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Transitivity Analysis of Media Bias in some Selected Newspaper Reports about Yemen Conflict

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Abstract

This paper aims at conducting a transitivity analysis of the reports of two newspapers, namely, **Tehran Times** and **Asharq Al-Awsat** about Yemen conflict. The present paper is mainly limited to the critical discourse analysis of the newspaper reports that tackle Yemen war from March 2015 to December 2016. It aims at Investigating the existing biased, tendentious position as well as ideologies found in the two newspapers, namely, Tehran Times and Asharq Al-Awsat. The paper conducts both a qualitative and a quantitative discourse analysis depending on Halliday's 'Transitivity' from his book 'Systemic Functional Grammar' (1994). The analysis of the reports of the two newspapers reveals that the reports of the two newspapers are not free from bias.

Key Words: transitivity analysis, Yemen conflict, ideologies

المستخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى إجراء تحليل للخيارات الوظيفية للتقارير الصحفية لاثنتين من الصحف وهما بالتحديد صحيفة Asharq Al-Awsat وصحيفة Tehran Times فيما يتعلق بصراع اليمن. ان التحليل النقدي للخطاب في التقارير الصحفية التي تتناول حرب اليمن في الفترة من آذار ٢٠١٥ لغاية كانون الاول ٢٠١٦ هوما تقوم به هذه الدراسة بصورة رئيسية. تهدف الدراسة الى استكشاف المواقف المنحازة والمغرضه وكذلك الايدولوجيات الموجودة في الصحيفتين .اجري البحث الحالي بأسلوب كمي ونوعي للتحليل واتباع نموذج هالدي لمتعددية الفعل من علم اللغة الوظيفي النظامي (١٩٩٤). يكشف التحليل لتقارير الصحيفتين بأن هذه التقارير ليست خاليه من الأحياز .
الكلمات المفتاحية: التحليل التعددي ،صراع اليمن ، ايدولوجيات

1. Introduction

The new concept of war nowadays is not only that of using weapons and soldiers in a direct fight between two armies but also there should be a supportive media which can be used to fuel the public with news about what is going on. Van Dijk (1988, p.83) states that “Ideologically news implicitly promotes the dominant beliefs and opinions of elite in society”.

Yemen war 2015 has always been under the consideration of the media, namely newspapers worldwide, on the one hand, and the Middle East, in particular, on the other. Different newspapers around the world whether in Western or Middle East countries have dealt with this war. Each newspaper has dealt with this war differently according to its ideology and interests of the country to which it belongs.

In this world two main factors are able to change those biased news and reports into objective ones. These two factors are money and power. They can be used either to manipulate or persuade people.

There are many reasons why media present biased news but the clearest reason is that media try to satisfy the interests of their countries, allies and politicians. In fact, they replace clear truths with lies and what is really happening in this world does not match what they say (Paul & Elder, 2004).

Numbers of studies with different theoretical frameworks have been conducted to study the tendentious representation of events through media

and newspapers in particular. Accordingly, Omidi and Rahimi (2013) are among many other researchers who try to deal with this topic. They aim to focus on how events are reported in the newspapers of the Middle East. In the same respect, Taiwo (2007) studies the relation among language, power relations and ideology. Reza and Ali (2016) conduct a study about Yemen crisis in terms of Tendentious Newspaper Headlines.

The previous studies mentioned above mostly concentrate on the analysis of events in media of only one country or take only one point of view. What is unique in this study is that, it is not limited to only one point of view or opinion. The study makes an analysis of two important newspapers in the Middle East about very important event in the region.

2 . Literature Review

2.1 An Overview of Critical Discourse Analysis

Before diving into the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA), we need to give comprehensive understanding of Discourse Analysis (henceforth DA) and how CDA is relatively a new concept comparing with DA .

DA is the field which emerged in the 1960s and it is concerned with the study of language in use. According to Bhatia (2008), this field focuses on the meaning the speaker gives to languages and the actions which are done by the language use in some certain contexts. On the other hand, DA is not limited to the study of language at the level of the sentence or sentences and their combination and their coherence; rather, there are some distinct sentences or utterances that might be examined as a communicative ‘actions’ or ‘events’. For instance, grammar tells people the literal meaning of the following sentence ‘ I pronounce you man and wife’ ; but it does not tell the context in which it means ‘you are married’ (Gee&Hand ford ,2012).

Fairclough (1989) states that Critical linguists who follow the framework of Halliday’s ‘Systemic Functional Linguistics’ believe that there are clear relations between linguistics and social structures , demanding that social meanings are very necessary for discourse to exist. However those scholars neglected an important point which is the relation between language, power, and ideology.

With the passage of the time, DA continued to develop until it reached the point which is very important in the history of this field when it started to affect other different fields, such as, sociology, anthropology and philosophy. This field plays a very important role in dividing linguistic analysis into three notions: text, society, and context (namely, communication, language use, and context). So, this change was the beginning of a new era in the field (Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

The term “Discourse Analysis” introduced first by Zellig Harris (1952) as a way founded in order to analyse writing and connected speech. There were two main interests for Harris; the first is the inspection of the language beyond the sentence level, and the second one was that of finding the relation between linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour. He studied the first one of these two in detail, hoping to provide a clear way to show how the features of the language are distributed in texts as well as to show the ways in which these features are combined in texts of different kinds and styles (Paltridge, 2012).

Thus, language can be used differently in particular situations. He argues that these discourses share not only particular meanings, but also they contain some characteristic linguistic features belonging to them. Concerning the relation between DA and CDA, the latter differs from the former in being ‘constitutive problem - oriented interdisciplinary’. Therefore, CDA does not concentrate on the analysis of the linguistic units; instead, this approach emphasizes the complicated social phenomena which require a multidisciplinary and multi-methodical approach (Wodak & Meyer, 2008).

Thus, CDA can be considered relatively as a new branch in the study of linguistics which is concerned with studying those relations between social practices and discursive. This approach began approximately in the late 1980s and developed quickly during the last thirty years to become one of the most common approaches in DA and social sciences as well (Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

2.2 Media Bias

News media play an essential role in our society; however, surveys indicate that media is widely viewed as biased. In general, bias has two effects on the demand for news: first, those rational people are more skeptical of biased news, so they depend less on these news in their decision-making. Second, bias makes certain stories more likely than others (Baron, 2004). A survey by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE (1999)) revealed that 78% of people believe that there is bias in news reporting. However, there is little consensus on the direction and nature of the perceived bias. The term 'media bias' has been defined in many ways. According to Baron (2004), media bias is defined relative to the truth. Under this definition, journalists for instance, may report the truth but favor one particular point of view in their selection of information in order to be reported.

According to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, the term 'media' refers to "an agency or means which can be used for transmitting, communicating, or diffusing information to the society". At the same time, this dictionary defines the term 'bias' as "a preference or an inclination that inhibits impartial judgment or an act of policy stemming from prejudice" (Pickett, 2002, p. 21).

According to Black's Law Dictionary, one of the most widely American's cited legal compendium, 'media bias' refers to "a political bias in journalistic reporting in programing selection or otherwise in mass communications media" (Gamer & Black, 2009, p. 107).

Niven(2002) states that people develop opinions of media bias according to their own prejudices with little or no evidence as to why. After all, individuals view things from different perspectives, and they can be influenced by several factors like their own religion, partisanship, and background. It seems natural for people to believe that something is not biased because, for instance they agree with the writer or the article itself or biased when they do not agree with them.

Bias means several things for several people. A survey by the ASNE(1999) finds that :

1. 30 % of people especially adults see bias as not being open-minded and neutral about the facts.
2. 29 % of people say that it is having an agenda, and shaping news report in order to go with this agenda.
3. 29 % of people believe that it is favoritism to a particular social or political group.
4. 8 % of people see bias in the news media is “all of these”.

2.3 Transitivity

The clause has many aspects of meaning; one of these aspects is the meaning as representation. When people talk about what does a word or sentence mean, they have this type of meaning in mind, “the meaning in the sense of content” (Halliday , 1994 , p.106).

Material, mental and relational processes are the three main types of process in the English transitivity system. But there are also further categories among these three main processes. These are the behaviour, verbal and existential process. The most powerful impression of experience consists of ‘goings-on’, such as, happening, doing, sensing, meaning, being and becoming. These entire ‘goings on’ are found in the clause (Halliday, 1994).

Transitivity means the grammar of experience, and it can help people to get the crucial requirements in order to classify the infinite variety of ‘goings-on’ into a set of processes types. Transitivity expresses the main following notion “who did what to whom in what conditions” using accurate words.

The aforementioned six processes in the Transitivity system introduced by Halliday (1994) are to be discussed as follows:

1. **Material processes:** They are used to refer to (doing, happening, changing...etc.). These processes are mainly related to the experience of the outer world.
2. **Mental processes:** This type of processes includes the following sides: feeling, seeing and thinking.

3. **Relation processes:** This type of processes refers to being and having an attribute or identity. In this type, there must be a relation between participants and their attributes.
4. **Behavioural processes:** This type of processes refers to the act of behaving, for instance, (laughing, smiling, singing, etc.). Participants who perform such processes are often called 'behavers'(Halliday , 1994).
5. **Verbal processes:** This type of processes represents the verbal actions, i.e. actions which are about saying something, for instance (talking, promising, warning,..etc.).
6. **Existential processes:** This process simply refers to that relation of existing or being there. As in the following example "There was a storm" (Halliday , 1994 , p.143).

Table (3-1): Type of process, its meaning, and the participant (Halliday , 1994 , p.143)

Process type	Category meaning	Participants
material: action event	'doing' 'doing' 'happening'	Actor, Goal
Behavioural	'behaving'	Behaver
mental: perception affection cognition	'sensing' 'seeing' 'feeling' 'thinking'	Sensor, Phenomenon
Verbal	'saying'	Sayer, Target
relational: attribution identification	'being' 'attributing' 'identifying'	Carrier, Attribute Identified, Identifier, Token, Value
Existential	'existing'	Existent

3. Methodology

In this section the researcher presents transitivity analysis adopted from the model of Halliday 'Systemic Functional Grammar' (1994). In this respect, (120) clauses are chosen randomly to be analysed.

Therefore, (60) clauses from each newspaper are going to be the data of the transitivity analysis, i.e., (60) clauses from TT, and (60) clauses from Asharq Al-Awsat.

The main characters in this respect are the following: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Houthis, who are located as participants. However, the allies can include John Kerry, Saudi ambassador to the US Adel al-jubeir, Ahmed Assiri, Yemenis ambassador to the UN and many other figures. On the other hand, Houthis and Iran include, Houssein Amir- Abdollahian, Mohammed Javad Zarif, Velayati, Yemen's new Prime Minister Abdulaziz bin Habtoor and other figures. After finishing the analysis of each group of reports, the quantitative results, will be presented on the shape of numbers.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Transitivity Analysis of Tehran Times Reports

In the present section, the researcher analyses (60) clauses selected from TT to be analysed according to Halliday's model 'Systemic Functional Grammar' (1994). The researcher analyses these (60) clauses in terms of participant types and process types.

The following table expresses findings of transitivity analysis in which the category of participants and process, the overall occurrence, the total frequency of participants and processes as well as the percentage are expressed as follow:

Table (4-5): Frequency of Occurrence of Participants and Processes in *TT*

Participant Category	Process Category	Freq. of Occurrence	Total Freq. of Par/Pro	Per.
Actor	Material	19	60	31.6%
Sayer	Verbal	26	60	43.3%
Sensor	Mental	5	60	8.3%
Identified	Relational	10	60	16.6%

The table above reflects the overall frequency of participants and processes as well as the main characters as participants used in the clauses taken from Tehran Times. In terms of Sayer participants, they are given the highest numbers with (26) times, nearly 43.3% of the total percentage. The Actor participants come in the second place with (19) times, nearly 31.6% of the total percentage. In the third place, the Identified participants come with (10) times about 16.6% of the total number. Finally, Sensor participants come in the last rate with (5) times, nearly 8.3% of the total percentage.

4.2 Transitivity Analysis of Asharq Al-Awsat Reports

The present section presents the analysis of (60) clauses which are selected from Asharq Al-Awsat to be analysed according to Halliday's model 'Systematic Functional Grammar' (1994). The researcher analyses these (60) clauses in terms of participant type and process types. The following table shows findings of transitivity analysis in these (60) clauses. The table shows the category of participants and processes, the total frequency of participants and processes, the overall occurrence and the percentage of the occurrence.

Table (4-7): Frequency of Occurrence of Participants and Processes in Asharq Al-Awsat

Participant Category	Process Category	Freq. of Occurrence	Total Freq. of Par/Pro	Per.
Actor	Material	18	60	30%
Sayer	Verbal	31	60	51.6%
Sensor	Mental	2	60	3.2%
Identified	Relational	9	60	15%

The table above shows that Asharq Al-Awsat concentrates on verbal processes; this can be seen clear through the high number of frequency. Saudi Arabia is presented as sayer in (14) clause out of (31). Verbs like 'explained', 'reported', 'told', and 'condemned' are used in the analyzed clauses reflect this fact.

5. Conclusion

The clear disagreement between the two newspapers Asharq Al-Awsat an TT in the presentation of the same topics is so obvious. Concerning Asharq Al-Awsat, material processes represented the highest rate of the total number. In most of its reports, the newspaper referred into Saudi Arabia as a dominant actor. The use of verbs like 'cut off', 'helped', 'began', 'stopped' and 'restored' indicated this idea. Saudi Arabia was presented as an 'actor' (13) times out of (31).

In terms of verbal processes, Saudi Arabia was shown as sayer (14) times out of (31). In all of these (14) times, Saudi Arabia was presented as the defender of human rights of Yemen civilians and the one who tried to restore legitimacy into the war-torn country. Regarding mental and relational processes, Asharq Al-Awsat did not pay great attention into these two processes. Saudi Arabia was presented as sensor only (2) times out of the (31) times. In these two times, Saudi Arabia was presented as the only country that tries to help Yemeni people and feels the suffering of them. In most of relational processes, Saudi Arabia was identified as a supporter into legitimacy in Yemen and always has neutral side concerning sectarian issues.

In terms of Iran, Asharq Al-Awsat tried to portray Iran in a very bad image. As an 'actor' Iran was presented as the country that is responsible for

all what is happening in Yemen. Verbs like ‘support’, ‘provide’ which refer to the Iranian military supplies into Yemen are used in order to indicate the bad role played by Iran in Yemen.

In verbal and relational processes, Iran is shown as ‘sayer’ in (5) clauses. In most of these clauses, Iran was presented negatively since they criticize the Saudi-led coalition and describe the war as ‘invasion’ and ‘dangerous step’.

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