

Critical Discourse Analysis of Media Coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli War in Two News Channels

Aya Mohamed

School of foundation and General Education, Canadian College of Kuwait-AlGonquin, Kuwait

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Abstract: This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is represented in media coverage by contrasting two prominent news channels: Al-Jazeera (Arab) and BBC News (British). By analyzing news reports from the period of December 2-30, 2023, this research aims to uncover how differing ideologies and power dynamics shape the portrayal of identical events. The study focuses on linguistic features, discursive practices, and ideological influences to understand the role of media language in constructing and reflecting societal power structures. Through a qualitative approach and Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the research provides insights into the biases and hegemonic tendencies within media discourse, contributing to a broader understanding of how media narratives impact public perception and reflect political orientations.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Media Representation, Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, Ideological Bias, Linguistic Features, Comparative Media Analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict which is considered one of the most intense and enduring conflicts in recent history has consistently captured the attention of both media and political figures. It remains a recurring topic in news coverage, with its discourse being just as argumentative and ideological as the conflict itself. Despite what expected from journalism is to adhere to the principles of truthfulness, accuracy, balance, non-bias, and integrity, news reporting on this conflict has faced continuous scrutiny and criticism from people on both sides, often accusing media of bias against them. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been a crucial topic of research for many researchers and academics. (Zaher, 2009)

This research aims to critically analyze the discourse of news representation of specific events from the Palestinian/Israeli war, particularly those starting on October 7, 2023. The focus is on exploring how Arab and Western newspapers report on the same events of the conflict differently stemming from having different ideologies.

The study will adopt a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach as the analytical framework to investigate how selected newspapers represent events from the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Certain events of the conflict will be selected from both newspapers to compare between them and shed light on how ideologies and power dynamics influence their production and representation in both newspapers.

To achieve this, the representations of identical events in an Arab news channel website (Al-Jazeera) and a British one (BBC News), each with distinct political orientations, are compared considering contextual linguistics feature, discursive practices and ideological factors of each of them.

Research Objectives:

- 1- To compare how events related to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict are represented in Arab and British/Western news channels using a Critical Discourse Analysis approach.
- 2- To investigate how ideology and power dynamics influence the framing of the news coverage and the media language in different news channels (British vs. Arabic).

Research Questions:

- How do linguistic features in news reports about the Gaza/Israeli war vary between British/Western and Arab news channels?
- What textual strategies are employed by media outlets (BBC News and Al-Jazeera) in framing identical events during the selected time frames, and how do these strategies contribute to the construction of meaning?
- In what ways do discursive practices, production processes, and consumption patterns reflect the ideologies and power dynamics inherent in the news coverage, particularly considering the political orientations of the newspapers?
- What are the underlying ideologies and power dynamics reflected in the language used by different actors in the conflict?
- How does media language function within the broader socio-political context, shaping and reflecting societal power structures, during the Gaza/Israeli war?

Context of the Study:

I investigated the media coverage of a British/Western and an Arab media sources through the escalation of violence in Gaza during the period of 2-30 December, 2023. I felt urged to conduct this study after 2 months of following up with the events of the latest Gaza/Israeli war, and how the media discourse of each party is totally different, though they are reporting the same events. Hence, I needed to understand or have some insights of why this is happening. This why I decided to analyze some news articles, in particular pieces taken from well known British/Western and Arab news channels using critical discourse analysis (CDA).

CDA is the primary method of analysis used in this study delving into the ways language acquires influence through its utilization by media apparatuses, as asserted by Bazzi (2009, p. 19). The utilization of CDA in my research aims to uncover how language manipulation of power and ideology occurs in the examined media texts. It is the fitting approach for analyzing the Israeli-Palestinian media discourse during crises and revealing the hegemonic tendencies embedded in journalistic texts from both perspectives. CDA is the right method to analyze the Israeli Palestinian media discourse in times of crises and to identify the hegemonic instinct behind the journalistic text in both sides, to explore how the language of media is used as a weapon in promoting wars and hatred.

Study Design:

This is a qualitative study that adopts Critical Discourse Analysis as the main approach to investigate the media coverage of the Palestinian/Israeli war of 2023. The interdisciplinary nature of this qualitative integrates different fields like discourse analysis, linguistics and media analysis. (Amer, 2015)

CDA is chosen for its potential to uncover underlying power dynamics, ideological constructs, and the complex use of language in media discourse. Furthermore, the study incorporates the Fairclough three-dimensional model within the framework of CDA, providing a sophisticated perspective of how to explore text, discourse practice, and socio-cultural context in media representations. This combined qualitative approach seeks to provide a thorough analysis of the many factors influencing how the war is portrayed in media discourse.

Rationale behind the Media sources Selection: (BBC News/ Al-Jazeera)

The reason why I chose these two news channels is that they have a great popularity worldwide, in the Western countries and in the Middle East countries as well. Thus, they are more likely to influence and shape the public opinion. In addition to their global popularity and influence, these news channels, are recognized for their extensive coverage, diverse viewership, and established reputations in the field of international news reporting. Their widespread reach ensures that the media discourse analyzed in this research captures a broad spectrum of perspectives, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the Gaza-Israeli conflict.

Significance of the Study:

This study aims to bring a fresh perspective to the existing literature on the Palestinian-Israeli war, focusing on how it influences Media Discourse in Western Media like the BBC and Arab Media represented by Al-Jazeera channel. This will be achieved by not only analyzing the textual or linguistic features of the news discourse but also the discursive

practices, the power dynamics, the underlying ideologies and the political orientations that govern and control the formulation or the productions of such news reports of war- Gaza war specifically.

This findings of this study are expected to matter a lot for future academic exploration, touching upon various fields like linguistics, critical studies, politics, and media studies. This becomes especially significant given the current and anticipated global interest and connections with the Middle East, emphasizing the growing demand for a shared understanding between different cultures.

Limitation of the Research:

This research depends mainly on CDA as its main method of analysis, and this is the first limitation. Given that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) relies on meta-theoretical and epistemological standards, the researcher employs perspectival interpretation and data selection within a particular social context. Consequently, this introduces a challenge regarding the reliability and repeatability of results across different samples, as noted by Wood and Kroger (2000).

In addition, in critical discourse analysis and specifically when we choose a qualitative method for analysis the researcher interpretation will always be framed within a context and will be subject to change which gives space to more interpretations. Thus, CDA encounters a validity problem, because the interpretation of the researcher is only one version among various other versions. This is due to the fact that discourse has a social context which makes it hold a multitude of meanings. In this case, evaluating a study in this context cannot be definitively labeled as true or false (Wood & Kroger, 2000).

Another limitation of the study is the lack of quantitative research. I believe using a quantitative method could have made the finding more accurate and reliable and could lead to a generalization.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Discourse Analysis, an overview:

According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997) Critical Discourse Analysis is a type of discourse analysis that is a sophisticated, intricate interdisciplinary approach that encompasses a multitude of theories, methodologies and research issues. Discourse analysis elucidates how meaning is crafted, revealing the methods used to shape and define social actors. Additionally, it explores how these portrayals contribute to forming a specific comprehension of the subject matter. (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005)

Since there are many different definitions of discourse analysis, there are an abundant ways of understanding CDA. Van Dijk (1988a:2416) characterizes discourse analysis as a theoretical and methodological framework for studying language and its utilization. Its main goal is to generate detailed and systematic depiction of language units termed as “discourse”. Smith and Bell (2007) suggest that discourse analysis entails a thorough investigation of text, encompassing visual elements and sound in addition to spoken or written language and it targets shedding lights on the meanings and societal importance embedded within the text.

Fairclough (2010) used the two adjectives interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary to describe this form of analysis. He argues that CDA goes beyond one discipline or theory and instead encourages a dialogue between different disciplines, theories and frameworks. This exchange of ideas and perspectives leads to developments and insights within each discipline involved, including CDA itself. CDA concentrates basically on the impact of power dynamics and inequalities in giving rise to societal injustices. Specifically, CDA places emphasis on the discursive dimensions of power relations and inequalities, exploring the dialectical interplay between discourse and power, and how these interactions influence other aspects and elements within the broader social dynamics.

CDA focuses on the process of creating meaning rather than the meaning itself, as emphasized by Betrand and Hughes (2005, p.174). This characteristic makes CDA inherently interdisciplinary and open to diverse methods and theories as highlighted by Wodak and Weis (2005. p.124).

Consequently, CDA integrates a variety of approaches and theories which makes it challenging to adhere to a particular set of tools or a defined methodology, as discussed by scholars like Fairclough and Wodak (1997, p.262-268). With the variety of CDA approaches, Pennycook (1994, p.121) proposes that these method are all committed to move beyond the linguistic description. Instead, they aim to provide explanations, demonstrating how language reflects and contributes to the of social inequalities.

Functions and Goals of CDA:

Fairclough (2014) asserts that CDA not only critiques discourse but also explains its role in shaping and contributing to the current social reality. Moreover, it serves as a foundation for action aimed at bringing about specific changes in that reality. Following that, this research not only provides critique of media coverage of the Palestinian war, but also seeks to clarify how this discourse is generated considering the aspects that impact new reporting in the two selected news outlets.

CDA seeks to elucidate how linguistic and discursive practices are interconnected with “socio-political structures of power and domination” (Kress, 1990:85). This is achieved highlighting “the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance” (Van Dijk, 1993a:249). Such a focus reveals how institutions and their discourses play a role in shaping individuals, aligning with the overarching goal of CDA. In the light of these tenets and objectives, this research on war reporting aligns well with the broader aims of CDA.

Discourse in the light of Media:

Discourse can be either written or spoken. Media discourse integrates both the actual texts, such as news stories and the procedures involved in constructing and generating these texts. In essence, media discourse serves as a reflection of the ideological interests and perspectives of influential figures like elite, politicians, and journalists, as indicated by scholars such as Fowler (1991), Fairclough (1989, 2001, 2003), Van Dijk (1997, 1998a, 1998b), and Richardson (2007).

An essential role of media discourse according to Fairclough (2001) is to facilitate communication between two realms: the public and the private, specifically the temporal context of Media content. For examples, media delivers news events, such as political news, war, or news related to crime, from the public domain to the attention of individuals in their homes (private domain) through various platforms like TV, radio, newspapers, and the Internet. In the context of my study this pertains to how the selected news channels report on the events of the Palestinian-Israeli war of 2023 and present them to readers and viewers.

Media discourse serves as a portrayal of reality and is a focal point for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In this context, media reports present diverse viewpoints on the same event. Media news functions as a resource deployed by individuals, particularly in competitive and dominating situations (Fairclough 2003). Fairclough (2001, p.4) recognizes the significance of analyzing news media, noting that it offers insights into the subjective nature of news representations, influenced by the political and social context.

Creators of media discourse choose their subject matter, what they report and how they report it based on their targeted audience. Additionally, they depict and endorse the war, defending their participation in it. This study conducts an analysis of the discourse of news channels. In doing this,

Fairclough three dimensional approach will used.

Discourse and Ideology:

According to Fairclough (2010), ideologies are initially characterized as representations that play a role in forming, sustaining, and altering social power dynamics and dominance. This perspective on ideology is deemed critical, differing from descriptive views, and it links ideology with power in the form of hegemony rather than force or violence.

Theoretical Framework:**Fairclough CDA Three Dimensional Model:**

Norman Fairclough (2003) presents a comprehensive framework known as the three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This model encapsulates the multifaceted nature of discourse analysis by incorporating three interconnected dimensions: textual, discourse practice, and social practice. Each dimension contributes to a holistic understanding of how language functions within specific contexts and societal structures.

Fairclough's three-dimensional model provides a layered approach to analyzing language as follows:

In the textual dimension, linguistic features within a specific text are described to explain how language constructs meaning. This includes the choice of vocabulary, grammatical structures, coherence, cohesive and rhetorical devices used in the text.

Moving to the discourse practice dimension, attention is directed towards the production /and consumption of discourse, examining the roles of producers (e.g. journalists) and consumers (e.g., readers) in shaping language use. In this step, the

researcher can explore how discourse is produced, distributed, and consumed through analyzing power relations, roles, and relationships between different actors involved in the production and reception of the discourse.

Lastly, the social or the sociocultural dimension which as Fairclough (1989, p.26) states "explores the relationship between interaction and social context with the social determination of the processes of production and interpretation, and their social effects". Thus, this dimension explores the societal context to understand how discourse reflects and influences broader social structures, ideologies, and power relations. The our pose of it is to reveal the sociocultural and political implications of discourse, aiming to understand how language use influences and is influenced by societal norms, values, and power dynamics.

In short, Fairclough CDA three dimensional model offers a nuanced and comprehensive methodology for studying the intricate interplay between language, practices, and social phenomena.

3. METHODOLOGY

Data Collection:

This study focuses on the analysis of two news articles collected from two prominent news channels, BBC News and Al-Jazeera, each of which reports news in the English Language ensuring accessibility and consistency across the selected articles. For my convenience, I collected the data online from the news websites of these two news channels. The selection of these channels is grounded in their global popularity, influential reach, and distinct political orientations.

To select the articles, a systematic approach was taken on the online news platforms of BBC News and Al-Jazeera. Keywords related to the Palestinian-Israeli War of 2023 were utilized, and the selection process prioritized headlines and articles covering the same events for homogeneity.

The data extracted from each selected news article included key components such as headlines, content, publication date, and contextual information relevant to the events covered.

The time frame for collecting the data was from the 7th of October till 31of December 2023. I investigated the media coverage of the two media sources to provide a comparative analysis of them based on Fairclough CDA approach, the three dimensional model.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

In this study I used 2 news articles, 1 article was collected from AL-Jazeera and the other one from BBC News. Both articles report the same events related to the current Palestinine-Israeli conflict.

The selected headlines can be seen in the following table:

No.	Titles	Media Outlets(News Channels)
1	Israeli strikes in Gaza kill at least 13, destroy al-Shifa's cardiac ward	AL-Jazeera
2	Israeli forces detain director of Gaza's al-Shifa Hospital	BBC NEWS

These headlines will be analyzed along with the articles based on Fairclough's Three Dimensional Model as stated earlier in the study.

Applying CDA of Fairclough on both news articles, the following conclusions are drawn.

1-Textual dimension, certain linguistic features can be found as follows:

A. Language Features

Investigating Al-Jazeera article, we can find that the headline and article use strong and emotive vocabulary such as "Israeli strikes kill 13, destroy cardiac ward" to confirm how harsh and severe the events in Gaza are because of Israel's actions. The choice of language here helped in framing the events in a more tragic and serious manner.

We can also see this linguistic choice in" The Israeli campaign has also displaced 1.6 million Palestinians, and wrecked much of Gaza infrastructure.

Another textual feature employed in Al-Jazeera article is using metaphors as in:

"Humanitarian workers say what little aid has been allowed into the enclave is a "drop in the bucket" compared to what is needed. " to show the dire conditions Palestinians lived in because Israel's violence. An additional effective linguistic feature deployed in the article is using an exaggerating language as in " Israel has waged a devastating bombing campaign".

On the other hand, looking at the BBC article, the first thing we notice is how the headline is framed shifting the whole event from striking the hospital to Israeli condemning or detaining the hospital' director showing him and Hamas as the aggressors or the hospital's destruction. I have attempted to find an article that reports the bombing of the hospital but could not find any. Generally speaking, the language of the BBC article is relatively neutral, as it presents facts and statements from various sources. For example, the article includes a quote from the Israeli military explaining the detention of the hospital director, attributing it to evidence that al-Shifa "served as a Hamas command and control center."

This direct quote reflects the official Israeli perspective without added bias from the news channel. It also provides a statement from Hamas denying the allegations, maintaining a balanced representation by including perspectives from both sides of the conflict. Finally quotes from hospital staff are included, offering insights into the situation inside the hospital and their experiences. This contributes to the neutrality of the language by presenting the voices of those directly affected.

One more feature is using active sentence when presenting the active actors whether Israel or Hamas. For example, "Israel launched a major military campaign in the Gaza Strip with the objective of destroying Hamas - which it classes as a terrorist organization – this additional statement between dashes is additional and needed not to be mentioned, however it was deliberately there to justify the Israel's attack as they deal with a terrorist organization. " The phrase. "which Israel classes as terrorist" is used to show that BBC News is neutral and objective and it only portrays Israel perspective.

However the article includes some phrases that imply impartiality as in, "following evidence showing that al-Shifa Hospital, under his direct management, served as a Hamas command and control centre" though no evidence was provided in the article to prove this narrative. One smart technique the article does is over quoting for Israeli officials almost 6 times and showing the amount of destruction done by Hamas and the great numbers of Israelis who got killed or hostages and always represent this as a form of self defense.

Also using words and phrases like "Hamas terror tunnel" though they do not even have an evidence that it belongs to Hamas, and the way they describe it as a terror tunnel to emphasize that Hamas is a terrorist organizational or group.

Another vocabulary choice that shows their impartiality is Hamas massacre on 7 October, to refer to the brutality of Hamas even though the number of Palestinian victims exceeded that of Israelis.

Grammar & Syntax

Al-Jazeera article uses active voice as in "One air strike destroyed the hospital's cardiac ward" to assign actions, emphasizing Israel's role in the strikes and foregrounds it (Israel), or representing it as the active actor of the sentence responsible for causing the violence, showing Israel as the aggressor or perpetrator. This is also obvious in "The Israeli campaign has also displaced 1.6 million Palestinians, and wrecked much of Gaza infrastructure."

Additionally, using passive voice as in "100 of the UN's agency employees have been killed in the war" to highlight the great number of civilian Palestinians killed it by Israel. So, the instead of saying Israel killed 100 employees, dead Palestinians were foregrounded by being placed in the beginning of the sentence- instead of the subject (Israel) to express that the majority of the Israeli attacks victims are civilians and not members of Hamas warriors, to show that this war doesn't target Hamas but it's a genocide to eradicate the civil Palestinians. Another quote which supports the same viewpoint is " killing at least 11,000 Palestinians, more than a third of them children, Gaza officials say. Additional example of using passive is " patients and displaced people are trapped with no electricity".

Looking at the BBC article, it is obvious that sentences are well-structured, contributing to the clarity of information. Certain grammatical Features noted includes using conjunctions to serve its ideologies by normalizing what happened to the hospital, as in" Hospitals are specifically protected under international humanitarian law." Then it adds " However, hospitals can lose their protection if they are used by a party to the conflict to commit an "act harmful to the enemy". The contradiction here justifies targeting the hospital and besieging it because it was used for military purposes, and since this shows how language is used to construct meaning and shape perspectives, this illustration can also fall under the discursive practices since it analyzes how language is used to construct meaning and shape perspectives.

2-Discursive Dimension

A. Journalistic Practices

Al-Jazeera article presents information about the ongoing conflict, quotes officials, and presents facts in a manner consistent with journalistic standards.

It emphasizes how the devastation of a hospital's cardiac unit and the dire circumstances inside the medical facility affect civilians. For example: The article did retell the real events detailed and their effects on the civilians and used quotes of officials for credibility.

Similarly, the BBC article follows standard journalistic practices, incorporating statements from various sources to present a comprehensive view. It aligns with the conventions of reporting in times of conflict.

However, in the given excerpt, " On Monday, the health ministry said 12 patients and other civilians at the hospital had been killed by Israeli fire. The Israeli military said its troops had targeted "terrorists" who opened fire at them from inside the facility." the discursive dimension is evident through the contrasting perspectives presented by the health ministry and the Israeli military, revealing the different narratives surrounding the events. The health ministry states that 12 patients and civilians were killed by Israeli fire, framing it as a negative consequence of Israeli actions. On the other hand, the Israeli military justifies its actions by claiming they targeted "terrorists" who opened fire from inside the facility.

Power Relations

By Al-Jazeera's mentioning Israel's military acts and their effects, the article illustrates power relations, focusing on the suffering of Palestinians and the difficulties encountered by medical facilities presenting Israel as the main actor in the war.

On the Contrary, The BBC News article reflects power relations by portraying the actions of the Israeli military, Hamas, and the hospitals involved. It highlights the power dynamics between these entities in the context of the conflict, shaping the narrative around their roles and actions. It emphasizes the Israeli perspective regarding the alleged use of hospitals by Hamas for military purposes. An example of that is the focus on Israel's military campaign and its perspective on targeting hospitals. The narrative emphasizes Israel's actions in the conflict, potentially influencing how readers perceive the power dynamics between Israel, Hamas, and the affected hospitals.

3-Social Dimension

A. Ideological stance

The article from Al-Jazeera reflect an ideological position that is pro-Palestinian. It frames the events to highlight the harm done to civilians and present Israel as the oppressor. With its emphasis on the humanitarian consequences of the Palestinian-Israeli war, the article is in line with broader discourses surrounding this war.

On the other hand the BBC article highlights the Israeli perspective on Hamas allegedly using hospitals for military purposes. It presents the Israeli viewpoint on the situation, framing it as a concern related to the military actions of Hamas.

B. Implicit Assumptions

The narrative by Al-Jazeera assumes a critical position against Israel's military actions, suggesting that Israel bears a direct- responsibility for destroying the hospital's cardiac unit. The use of phrases such as "Israeli air strikes in Gaza have killed more than a dozen people" and "destroyed the main hospital's cardiac ward" suggests a cause-and-effect relationship between Israeli military operations and the reported consequences. The implied assumption understood in the narrative is that Israel's military campaign is causing considerable harm to the Palestinian population, particularly evident in the targeting of a vital medical facility. The framing of news events in this way emphasizes the negative impact of Israel's actions and aligns with a perspective critical of Israel's role in the conflict.

C. Distribution and consumption

Both articles are likely to be distributed through mainstream media channels and consumed by audiences seeking updates on the Gaza-Israeli war. Different audiences may interpret the information based on their perspectives and pre-existing views on the conflict influenced by factors such as media bias, political beliefs, or cultural backgrounds.

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