

# A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Washington Post's Ingroup and Outgroup Presentation in the Iran Nuclear Crisis News Reports

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**Abstract:** *Essentially, according to media news, The Iran nuclear crisis is said to represent by the aggravated tensions and bad consequences following the collapse of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), popularly known as the Iran nuclear deal in early 2018. Therefore, the present study attempts to find out how The Washington Post represents the Iran nuclear crisis in away particular ideologies being propagated in the name of giving the targeted audience with factual information. The study aims at investigating ideologies adopted by The Washington Post's reports in presenting news on the Iran nuclear crisis. To achieve this aim the researcher adopted two models by van Dijk, namely, van Dijk's political discourse and political ideology (2006), and the Ideological Square (1998) to analyze the data.*

**Keywords:** critical discourse analysis, Ideological Square, discursive strategies, the Iran nuclear crisis

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Problem and its Significant

CDA as an approach of DA aims to discover unobserved covered opulent values, position, as well as perspectives embedded in various texts. Many studies have used CDA as a theoretical and analytical effective approach for investigating social and political issues that are constructed and reflected in discourse (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Hence, a Critical discourse analysis study will be adopted to analyze selected reports to uncover how The Washington Post newspaper propagates certain ideologies in the name of offering factual information to the targeted audience.

The newspapers presented the crisis through a language that is constructed in different ways carrying different ideologies intending basically to influence the reader's minds and perspectives. Therefore, the present study adopts the CDA to investigate the problem of the current study. Batstone (1995, p.198) states that CDA "seeks to reveal how texts are constructed so that particular (and potentially indoctrinating) perspectives can be expressed delicately and covertly. "Furthermore, the findings of the study are expected to stand out as a database for discourse studies in the English language department.

### 1.2 Question of the Research

The question of this study about what are the ideological perspectives as well as the ingroup and outgroup presentation investigated in selected reports concerning the Iran nuclear crisis?

### 1.3 The Aim of the Study

The study aims to reveal the different perspectives and ideologies adopted in presenting news on the Iran nuclear crisis.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis CDA

Van Dijk (2003, p.352) The term Critical discourse analysis CDA an approach to discourse analysis embodies a multitude of concepts which according to Van Dijk (2003) CDA is pondering about how power dominance inequality and bias is exercised by using language (spoken, written) in a social and political context, therefore some discourse analysts especially those who are interested in analyzing political movements describe CDA as "social movement". Also, Dijk describes CDA as "discourse analytical research" and for this fact; he illustrates basic points that make CDA a distinctive research approach from other discourse research studies. To Van Dijk (2003) CDA is not necessarily a research practice by itself, it cannot be considered as, school, single direction, or a major approach like other approaches in discourse studies.

According to Paltridge (2012, p.187), CDA can be defined as follows: "The connection between the use of language and the social and political contexts in which it occurs". It explores issues such as gender, ethnicity, cultural difference ideology, and identity and how these are both constructed and reflected in texts. It also investigates ways in which language constructs and is constructed by social relationships. A critical analysis may include a detailed textual analysis and move from there to an explanation and interpretation of the analysis. It might proceed from there to deconstruct and challenge the text(s) being examined. This may include tracing underlying ideology from the linguistic features of a text unpacking particular biases and ideological presuppositions underlying the text and relating the text to other texts and people's experiences and beliefs (Paltridge, 2012, p.187).

Wodak (1995, p.204) states the main goal of CDA is to give a detailed analysis of "opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance discrimination, power,

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and control as manifested in language" (Wodak,1995, p.204).

Some scholars disagree or fall into the equivocation point of whether to consider CDA as a scientific theory, an approach, or a method towards the analysis of discourse (written or spoken). Wodak and Meyer (2001) consider CDA as a method.

In the same realm, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) emphasized the idea that CDA is a theory and method, CDA is "the mediation between the social and linguistics" (P.16). However; Meyer's point of view about CDA is something being described as a theory because CDA takes so many forms and these forms are highly understood to be based within a theory.

Van Dijk (2001, P.96) States that CDA is not necessarily theory, but it makes use of different methods depending on selected theories, therefore, CDA is often being addressed as an "approach" that depends on different theories and methods.

CDA is not a direction of research among others, like TG grammar, or systemic linguistics, not a sub-discipline of discourse analysis such as the psychology of discourse or conversation analysis. It is not a method, nor a theory that simply can be applied to social problems. CDA can be conducted in, and combined with, any approach and sub-discipline in the humanities and the social sciences (Dijk, 2001, p.96).

Therefore, much of CDA has been thought of as a key factor in the analyses of various types of connections between language and society. Fairclough (1989) also has questioned the possibility of considering CDA as a scientific linguistic theory. He states that CDA is critical from the perspective of "social" connections which are established through the use of language. Therefore, CDA cannot be regarded as a theory or a method of discourse analysis.

However, CDA attempts to make socio diagnostic criticism by spreading a group of " linguistics theories" socio diagnostic criticism has a group of linguistic tools these tools, on one hand, appears exposed for official examination, on the other hand, it can classify the main merits of text and discourse which in return, makes up and establishes the realization of the significance of language in forming various ideologies and societies (Fairclough, 1998, p.2; Fowler1999, p.89).

## 2.2Media discourse

According to O'Keeffe (2006, p.441) defines media discourse as "interactions that take place through a broadcast platform, whether spoken or written, in which the discourse is oriented to a non-present reader, listener or viewer". Where discourse is addressed to be read by the absent reader or listener. Media discourse is characterized by being "public, manufactured, on - record, form of interaction" and not as naturalistic interaction as casual speaking or writing (p.441).

O'Keeffe (2006) stresses the media role in the modern world, its role is powerful so much that inspired a lot of academic studies and to be involved in many critical and discursual studies. There are two main types of media: The Written as Newspapers and Magazines and the Spoken as Radio and Television News broadcasts, Drama. Media generally focuses on particular aspects as Immediacy (Specific actions and events), Drama (Violence, crisis or conflict, extremist behaviors, outrageous acts) Simplicity (Clear cut opinions, images, major personalities, two-sided conflicts) Ethnocentrism ('Our' beliefs, myths, and symbols, 'Our' suffering, the brutality of 'Others'). Concerning media Ideology, the ideology may be biased to Government either (supporting or hampering) the government, Impartial (attracting public attention for high rating). Fowler (1991) recent critical study defines news of media as "a product shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces" and not as a reflection of reality Furthermore, Such critical study focuses on the application of linguistic "tools" for the analysis of transitivity in syntax, lexical structure, modality, and speech acts (Dijk,2001, p.359).

## 2.3Iran Nuclear Crisis

Early 2018, President Trump announced that the United States as a country was involved in making the Iran nuclear deal in 2015 would no longer participate in the JCPOA, and would resume imposing sanctions that had been suspended according to the deal. However, the European powers who are also involved in this agreement with Iran as Russia, China, France, Britain, and Germany denied and opposed the U.S. decision, and tried to make meetings to fix the situation with Iranian officials to save the JCPOA from being collapsed.

Trump's decision to withdraw from the deal had a huge impact on Iran's economy, a remarkable conflict and tensions aggravated the relation between Washington and Tehran. These tensions and disagreements escalated in a crisis that continued for nearly a year after Trump's decision was issued. An incessant threat from Iran's government against the U.S government (and vice versa) appears to fire media news about possible near war to happen. For Trump, such a deal is unsuccessful and "terrible". The conditions and limitations of the deal cannot stop Iran from exceeding the limits of enriched uranium needed for developing nuclear weapons as he said "it is clear to me that we cannot prevent an Iranian nuclear bomb under the decaying and rotten structure of the current agreement". Moreover, Trump stated that the Iran deal didn't consider sufficiently Iran's behavior and actions in the Middle East or its missile program. Therefore. Trump says he wants to negotiate with Tehran about a proposition to form a new better deal.

For that, Iran addressed U.S threats and accused the U.S government of forming "an economic war" against Iran, and that Iran's government refuses any proposition to negotiation with Trump unless sanctions were lifted. Some analysts and critics expressed their opinion on this decision as a way to open the doors of "a global crisis" (Haltiwanger,2019).

## 2.4 Model of Analysis

This section presents the model adopted in the analysis of the data. The analysis is qualitative. The qualitative analysis relies on Dijk's political discourse and political ideology (2006) that provides several discursive strategies that help to reveal where news is being manipulated to serve certain ideas, and van Dijk's Ideological Square (1998) which tackles the concept of in-group and out-group presentation.

### 2.4.1 Dijk's political discourse and political ideology (2006)

Van Dijk's political discourse and political ideology (2006) to identify the most prominent ideologies used to escalate the tensions and conflicts between the U.S and Iran's government over the Iran nuclear crisis.

#### 1) Metaphor (Rhetoric)

A rhetorical strategy that is used to describe something by comparing it with abstract unfamiliar meanings.

#### 2) Polarization (Meaning)

A syntactic strategy a way by which the speaker emphasizes the good qualities of the categorized individuals belonging to "Us" and emphasizes the bad qualities of the categorized individuals belonging to "Them".

#### 3) Presupposition (Meaning)

A strategy used in situations when the speaker tries to form his discourse with a particular formulation that makes his audience assume the truth of his discourse even if that truth is not explicitly produced by the speaker himself.

### 2.4.2 Dijk's (1998) Ideological Square

Van Dijk's (1998) Ideological Square states the following points:

- Emphasize positive information about us.
- Emphasize negative information about them.
- De-emphasize positive information about them.
- De-emphasize negative' information about us.

## 3. Data Analysis

### 3.1 Report 1: "Iran's foreign minister warns that nation will restart 'nuclear activities' if U.S withdraws from accord" April 22, 2018.

*In addition to an overall change of U.S attitude ,Zarif said , Iran is looking for "a change of language " from Trump , who has frequently denounced Iran's religious leadership .Other members of the administration and sime lawmakers have called for regime change and military action against Iran.*

This segment evokes the use of negative lexicalization as in "regime change" expression implies a negative sense towards the situation. However, it indicates Trump's reaction towards Iran's threats which has been suggested by the "presupposition" ideological strategy integrated as in the use of ungrateful tone, and a strong language addressing the Iranian authorities and government with expressions that imply a negative representation of the outgroup. Besides, it confirms the U.S threats of legitimizing a military action

against Iran. Thus, it creates an impression of padded threats of unequal powers.

*Trump also wants the deal to include new restrictions on Iranian development of ballistic missiles and on Iran's expansionist activities in the region – issues that were not part of the nuclear deal.*

The present sentence includes the utilization of "presupposition" ideological strategy to indicate the negative act of the outgroup that is represented as in "development of ballistic missiles". Therefore, it holds out the idea of Trump's power in legitimizing the legality of imposing sanctions as an outcome for provoking threats towards the region and against the U.S government.

### 3.2 Report 2: "After Trump slams Iran's president, Iranian officials accuse him of psychological warfare" July 23, 2018.

*Trump's threat on Twitter appeared to be a response to remarks by Rouhani in which he said any war with Iran would be "the mother of all wars." Rouhani had also said that the United States "must realize that peace with Iran is the mother of all peace," Iran's Tasnim News Agency reported.*

The segment evokes the utilization of a "metaphor" ideological strategy when Rouhani warned of legitimizing a war with the U.S government using negative lexicalization "the mother of all wars. "Thus, it reveals the reporters' intention in triggering the reader's impression and expectations about Trump's threats to Iran is a response to Rouhani's warning. In other words, reporters are justifying these threats as a normal reaction from Rouhani warnings.

*"We will never abandon our revolutionary beliefs. We will resist pressure from the enemies," the Reuters news agency quoted him as saying.*

The sentence evokes the use of "polarization" ideological strategy when Hossein Gheibparvar used "We" personal pronoun to positively represent the ingroup, in this case, is the Iran government. Consequently, it reveals Iran's government reaction and resistance towards Trump's domination and threats.

### 3.3 Report 3: "Trump warns Iran of 'overwhelming force' in the event of an attack on 'anything American'" June 25, 2019

*Iran's leadership "doesn't understand the words 'nice' or 'compassion,' they never have," Trump said in a series of tweets. "Sadly, the thing they do understand is Strength and Power," he said. "Any attack by Iran on anything American will be met with great and overwhelming force. In some areas, overwhelming will mean obliteration!"*

The sentence calls out the use of "polarization" ideological strategy that is resulted in having criticism and vitriol of the outgroup as it is laid out that Iran's leadership (outgroup) being attributed with negative characteristics like they don't make out things as "nice" or "compassion," but rather

"Strength and Power" in sense of corruption and this emphasizes the negative representation of the outgroup. Besides, reporters' evocation of "Any attack by Iran on anything American will be met with great and overwhelming force" is a way to validate the idea of the previous segment and make it more plausible for readers. Thus, it suggests the fact that the U.S government is trying to derogate Iran's leadership in a way that projects them as being in a position of having callousness and the indecorous manner in dealing with political or social issues which in return manifests the U.S government as having competence in dealing with social or political problems.

*U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, during an unannounced trip to Afghanistan on Tuesday, told reporters that Iran's reaction was "a bit immature and childlike." He said Tehran should "know that the United States will remain steadfast in undertaking the actions that the president laid out in this strategy to create stability throughout the Middle East, which includes the campaign we have, the economic campaign, the pressure campaign that we have on the Islamic Republic of Iran."*

The sentence involves the utilization of the "polarization" ideological strategy by which the speaker is justifying imposing sanctions on Iran's government for the sake of stability in the Middle East. Consequently, led to representing the outgroup negatively. Therefore, evokes the sense of establishing the power of legislation of laws by the united states over Iran's government.

#### 4. Conclusion

The findings have asserted the most prominent ideological strategies used by the American and Iranian newspaper reports are presupposition, metaphor, and polarization which are in one way or another indicates the positive self-representation of the ingroup and negative other representation of the outgroup. Moreover, such strategies call out for persuasive mode because of its linguistic and rhetorical structure. Besides, these strategies attributed Iran's government as well as Iran's deal with negative actions asserting the idea that the deal represents a threat to the world's peace and justified Trump's moves reporting him as a dealmaker which indicates the positive actions of the ingroup.

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