

Reporting the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract: *The Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as one of the most controversial issues in the contemporary era, is an interesting area to study and analyse different views from varied backgrounds. It is quite common to see the variety of discourses produced when that Palestinian-Israeli conflict occurs. This study analyses two news reports from two different news agencies that have the same topic, which is 'the last war against Gaza in 2014'. The two reports were compared and critically analysed according to Huckin's analytical approach (1997), which deals with texts from a critical perspective. The results of the analysis were discussed against some principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA), while a number of 'out of sight' values, ideologies, and perspectives were revealed through analysing those textual features.*

Keywords: Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Critical Discourse Analysis, CDA

1. Background Theory

Throughout the linguistic history, there have been many approaches which were created and elaborated upon with many theories that studied and analysed language for different purposes. One of the latest analytical approaches, which went beyond looking at language patterns and linguistic properties across texts to looking at the social and cultural context in which the texts occur, is discourse analysis. This analysis approach has a number of different views that vary in accordance with their orientations, such as textually oriented views and socially oriented views. One of the most common socially oriented views is CDA.

CDA emerged in the late 1980s by Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun van Dijk, and others, and it has become one of the most influential branches of discourse analysis (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). In the beginning, it drew from an area known as critical linguistics that was prevalent in the late 1970s, which was based on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994), and developed by some linguists and literary theorists. These linguists view language as simultaneously performing three functions: ideational function, which represents the speaker's or writer's experience of the world; interpersonal function, which refers to the reflection of speakers' own attitudes in text and creating a relationship between addressor and audience; and finally the textual function where addressor is able to present an understood text to the audience (Fowler, 1991; Fairclough, 1995). These functions see meaning in the writer's or speaker's linguistic choices, as the writer or speaker uses their own language to express and connect ideas. These choices are consciously or unconsciously "principled and systematic" (Fowler et al., 1979) and ideologically formed. This Halliday's view of language is a central assumption for critical linguistics and later for CDA.

In addition, critical theory, as one of the critical linguistics theories, has an obvious role to shape the critical perspective of CDA. It mainly discusses how people are inequitably positioned in different political, social, cultural, and economical ways. It also discusses the role of ideology in shaping both a text's production and reception (Pennycook, 1997). These concepts have been further developed by a number of scholars to form the new approach, CDA.

The idea of CDA is that spoken and written texts, which occur within some social, political, racial, or economic contexts, often have some "out of sight" values, positions, and perspectives, and CDA helps to reveal those values and perspectives, positions readers in particular ways, and explores the implications of that kind of language use (Paltridge, 2012).

CDA also is based on the assumption that genres and discourse cannot be taken apart from their social context in which ideologies, values, and biases are reproduced and conveyed consciously or unconsciously—and that results in making genres and discourse are not ideology-free or objective (Threadgold, 1989; Eggins, 2005).

CDA examines and explains the use of language in those particular contexts "in relation to social and cultural issues such as race, politics, gender, identity, ideology, and cultural difference". Furthermore, it may make the underlying ideologies, presuppositions, and assumptions clear for readers (Paltridge, 2012).

CDA could reveal sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias, and explain how they are maintained and reproduced within some social, political, and historical contexts (Dijk, 1998). CDA is based on a number of principles described by Fairclough and Wodak (1997). These principles were summarised by Paltridge (2012) into four key principles, including "that the CDA addresses social and political issues and examines ways in which these are constructed and reflected in discourse". That is done by analysing the certain linguistic structure of those social and political issues that are purposely used in discourse. The second principle is "power relations are negotiated and performed through discourse". That demonstrates who controls the discourse or enables others to be a part of it through a particular use of language. The third principle is "discourse both reflects and reproduces social relations". That also shows how discourse is a part of social relations and how it creates and reproduces them through its linguistic structure. The fourth principle is "ideologies are produced and reflected in the use of discourse". That shows the way to use a particular language in a discourse to represent the writer's or speaker's ideologies and message that they want to convey through their discourse. These principles justify the

writer's or speaker's way of using language, strategies, and choices, and explore the relationship between that language and its meaning, which is not arbitrary (Paltridge, 2012, p. 187–193).

2. Methodology

In this part, I will analyse two news reports published on two different news agencies' websites at the same time. Both reports addressed the same topic, which is the 'killing children in Gaza', but from different angles. The first report was published on July 29, 2014, on the Al Jazeera News website, one of the most famous Arabic news agencies in the Arab World. The report's headline is, 'Children killed in Gaza playground shelling'. The second report was published on August 3, 2014, in CNN News' website. CNN is a well-known American news agency. Its headline is, 'Nobel laureate Wiesel: Hamas must stop using children as human shields'.

This critical analysis depends mainly on Huckin's analytical approach, which points out the features of the text, not from a linguistic view, but from a critical perspective. It deals with those features of the text that 'appear to be textual manipulations serving non-dogmatic purposes' (Huckin, 1997, p. 80).

This analytical approach enables the analyst to examine the text features from different sides and to focus on those features that may potentially mislead audience. Some of these features are associated with the text as a whole such as genre, framing, foregrounding, backgrounding, and presupposition; some of them are associated with the sentence level such as topicalisation, and agency; and then the rest of them are associated with words/phrases such as connotations, and modality.

3. Data Analysis

In this section, these two news reports will be analysed through these three levels.

4.1 Genre

Genre refers to the discourse type that text represents. The analyst's job is to determine the choice of genre, examine the extent to which the text conforms to it, and observe the text producers' purposes through his/her way of dealing with the genre. Analysing genre could enable the analyst to find out what \ have been mentioned, and what have been omitted. (Huckin, 1997).

While these news reports are about the same topic, however, they have two different headlines that give two different impressions. On the topic of genre structure, both reports have a top-down structure in which, as Van Dijk (1988) states, the most important information comes first, whilst the less important comes at the end. Consequently, whatever comes first will be considered by the readers as the most important part.

According to the CNN report, which is about a new ad campaign by Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, the first

responsible for the killing of children in Gaza by the Israeli rockets is Hamas, the Palestinian regime in Gaza, and they should stop that. Readers can interpret that as the most important theme in this report, whilst the Hamas deny those allegations, and so the main aim of that ad campaign is less important information that is placed at the end of report. I would argue that the writers made this sequence of ideas to highlight their point of view and make it the central one.

On the contrary, Al Jazeera's readers would consider the killing seven children who were playing to be the central theme of the report, whilst the less important information comes later about the Israeli prime minister's speech about fears of threats to the Israelis and the emergency meeting of the UN about a ceasefire. I would argue that the writer put those ideas at the end to question the credibility of the Israeli prime minister's speech and to suggest that the meeting of the UN as having little worth.

4.2 Framing

Another feature that can be analysed is framing, which refers to the way in which a text's content is presented, and the angle from which the writer presents the topic (Huckin, 1997).

Both news reports have the same top-down orientation of information. This frame is a primary one to narrate the sequence of events. In the CNN report, writers have chosen to present the events as a chronologically arranged series of quotes from Wiesel's speech in order to make a complete news report based on a piece of news in Gaza. I would argue that this combination of news and Wiesel's speech quotes were to shape the writers' angle, which was highly supported by Wiesel's point of view. This angle dealt with the topic of killing children from one side and puts the responsibility on Hamas, whilst presenting Israel as a victim. Furthermore, the visual aids, such as Wiesel's photo with his title as Nobel Laureate, which grants him credibility in this context, and the video recorded report that presents Hamas as a terrorist organisation were clearly to position readers and draw their attention to the writer's intended perspective.

On the other hand, Al Jazeera's report has been framed as a series of events, eyewitnesses' participations, and interviews with people by using a neutral language in most parts. In addition, using photos and a video recorded report at the beginning as visual aids showing those children's tragedy. I would argue that the use of this neutral language to be more objective and the use of visual aids were done in order to draw readers' attention and sympathy to see the issue differently than from other perspectives and to consider Israel as responsible for these crimes.

For both reports, this framing succeeds in focusing on the writers' perspectives and drawing attention away from others issues; for example, the main role of the Israeli government behind the war in the CNN report

4.3 Foregrounding and Backgrounding

Foregrounding refers to issues on which the writer or speaker focuses and mentions prominently through the text,

while backgrounding is when the issues are de-emphasised or omitted (Huckin, 1997). According to the genre structure of the top-down orientation of news reports, it is common that sentences that are 'occurring early in the report will be foregrounded while those occurring later will be backgrounded' (Huckin, 1997, p. 82). For instance, the CNN report foregrounds the role of Hamas in killing the children, whilst it backgrounds by omission an important issue regarding Israel's role and missiles that killed the children. On the other hand, Al Jazeera's report foregrounds the description of what happened and show it as a human tragedy, and then backgrounds some issues that could be included such as the reasons and the sequences of events. I would argue that both reports use foregrounding and backgrounding for this information in order to achieve their goals of framing readers' ideas about the issues.

4.4 Presupposition

This term refers to the way in which \ writer can manipulate readers by using language in a way that 'appears to take certain ideas for granted, as if there were no alternative' (Huckin, 1997, p. 82). The CNN report obviously presupposes that the Hamas regime is mainly responsible for what happen to those children. Another presupposition is that the rest of Palestinians are against the Hamas regime and are not satisfied with their policies, and instead they should find 'true Muslims' to represent them. On the other hand, the way Al Jazeera's report is framed presupposes that the Palestinians suffer a miserable life with worldwide apathy towards their issues.

4.5 Topicalisation

Topicalisation refers to what the writer puts at front of a sentence as a topic. That is a form of foregrounding at the sentence level (Huckin, 1997). By closely looking at the sentences' topics in the CNN report, most of them support the writer's perspective that considers Hamas as the foremost accused in this issue; for example, Hamas must; those who champion death; holocaust survivor and author who won the Nobel Peace Prize; Jews; Hamas' political leader; and murderous Hamas regime. The rest of sentences confirm the writer's presupposition that presents other Palestinians as being against the Hamas regime; for example, Palestinian parents; the Palestinian people; and Muslims who.... On the other side, most of sentences' topics in the Al Jazeera report also support the writer's perspective of trying to draw readers' attention to the Israeli crimes and away from other ideologies: for instance, children killed; missiles; eight people, including seven children; the children; the kids; a rocket; the Israeli army; an Israeli missile; a number of small bodies; at least another five Palestinians, including three children; a four-year-old boy; Monday's violence; the United Nations; the Israeli prime minister; Palestinian families; and dozens of worshippers.

4.6 Agency

Analysing 'agent-patient relations' in sentences could indicate who is who and what does the agent in the sentence do to others. It also could display who has initiated the actions and has the power and authority show the recipients

are often passive for some reason (Huckin, 1997). As the CNN news report was framed depending on two main parts, the news about the killing of the children and the quotes from Wiesel's speech, it is very obvious that the quotes from Wiesel's speech is an initiating action because it supports the writers' idea. For example, there are many sentence based on his actions, such as writes, begins, calls, asks, papers, and says. In addition, as it is heavily topicalised, Hamas were associated with some actions mentioned in the topicalisation section to confirm the writer's perspective. In contrast, most of topicalised agents in the Al Jazeera report are direct objects who are suffering. Furthermore, the obvious use of passive voice in this report, such as children killed; number of small bodies were brought; they've been killed; five Palestinians, including three children, were killed; and another person was killed, can be interpreted as an attempt to spotlight the victims and not those guilty of the crime. That could reinforce the writer's angle to direct the readers.

4.7 Connotations

At the word level, connotations that have additional special meanings can be analysed to clarify negative or positive implications (Huckin, 1997). While news reporting discourse is supposed to be objective, there are some examples of connotations that were purposely used. For instance, the CNN report used an oxymoron, when two contradictory terms are used together to describe the Hamas regime as a 'champion of death' and a 'death cult'. I would argue that this use of an oxymoron is to defame Hamas, and to reinforce the writers' point of view by laying the responsibility for the killing of the children on Hamas. Similarly, Al Jazeera's report uses an oxymoron to describe the Islamic festival of Eid al-Fitr. The oxymoron was in 'Eid of mourning' to represent the ultimate sadness and misery.

4.8 Modality

The last feature to be analysed is modality that refers to those words in the text that express degrees of certainty and attitudes on the part of the author (Huckin, 1997). For example, Al Jazeera's report was written in a factual tone, indicative mood, and past tense, and it does not have any type of modality. That would have an overall effect on readers by presenting the issue in an objective and unbiased way to readers for the purpose of getting their attention and sympathy.

4. Discussion

Through this critical analysis of those news reports, there are some basic principles, assumptions, and concepts of CDA that have been proved and supported. While the main purpose of news reports is basically to be informative discourse using an objective and neutral language to present events, there were some 'out of sight' values, ideologies, and perspectives that were revealed through analysing those textual features. This critical analysis confirms the assumption which states that discourse and genre are rarely objective and ideologically free. Although some texts seem to be objective with a neutral language, ideologies,

subjectivity, and points of view nonetheless can be traced and revealed through such a critical analysis.

Obviously, those two news reports were produced within specific contexts that are related to some controversial social and political issues and that have many worldwide perspectives. This critical analysis examined and explained the way in which language was used within those contexts. Consequently, a very obvious difference between the two texts, in terms of values, ideologies, positions, and perspectives, was found, despite that both texts talk about the same topic and the same events. Therefore, they have different headlines.

Regarding those key principles of CDA, this critical analysis confirmed them during its process. First, apart from the piece of news and the event itself, this critical analysis discussed one of the biggest social and political issues of our time, which is the Palestinian situation. It shed light on both western American and Arab perspectives towards this issue, and how they present their discourses in terms of these perspectives. Second, this critical analysis clarified some power relations in this political issue, as well as how the western authorities care about the Israeli side and present the Palestinian resistance as terrorism. Third, this critical analysis shows how these two discourses try to make relationships with readers and indirectly take part in the issue. For example, the CNN report indirectly conveys a message from Wiesel's speech to Palestinians to abandon Hamas and choose another political party to represent them, whilst Al Jazeera indirectly encourages the world to take part in solving this human problem and stand against Israel. This critical analysis revealed some ideologies that were produced and reflected in both texts by using some language features such as the following. Both texts used the same genre and same framing, which enables writers to foreground what they want to deliver as the most important information and place in the background what they consider to be less important information. That makes readers unconsciously receive an ideologically formed piece of news and construct the background. Also, through presuppositions, writers can indirectly make readers take their ideas for granted by perfectly stating them as a truth. Additionally, through topicalisation and agent-patient relations, it becomes clear that the writer uses powers and their relations to form readers' views of the topic. Finally, by using some connotations, writers could cause some psychological effects in readers, in order to reach his/her goal behind this discourse.

5. Conclusion and implications for Language Teaching

In the end of this study, I will briefly conclude with some implications of CDA practising in the language-learning process. One of the most important implications of CDA practising is its improving of reading skills and methodology (Wallace, 1992). To fully understand texts, it is not enough to understand vocabulary and grammar only; it is important to identify the writer's point of view and the social and cultural context in which the text is produced. Moreover, CDA could enhance the ability to read critically and comprehensively. Dellinger (1995) states that the ability to

realise the author's intent is essential to comprehend the meaning of the text. CDA encourages students to analyse texts in ways that bring their hidden meanings to the surface by identifying the writer's beliefs and ideologies. In addition, it enables the student to examine contexts more than other approaches and thus make students look at the big picture (Huckin, 1997).

Practising CDA in language learning classes can be helpful in raising students' critical language awareness (Clark, 1995). When students learn and practise how to deconstruct texts, analyse their features, and then identify the ways and strategies that writers can use to convey their ideologies, then they can become aware of the language functions, able to analyse different forms of discourses, able to argue to defend their beliefs and ideologies, and able to gradually construct their critical awareness towards texts. Furthermore, the resulting critical awareness would lead to an improvement in students' production of discourse. When students become able to recognise discourse patterns, sentences and clausal relations, and genres types and framing, they can introduce more professional discourses (Dudley-Evans, 2001).

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