical Study of News Discourse:

Iran's Nuclear Issue in the British Newspapers

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Abstract

This study investigates the way a political issue as well as its main participants and their actions are represented in newspaper headlines. Employing a number of analytical tools from Van Dijk (1998) and Halliday's transitivity model, the study examines the headlines of news stories on Iran's nuclear program published by a number of British newspapers to identify the specific ideology propagated by the newspapers. The findings of the study indicate that the British newspapers' coverage of Iran's nuclear program tends to present a negative image of Iran and its nuclear program in the context of "Us" and "Them". The findings provide evidence to support the claim that news media do not simply reflect the social reality but articulate dominant ideologies in representing political events. The study contributes to the understanding of the ideological role of language within news discourse in constructing representations of a society.

Key Words: Critical Discourse Analysis, Newspaper, Iran's Nuclear Program, Transitivity, Macroproposition, Lexicalization, Thematization.

Introduction

An increasing volume of studies carried out by various scholars (Hall, 1982; Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Fowler, 1991; Hodge & Kress, 1993; Caldas-Coulthard et.al, 1996; Van Dijk 1988a, 1988, 1991, 1993) has demonstrated that news, due to its nature, cannot be a totally value-free reflection of facts. News production process comprises selection, interpretation, and presentation of events to audiences, thereby constructing reality in a manner corresponding with the underlying ideologies of the news producers and presenters. News imposes a structure of values on whatever it represents, and therefore produces meanings which construct ideological representations of a society (Fowler, 1991).

Recent studies on media discourse with the critical discourse analysis perspective (Wodak, 1991; Van Leeuwen, 1995; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Van Dijk, 1988a, 1988b, 1995, 1998) have demonstrated how the Western news media linguistically construct ideological representations of different groups of people and different countries, and how these representations exercise a great deal of power in shaping their readers and viewers' interpretation of the suggested facts. However, so far, no critical discourse analysis has been carried out on the stories published by these newspapers on Iran's nuclear program. Considering the growing interest in this issue, such an analysis is important to see if and how the discourses of some Western newspaper stories paint a subjective and ideologically biased picture of socio-

political issues about a foreign country like Iran to the readers. To this end, therefore, the headlines of news stories published by a number of British newspapers on a controversial issue, 'Iran's nuclear program', were examined to see if any ideology is at work in the language of these newspapers.

Headlines show the most prominent and relevant information of the news discourse. "The headline forms the summary of the news story, which strategically serves as the expression of its macrostructure" (Van Dijk, 1988b: 226). Since readers often read and recall only headlines, they construct not only preferred meanings of the news texts for the readers but also the most prominent ideological view of the texts (Van Dijk, 1988b). In order to investigate the most prominent ideological framework in news discourse on Iran's nuclear program, therefore, the headlines of a number of newspapers were examined. It is argued that the headlines of news stories on Iran's nuclear program in the British mainstream newspapers may manifest a relatively ideological power relation in representing two participants, Iran on the one hand, and EU on the other hand. It is hoped that studies like this will create an awareness of the constructive and functional nature of language within news discourse in the course of everyday lives and reveal 'ideological and political investments' (Fairclough, 1992:315).

Theoretical Framework

The present study belongs to the theoretical approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1995; Van Dijk, 1993,

1996), which is rooted in Critical Linguistics (Fowler et al., 1979; Hodge and Kress, 1979), a branch of discourse analysis developed in the 1970s at the University of East Anglia. Influenced by the social thought of Gramsci, Althusser, Habermas, Foucault, Pecheux and others, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) sees language as discourse, that is, as a form of social practice. Consequently, it focuses on the role of discourse in producing and reproducing social reality, in enforcing and transforming social identities and relationships, and therefore studies how discourse contributes to social continuity and social change.

The major analytical framework used by CDA for the study of linguistic texts is the Systemic-Functional Grammar of Halliday (1985, 1994). Hallidayan linguistics constitutes a lexico-grammatical theory which does not consider language to be a self-contained system, independent of the context in which it is used, but instead tries to explain why language is the way it is. Halliday (1985) regards language as a network of options from which language users make selections that are ideologically significant. Thus, meaning is generated from the choices made, or not made, by text producers. Finally, language is construed as being multifunctional, performing simultaneously 'ideational', 'interpersonal' and 'textual' meta functions (Halliday, 1994). However, CDA has extended its toolkit (see Caldas- Coulthard and Coulthard, 1996), and now also draws upon other linguistic traditions, such as pragmatics, semantics and discourse analysis. This last tradition, in particular, can give insights into the macro structural analysis of texts,

since Systemic–Functional Grammar mainly focuses on the realization of meaning at the clausal rather than the textual level.

Van Dijk's discourse analysis theory is a discourse theory which has greatly contributed to, and is often drawn upon by, CDA. Van Dijk (1995) essentially perceives discourse analysis as ideology analysis, since "ideologies are typically, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication, including non-verbal semiotic messages, such as pictures, photographs and movies" (p. 17). His approach for analyzing ideologies has three components: social analysis, cognitive analysis, and discourse analysis (1995, p. 30). Whereas the social analysis pertains to examining the overall societal structures (the context), the discourse analysis component is primarily text based (syntax, lexicon, local semantics, topics, schematic structures, etc.). In this sense, Van Dijk's approach incorporates the two traditional approaches in media education, i.e. interpretive (text based) and social tradition (context based) into one analytical framework for analyzing media discourse. However, what noticeably distinguishes Van Dijk's approach from other approaches in CDA is another feature of his approach: cognitive analysis.

To Van Dijk (1994) it is the socio cognition - social cognition and personal cognition - that mediates between society and discourse. He defines social cognition as "the system of mental representations and processes of group members" (p. 18). In this sense, for Van Dijk, "ideologies ... are the overall, abstract mental systems that organize ...

socially shared attitudes" (p.18). Ideologies, thus, "indirectly influence the personal cognition of group members" in their act of comprehension of discourse among other actions and interactions (p.19). He calls the mental representations of individuals during such social actions and interactions "models". For him, "models control how people act, speak or write, or how they understand the social practices of others" (p. 2). Of crucial importance here is that, according to Van Dijk, mental representations "are often articulated along *Us* versus *Them* dimensions, in which speakers of one group will generally tend to present themselves or their own group in positive terms, and other groups in negative terms" (p. 22). Analyzing and making explicit this contrastive dimension of *Us* versus *Them* has been central to most of Van Dijk's research and writings (1988, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1998).

Data

This study is based on the analysis of data from the headlines of news coverage of Iran's nuclear program in a number of British newspapers. The British newspapers chosen are *The Telegraph*, a Conservative broadsheet; *Daily Mail*, a Conservative middle-market tabloid; *The Guardian*, a left of center top quality daily; *The mirror*, traditionally a left-wing paper; *The Times*, a slightly conservative paper and the oldest British national daily; and *The Independent*, a daily liberal broadsheet with a wide international coverage. All these are widely circulated famous tabloid or broadsheet newspapers selected to represent the British

press. Since access to the hard copies of these newspapers was not possible, the Internet editions of the papers were selected.

For the purpose of this study, a period of about 36 months, February 2003 to April 2006, was selected. This time frame covers a period of heightened attention by the newspapers to Iran's nuclear program. The archives of the above mentioned newspapers were then searched for the relevant stories. The search yielded a population of a few hundreds stories. 160 news stories were then selected for the sample. The data, therefore, comprised the headlines of a total of 160 stories. In collecting data, coverage by the outside sources - AP, UP, Reuters News Agency - was excluded. Editorials or opinion letters were also excluded, as these text types require a different approach of analysis because they are different in schemata and genre type.

Data Analysis

CDA draws on a wide variety of analytical tools for analyzing discourse. The employment of a full range of the relevant tools results in a broader picture of a situation and in making ideologies in discourses more transparent. Since a number of these analytical tools were not relevant to, or their employment was beyond the scope of, this study, the sampled headlines were analyzed only in terms of the discourse features of topics, grammar of transitivity, lexical choices, thematic patterns, and modality.

Topics

Van Dijk (1988b) states that the analysis of a news story should take place at two levels: microstructure and macrostructure. The analysis of microstructure is focused on the semantic relations between propositions, syntactic, lexical and other rhetorical elements that provide coherence in the text of the stories. The analysis of macrostructure, however, pertains to the thematic/topic structure of the news stories and their overall schemata. Themes or topics are propositions, which relate together to form macro propositions. According to Van Dijk (1988b), macro propositions are derived from propositions through the processes of generalization, selection, and construction which semantically map propositions sequences to a macro proposition at a higher level.

Van Dijk (1988b) further states that themes and topics (macro propositions) are realized in the headlines of news stories and are, therefore, the most important information expressed by a text. The headlines "define the overall coherence or semantic unity of discourse, and also what information readers memorize best from a news report." (p.171). Therefore, given the fact that headlines are constructed by news editors after the stories have been written (Bell, 1991), newspaper headlines function as opinion manipulators, and are therefore good candidates for the study of the newspapers' ideological positions.

Since topics are "routinely expressed in the headlines of news stories", and "a general ideological picture of a situation is painted by the

topics analysis of news stories”(Van Dijk, 1988b: 170), all the 160 headlines were subjected to detailed topical analysis.

Despite differences in style and emphasis all the newspapers share similarities in terms of prominent themes and topics. Themes that emerge from the news stories can be divided into two groupings: a) topics projecting a negative picture of Iran and b) topics presenting a positive picture of the EU.

As for Iran, the overwhelming theme of the headlines is the ‘threat’ posed by Iran’s nuclear program. The discursive formation of Iran’s threat is crystallized by a number of sub-topics. The topical analysis of the headlines of the selected newspapers reveals the dominating themes or topics of *cover-up*, *defiance*, *deviance*, *concession seeking*, *fear* and *crisis*, all of which are consistent with the continuing framework of a perceived threat posed by Iran.

With the headlines consistently referring to ‘crisis’, ‘defiance’, ‘danger’, and the like, an ‘Iran-as-a-threat-to-peace’ script could be activated in the minds of the readers because it is the most salient feature in the headlines. The projection of Iran as a threat to world peace and security serves to orient readers to a specific interpretive framework which could pave the way for imposing sanctions on Iran.

EU condemns Iran over nuclear cover-up
Iran defiant over nuclear plans
Iran on verge of sparking 'major international crisis'
A-bomb fear as Iran defies UN
Iran demands more EU concessions

EU's image, on the other hand, is the opposite of what we noticed about Iran. The image of EU is constituted by such themes as *power*, *crisis solving*, and *world-protection*. The newspapers try to present a very welcoming image of EU by casting it in the role of a savior standing firm against a real threat to world peace.

EU favors diplomatic solution to Iran's nuclear crisis
Britain gives Iran nuclear ultimatum
Euro determined to stop Iran

Lexical Choices

The choice of words is important in providing readers with cues for interpreting events. Lexical items construct particular ideological representations of events. Apart from its experiential function, vocabulary has expressive value implying the producer's negative or positive evaluation of actions, participants and events (Fairclough, 1989). Therefore, the selection of vocabulary can be regarded as ideologically based.

Where an unusually high degree of wording, often involving clusters of related terms which are near synonyms occurs, this overwording often indicates a key concept or particular preoccupation which gives certain meanings the producers of texts intend to convey (Fairclough 1989, Fowler 1991).

As for the present study, the selected newspapers demonstrate surprising coherence in their use of terminology in their coverage of Iran. This may suggest that a very powerful ideology is at work which is routinely being applied to the 'other'. It appears that certain understandings and perspectives are being privileged. The use of emotive and 'loaded' terms seems to fit the ideological stance of the selected newspapers. They take every opportunity to vilify Iran's nuclear program and to discredit the Iranian officials' views and statements about the program. These lexical choices appear to project Iran's nuclear program as 'dangerous', 'irrational', and a 'threat' to world peace.

The lexical choices in the headlines present two ideologically significant motifs: Iran as a threat and EU as a savior. A recurrent 'threat' motif is used to arouse fear and evoke condemnation from the world community against Iran's program while that of 'savior' is used to enhance the image of Europe.

Iran, a number one challenge to peace
Iran's nuclear threat worries people around the world
Iran nuke a danger for Middle East
Iran defiant on nuclear work

EU gives Iran a deadline
EU stands tough on Iran's nuclear program
Euro determined to stop Iran

As for Iran, over wording around the concepts of 'threat', 'fear', and 'defiance' through the interrelated words such as 'worry', 'concern', 'alarming', 'alert', 'crisis', 'blackmail', 'cover-up', 'secret', 'transparency' 'defy', 'reject' indicates an unstable and worrisome situation created by Iran's "covert" nuclear activities. Here, 'over-lexicalization' as a pragmatic strategy of encoding ideology weaves an excess of repetitious, quasi-synonymous terms into the discourse of news stories on Iran's nuclear program to perpetuate a particular ideology. Lexical choices made in the texts of the news stories, therefore, provide us with a key to unravel the ideological construction that underlies the texts. Like the other discursive strategies, over-lexicalization is exploited to create a dichotomous 'Us' versus 'Them' reality that conjures up a negative image of Iran.

Transitivity analysis

In Systemic-Functional Grammar (SFG), 'clause' rather than 'word' or 'sentence' is the unit of analysis, and the function of a clause is analyzed in terms of: (a) Subject, Finite, Predicator, Complement, and Adjunct (SFPCA), (b) Theme and Rheme; (c) Given and New, and (d) Process and Participant or transitivity system. SFPCA captures syntactic niceties of the text. Theme-Rheme and Given-New indices deal with the way a text is packaged and the way information in a text is structured in a clause.

However, a Process and Participant analysis of texts reveals the way language users manipulate language to represent their perceptions of reality (cf. Fowler, 1991). It is concerned with the ideological significance which choices between different grammatical process and participant types bear in a particular context.

In this theoretical model, it is, in fact, the transitivity system (Process, Participants and Circumstances) which "specifies the different types of processes that are recognized in the language and the structures by which they are expressed" (Halliday, 1985, p. 101). By definition, the term 'process' refers to the 'goings-on' in reality: doing, happening, being, etc. The entities involved in every process are referred to as 'participants', and 'circumstances' refer to certain conditions associated with a process. 'Process', 'participant' and 'circumstance' are generally realized as Verb, Noun, and Adjunct, respectively (cf. Halliday, 1985). And, the processes are of the following types: (1) material, (2) mental, (3) relational, (4) verbal, (5) existential, and (6) behavioral (Halliday, 1985, 1994).

Material Process or the process of 'doing' involves some physical action and shows that something is going on in the external world. Mental Process, however, indicates that something goes on in the internal world of the mind. This process necessitates the involvement of a conscious participant, i.e., a human agent who is called 'Sensor' and another entity- 'Phenomenon'- which is sensed or experienced. Relational Process, on the other hand, does not involve an action or require some entity to act upon another. Essentially, it is a process of 'being' and is concerned with the

relationship set up between two things or concepts. Verbal Process indicates the process of 'saying' but as Halliday (1985) reminds us, "'saying' has to be interpreted in a rather broad sense; it covers any kind of symbolic exchange of meaning" (p. 129). Existential Process shows that something exists or happens. And finally Behavioral Process refers to the process of human physiological and psychological behavior. Tables 1 and 2 below display the possible configurations in SFG of these lexico-grammatical categories.

Table 1

Summary of process types (adapted from Halliday, 1994)

<i>Process types</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Material	
Action	The lion <i>caught</i> the tourist
Event	The mayor <i>resigned</i>
Behavioural	She <i>smiled</i> at him
Mental	
Perception	I hadn't <i>noticed</i> that
Affection	Mary <i>liked</i> the gift
Cognition	No one <i>believed</i> his story
Verbal	John <i>said</i> he was hungry
Relational	
Attribution	Sarah <i>is</i> wise
Identification	Tom <i>is</i> the leader
Existential	There <i>was</i> a storm

Participants have different names in terms of the process type with which they are associated. For instance, material processes have an 'Actor', i.e. the entity or participant responsible for the process and a 'Goal', i.e. the participant at whom the process is directed, and, in case of three-participant clauses, a 'Beneficiary' i.e. the participant benefiting from a process, while verbal processes have a 'Sayer' and a 'Receiver'.

Table 2

Process Types, their Meanings, and their Relevant Participants in SFG

Process	Meaning	Participant
Material	Doing	Actor, Goal, Beneficiary
Mental	Sensing	Senser, Phenomenon
Relational	Being	Carrier, Attribute, Identified, Identifier
Verbal	Saying	Sayer, Receiver, Verbiage
Existential	Existing	Existent
Behavioral	Behaving	Behaver

By way of summary, processes can be classified into two main types: *actional* and *relational*. Actional processes consist of material, mental, verbal, and behavioral process types and, in general terms, refer to actions, events and situations that involve people and objects as participants of a process. In this respect, actionals represent the relationships perceived in the physical world (and, by analogy, in the mental world of thought and perception). Relationals, on the other hand, do not involve action, but establish a relation between two entities or between an entity and a quality; and display the results of the activities of

mind, making judgments and commenting. These representational processes designate two different kinds of discursive trace: actionals signify events and situations, namely, processes of doing, sensing and saying whereas relationals signify the act of classification and judgment (Hodge and Kress, 1993).

The presence, absence or high/low frequency of these processes and/or participants may have different implications. According to Fiarclough (1989), selection between process types has an effect of highlighting or backgrounding agency and such choices are ideological because motivated obfuscation of agency results in leaving attributions of causality and responsibility unclear.

As shown in Table 3, in the headlines of selected newspapers, EU's participation is distributed between four processes: material (23.6%), verbal (17.2%), mental (4.4%), and relational (6.6%). 51.8 % of the time EU participants (in all the manifestations we see in the headlines: the governments, the people and named individuals) have been assigned the role of Actor, sayer, sensor or carrier/ identified, and 22.7 % of goal, receiver, or target. A close look at the types of processes associated with EU participants and their roles in those processes, and the nature of their involvement reveals that the representation of EU by the British newspapers is a positive one.

Table 3

EU and IAEA's roles in processes, in percentage, in the British newspapers

Processes →	Material	Mental	Relational	Verbal	Behavioral
Role ↓	%	%	%	%	%
Actor/sayer/sensor	23.6	3.4	6.6	17.2	
Goal/receiver/target	14.5			8.2	
Beneficiary					

EU participants are mainly constructed as Actors/sayers. This is achieved by placing them as participants taking the leading role in the negotiation with Iran and taking measures on or against Iran, i.e. as actors or those who make statements:

Britain, France press Security Council for action on Iran

Europeans push efforts on Iran's N-program

EU-3 offers Iran fresh nuclear talks

The role of the participants constructed by the grammatical representations results in a specific ideological meaning and a particular worldview. The analysis of data summarized in Table 3 suggests that the grammatical structures used could facilitate in the minds of readers the socio-cognitive representation of EU countries as participants who are major agents and actors, and in control of the situation.

In actional processes, as previously mentioned, actions, events and situations could be represented either by transitive structures, that is, portrayed as either arising directly as the result of an actor's action and with a direct effect on a goal, or by intransitive structures, arising without such an action, that is, either as a self-caused action or an action that happens in some unspecified way. It is clear that the mode in which a process is presented either as transitive or intransitive construction cannot be conceived of as a matter of truth or reality but rather as a matter of the way in which that particular process is integrated into the ideological system of the text producer, and the manner in which such a process is therefore articulated in a specific discourse (Kress, 1983).

Findings of the transitivity analysis of the headlines demonstrate that transitive structures dominate the actional processes used in the selected newspapers' discourse on Iran's nuclear program. Thus, in the headlines of British newspapers, EU participants are mainly depicted in the active role, acting upon *them* (Iran). This evaluation is represented by means of actional processes which depict EU participants as dominant negotiators and decision makers taking every possible measure including offering help and support to Iran and, if necessary, applying pressure and force to get Iran to stop its "dangerous" nuclear activities as a manifestation of the contextual strategy of positive self-presentation.

The selected newspapers' positive representation of EU differs from the image they present of Iran. As shown in Table 4, Iran and Iranian participants for the most part are either agents of transactive processes, or

the beneficiaries of the actions or sayings of their opponents. Table 4 illustrates that in the British newspapers Iran and Iranian participants, similar to EU, are involved in the four processes of material, verbal, mental, and relational and they have been assigned different types of roles. They are put as actors and statement makers, as affected participants, and as beneficiaries of giving processes.

Table 4

Iran's roles in processes, in percentage, in the British newspapers

Processes →	Material	Mental	Relational	Verbal	Behavioral
Role ↓	%	%	%	%	%
Actor/Sayer/Sensor	29	0.9	7	14	
Goal/receiver/target	14.5	1.8		7.3	
Beneficiary	2.7			4.5	

Surprisingly, Iran and Iranian participants are placed in the actor and sayer roles more than EU participants, initially leaving the readers with the impression that Iran is being placed in the dominant position. However, upon a closer reading one realizes that Iranian participants are associated with extremely negative predicates of material and verbal processes.

Iran slams door on dialogue

Iran turns down EU nuclear offer

Iran defies EU nuclear plans

This negative agency role of Iran is extended to its role as *sayer* in verbal processes. That is, in addition to being assigned negative roles in material processes, Iran is given some space to speak out:

Iran rejects UN nuclear concerns as 'absurd'

Iran slams IAEA board vote

Iran threatens to lock out UN

Iran accuses west of double standard policy

U.S. behind IAEA's decision: Iranian envoy claims

Here Iran is assigned the role of *sayer* which is important, because as a *sayer* it seems to contribute to the discursive structure that is defining its position. However, a closer look at the kinds of sayings Iran is associated with seems to prove the opposite.

The use of predicates 'accuse' and 'claim' in the last two headlines is interesting from an ideological standpoint. According to Van Dijk (1993), words such as *accuse* or *charge* are discrediting devices. In other words, it appears as though the newspapers perceive what Iran says as just *accusation* and *claim*. In this way, the papers undermine Iran's assertion and, therefore, do not support Iran's opinion.

Relational processes account for about 14 percent of the processes in which EU and Iran are involved. As mentioned previously, relationals serve to represent the acts of classification and judgment. This can provide the grounds for biased identifications and descriptions to be built into discourse (Hodge and Kress, 1993).

As for the present study, the analysis of the relational processes indicates that the acts of classification in the British newspapers' discourse of headlines constructs a world divided into 'rule of law', 'determination', 'power', 'peacekeeping' on the one hand, and 'threat', 'irrationality', 'lawlessness' on the other hand. That is, through relational processes, the newspapers represent the EU in positive terms by assigning it positive values. On the other hand, Iran is presented by assigning it negative values.

EU firm on Iran

EU committed to a peaceful solution

Europe united in views on Iran

Euro determined to stop Iran

Iran a chief military threat

Iran a threat to world security

Iran nuke a danger for Middle East

Relational processes contain overtly biased identifications and descriptions of the ingroup and the outgroup, emphasizing difference and relations of power. Thus, the use of relationals enable the writers of the newspapers to be categorical and judgmental in favor of the ingroup, and, consequently, in disfavor of the outgroup.

These categorical generalizations represented by relational processes in the discourses of the newspapers under analysis seem to be symptomatic of stereotyping or cognitive prejudice (Van Dijk, 1988b). That is to say, the way a social group is categorized influences the way

we perceive and relate to them. This kind of political stereotyping serves to perpetuate the *Us* versus *Them* polarity between EU and Iran.

More significantly, categorizing a social group or a country into a particular social schema also leads to shape the perception of the meaning of what that social group or country *does*. As discussed earlier, the use of actional processes represented predominantly by transitive structures in the active voice enables the writers of the British newspapers to make biased evaluations about what *we* are doing (to *them*) and what *they* are doing (to *us*).

Thematic patterns

Theme is what a text is about and appears in the first part of the clause in English. The theme gives the most important information in the clause. Therefore, the writers foreground what they consider the most important information by placing it in the thematic position (Halliday, 1985). The analysis of the thematic patterns of the headlines not only reveals what the writer considers the information that would catch the eye, but also gives insight into commonsensical assumptions taken for granted about the event or issue under study.

The thematic patterns in the headlines of the selected newspapers are either the participants:

Iran threatens to lock out UN

Britain gives Iran nuclear ultimatum

or processes in the reduced form of nominalization:

Iran's nuclear threat worries people around the world

EU-Iran talks see no progress

Nominalizations turn processes into states, and concrete into abstract, creating a new category of abstract entities (Hodge and Kress, 1993). The creation of new entities is of considerable cultural and ideological importance because nominalizations themselves take on the role of presupposed, commonsensical, and taken-for-granted entities or social realities. In the headline "*Iran's nuclear threat worries people around the world*" the nominal group in the thematic position is the information which is presupposed and taken for granted: *Iran poses a nuclear threat*.

The nominalizations which occur in thematic position in the headlines are predominantly the 'row', 'fear', and 'standoff' caused by Iran's nuclear ambitions or the 'threat' posed by Iran's nuclear program (13 occurrences) or the 'pressure' exercised by EU on Iran to stop its nuclear activities (3 occurrences).

As for the participants, the thematic analysis of the headlines reveals a high proportion of thematic positions occupied by EU participants. There are 75 headlines in total which have EU (in all the manifestations) occupying the thematic position. This figure accounts for 47 percent of the data. This thematic foregrounding of EU in relation to Iran seems to be ideologically motivated to enhance the status and significance of EU in its efforts to "contain the threat posed by Iran".

What it does is thrusting the EU into a dominant position of power and control by means of structural foregrounding. Whether they are *in reality* exercising this power and control, though, is quite a different matter.

Iranian participants occupy a relatively lower proportion of thematic positions, 66 in total accounting for 41 percent of the data. Iran and Iranian participants are foregrounded in thematic position in relation to processes of the threatening the world, defying the UN, rejecting plans, and creating crisis.

The foregrounding of EU participants in thematic position could evoke in the mind of readers the commonsensical assumption about EU's position and role in facing Iran's nuclear threat and its efforts to resolve a difficult situation. The themes, therefore, contribute to the ideological common sense, and its naturalization through linguistic transformation, of the role of EU in facing Iran's nuclear threat because it is simply the way of presenting the picture of reality to readers.

Modality

A resource of language with a great potential for encoding opinion and ideology is modality system. Modality, as defined by Fairclough (1989), is "a categorical commitment of the producer to the truth of the proposition" (p.129) and "indicates the writer's judgment on the credibility of the representation" (Kress & Leeuwen, 1990:49). To put it differently, modality is a writer or speaker's direct comment on the ideational part of the clause; it is the grammar of explicit comments.

Modality is a major aspect of the clause for the expression of point of view of the writer or speaker.

In *Language and Power* (1989) Fairclough defines modality as “to do with speaker or writer’s authority” and posits two dimensions to modality. First, *relational modality*, which is a matter of the authority of one participant in relation to others. And second, *expressive modality*, which is a matter of the speaker or writer’s authority with respect to the truth or probability of a representation of reality. The latter is the modality of the speaker/writer’s evaluation of truth. Fairclough argues that modality is expressed by modal auxiliaries like *may*, *might*, *must*, *should*, *can*, etc., but also by various other formal features including adverbs and tense.

Both relational and expressive modalities are used in the selected newspapers’ headlines. There are two occurrences of the modal auxiliary *must* in the headlines:

Britain, Germany agree Iran crisis must be solved diplomatically

Britain warns Iran must stop non-compliance with obligations

The modal *must* in the first headline indicates the European leaders’ strong commitment to avoid sanctions and use of force and to the solution of the crisis through diplomatic means; in the second headline it signifies Iran’s perceived categorical obligation to stop defying the world and meet the UN demands with regard to its nuclear program.

There are six occurrences of modal auxiliary *will* in the headlines which mark expressive modality, mostly used in predictive statements. As mentioned earlier, expressive modality concerns the expression of certainty, probability or possibility, of an event occurring, or concerning the truth content of a proposition; it essentially expresses the speaker or writer's assessment of likelihood an event.

(Note that in the journalistic style of headline writing 'to' often replaces 'will' to refer to future time)

Iran to reject any Western incentive to halt nuclear work

Defiant Iran to proceed with more atomic work

Iran to defy UN nuclear demands

EU members to refer Iran to Security Council

Iran will face nuclear sanctions

EU will continue talks to solve Iran nuke crisis

Through the use of modal verb *will* the above headlines are given strong modal force as they are intended to be perceived as having a very high probability of occurrence. The first three headlines all point to the inherent disposition of Iran to take a defiant posture in spite of compromises made and incentives offered by the EU. The next two headlines predict and indicate the certainty of Iran's being punished by the Europeans pointing to the Europeans' power and firmness in dealing with Iran. The use of modal verbs allows the writer to present opinion and speculation about Iran in a way that gives it the status of fact.

Furthermore, as Fairclough (1989) rightly maintains, modality is not just a matter of modal auxiliaries. Modality may also be expressed through various other formal features including adverbs and tense. In the sentence '*your library books are overdue*' the verb 'are' is in the simple present tense form. This is one terminal point of expressive modality, a categorical commitment of the speaker to the truth of the proposition; the opposite terminal point would be the negative simple present, '*your library books are not overdue*', an equally categorical commitment to the truth of the negated proposition. The alternative possibilities with modal verbs fall between these categorical extremes: '*your library books must/may be overdue*'. And the intermediate possibilities include forms with adverbs: '*your library books are probably overdue*'.

In the headlines of British newspapers, the propositions about Iran or its nuclear program are generally represented as categorical truths-facts- without the sort of intermediate modalities illustrated above.

Iran a number one challenge to peace
Iran a chief military threat
Iran nuke a danger for Middle East
Iran defiant over nuclear pressure

The verbs are all in non-modal present tense forms. The forms allow newspapers to present opinions and speculations about Iran or its nuclear program that might be interpreted as actual facts by the readers.

The prevalence of categorical modalities supports a view of the world as transparent - as if it reveals its own meaning to the observer

without the mediation of the text producer. It disguises the ideology built into the headlines therefore naturalizing this embedded ideology.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article has attempted to delineate the representation of a political issue, i.e. Iran's nuclear program as well as its main participants and their actions in the headlines of a number of British newspapers by analyzing the topics, lexical choices, thematic patterns, modality, and transitivity patterns with reference to the use of the contextual strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, two ideological moves applied for the purpose of "face keeping" or "impression management" (Van Dijk, 2000), to portray oneself as superior to, or better than, others, and to present the Other as inferior, evil, etc.

The analysis of the headlines of the selected newspapers according to the said discursive features suggests that the newspapers tend to encode and reinforce asymmetries between EU and Iran in their representation, in the context of west-dominated international politics. They appear to project a specific point of view, according to which imposing sanctions on Iran is the right measure to avert a nuclear catastrophe.

The picture that emerges from the newspapers coverage of Iran is negative. The newspapers have printed news stories that reinforce the dichotomy of 'Us' and 'Them,' often with hegemonic undertones. This representation tends to emphasize negative images and casts Iran in an unfavorable light. The image of Iran's nuclear program as a security

threat seems to be regenerated against the backdrop of the 'war on terror.' Heightened and artificially exaggerated security concerns have made Iran's peaceful unclear program a subject of intense international attention and scrutiny.

Negative representation of the 'Other' and positive representation of 'Us' appear to be two common strategies in all the discursive strategies used by the British newspapers. The use of these discursive strategies serves to orient readers to a specific interpretive framework.

The question that arises at this point is why do the newspapers present news in such a way, or why is there this dichotomization of the EU and Iran? To answer this question, we need to probe more deeply into the socio-political forces shaping contemporary world arena. That is, apart from analyzing the linguistic tools and structures in the selected newspapers, it is equally vital to situate the newspapers in their proper socio-discursive and political context so that it would be possible to examine all those extra-textual forces, the various ideas, values and beliefs that help to shape the perceptions and perspectives of the newspapers towards the subject of discourse, in this case Iran's nuclear program. It is important to consider the role of context as language use is always embedded in social contexts. A text, as Fairclough (1989) points out, cannot be divorced from the processes of production that create it and which in turn cannot be disentangled from the local institutional and socio-historical conditions within which the text is situated.

As pointed out earlier, the mass media, as one of the most powerful institutions, may be able to construct meanings about an event, culture, and so forth, according to dominant ideas and interpretations. In other words, they may construct ideas about distant others in a biased manner. The media has the ability to construct the way we think about a subject, whether this is a benevolent or malevolent construction. In the case of representing other societies, power relations may determine how that society is presented to us.

Some commentators (Said, 1995; Chomsky, 1989; Hall, 1992) note that the Western media have had the power to construct negative images of those societies that 'threaten', or do not share, the liberal/democratic/capitalist ideology, such as the Soviet Union. The media have had the power to construe socialism and Communism as fundamentally evil ideologies - 'the evil empire'. Conversely, the Western media have portrayed societies, such as Israel, in a positive manner, perhaps because they may have vested interests in this portrayal.

Some commentators (Hall, 1993; Said, 1995; Cones, 1997; Karim, 2000) also note that the end of the Cold War necessitated new enemies and note that Islam has been the principal candidate for replacing the West's old enemy, Communism. Islamophobia has increasingly been a part of all policies of the great powers, of hegemonic powers. Islam has been cast as the "enemy of humanity" by governments reverting to the polarized worldview that divided the planet for 50 years after World War II.

Similarly, Chomsky (1992) proposes that the fall of Soviet Union necessitated new enemies, and those deemed as “rogue states” were the viable alternative. Iran as an officially recognized Islamic state that opposes the dominant Western ideology and the existing power relations of the world community “is fast becoming the chief threat to global peace” and to the “new world order” propagated and sponsored by the West and would inevitably suffer from foreign ideological prejudice. Given the prejudices and attitudes of the West against Iran, it will not, therefore, be surprising to see the selected newspapers imbued with anti-Iranian rhetoric.

The findings of this study enrich the research literature on CDA by substantiating the view that “carefully constructed news texts would employ a number of syntactic, semantic, rhetorical and devices in the spirit of impression management (Van Dijk, 1988b: 86). They suggest that these strategies are pervasive in discourse. They also illustrate that these strategies serve a number of linguistic and non-linguistic functions. They serve both informational and interactional functions in discourse (Berton, 1999). The functions of the analyzed discursive strategies are to develop a particular perspective on the information. The insights gained from this study show that the information presented and the perspective developed in the discourse of the news stories analyzed, i.e. negative Other-representation and positive Self-presentation is effectively created and reinforced by the frequent use of the analyzed discursive strategies.

It is hoped that this critical analysis of newspaper reporting on Iran's nuclear program will, in its own modest way, contribute to the field of CDA and stimulate further research to be undertaken in areas beyond newspaper discourse or even the media, to all areas of 'text and talk' that harbor ideological persuasion, to make transparent the processes that enter into the construction of social inequality and injustice. It is the sharpened expertise and heightened awareness coming with a cumulative body of work on CDA that will equip and energize people to deconstruct the sociolinguistic infrastructures that continue to trap people in positions of subservience. It is then that CDA can truly be a socially relevant and meaningful mode of applied linguistic inquiry.

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