

A Critical Discourse Analysis of SANA and Aljazeera English Channel's Coverage of Syria's 2014-2015 Uprising

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to highlight the impact of ideology on SANA and Aljazeera English channel concerning the Syrian uprising between 2014-2015. The study aims at comparing and contrasting the coverage Syrian uprising portrayed in two Arab leading media. In addition, the current study shows the persuasive strategies that both used to be famous in the mass media world. The study investigates 8 headlines and subtitles, examining how ideology resides in these texts according to Fairclough's assumptions. Furthermore, the study is framed with the theory of critical discourse analysis (CDA) which reflects the strategies utilized for political purposes. This paper further aims at discussing the realization of power by the use of language in the political discourse. It is no surprise that the persuasive strategies used by politicians in broadcasting news about Arab uprisings lead to sympathizing people's hearts and emotions; therefore, their reaction against what they hear and watch will be expressive.

Keywords: language and media, critical discourse analysis, ideology, Fairclough's theory

1. Introduction

Language allows people to communicate and do actions and without language people cannot do anything. Each occasion has a particular language as our experience and social interaction shape the language that we use in our daily life. Through language, we can make friends, argumentation, enemies and social relationship. However, language differs according to the situation, for example, the language of happy occasions such as a university graduation, wedding or winning a competition is totally different from the language that we use in the grief, war, condolence and disease. Consequently, discourse is often affected by psychological, social, economic, cultural, biological and environmental factors.

Fairclough (2003) defines discourse as "a way of representing aspects of world, processes, relations and structures of material world, mental world of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and social world" (p. 89). In this regard, it is worth mentioning that there are social, psychological and political factors contribute to the formulation of the ideological discourses.

According to Wilson (2001), "linguistic options for representing the world are clearly, then, central issues in political discourse; utterances within the context of political output are rarely isolated grammatical cases" (p. 404). In other words, the political speeches have been governed by grammatical rules and principles that help the speaker to send his message with regard to the situation for which the language is produced. In discourse analysis, the linguists do not focus on the form of language, whereas they concern how language is used in the context. In fact, the language of politics often conceptualizes the discourse according to the status quo. Furthermore, the mechanism of selecting words always subdues to decisions made by editors.

Chilton and Schaffner (2002) define politics "as a struggle for power, between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it" (p. 5), and the struggle brings ideas which may lead to social and economic practice. Additionally, each utterance has significance and theme as a message to address people in different situations according to their beliefs, manners, attitudes and behaviors.

Trudgill (1992) considers language attitudes as "the attitudes which people have towards different languages, dialects, accents, and their speakers" (p. 44). Therefore, these attitudes resulting from interaction are social in the

first place and have some effects on behaviors, shaping identities and language shift.

2. Statement of the Problem

The target audiences get the news from several media; however, the target receiver may be confused about truths. Thus, disinformation often occurs when broadcasting headlines and subtitles because the media outlets thoroughly carry out the policies of their states. So, the study has come into being in order to reveal how the media have been affected by ideology. In addition, a language always reflects the states' intentions and attitudes toward crises. It is worth mentioning that SANA and Aljazeera English Channel are oriented to non-Arabs. Both also have their own ideological perspectives that make the target audiences eager to know what is happening on the battlefield without prejudice.

3. Objectives of the Study

This study aims at analyzing 8 headlines and subtitles taken from SANA and Aljazeera's coverage of Syria's revolution and adopts critical discourse analysis theory (CDA). Furthermore, the study stresses upon the impact of ideology concerning the Syrian uprising. The study also focuses on the variation of language between the two Arab media outlets and how both attract ordinary people's attention.

4. Research Questions

The present study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) Why does ideology affect the news coverage of SANA and Aljazeera?
- 2) How is the ideological perspective of SANA and Aljazeera presented to the target audiences?

5. Methodology

The study uses comparative and descriptive analysis when analyzing data. The sample of the current study consists of 8 headlines and subtitles collected from two media outlets. Moreover, the study applies Fairclough's theory which highlights the role of ideology in shaping discourse. Therefore, 8 headings and subtitles related to the Syrian conflict are analyzed and discussed so as to investigate Fairclough's assumptions.

6. Review of Literature

Henry and Tator (2002) regard critical discourse analysis as "a tool for deconstructing the ideologies of the mass media and other elite groups and for identifying and defining social, economic, and historical power relations between dominant and subordinate groups" (p. 71). Therefore, the role of media is very important whether to absorb tensions or to increase unrests in the uprising countries. Obviously, critical discourse analysis makes people realize how ideologies prevail the mass media that applies a certain political propaganda. It can be noticed that the language of politics plays a primary role in terms of putting political ideas into practice; hence, every political action is controlled, prepared and played by a language.

Fairclough (1997) posits that "ideologies reside in texts" (p. 92). Ideology means the manner of thinking that forms an economic and social policy. Thus, it organizes a particular society or people. Languages are always influenced by ideologies that govern our lives and we acquire language through reading, writing, speaking and listening. Moreover, the form of our ideological ideas often spring from reading a novel or newspaper, watching television, listening to songs or music, and engaging in discussions with friends.

Van Dijk (2003) points out that "ideologies not only may control what we speak or write about, but also how we do so" (p. 28), acknowledging that the relationship between language and ideology is inseparable as each action is based on different thoughts and beliefs.

Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) state that "language is a 'machine' that generates, and as a result constitutes, the social world" (p. 9). They consider language as a means of communication and regard it as a generator that is responsible for the dynamic movement of its parts. Therefore, the language spoken by people often reflects their ways of thinking, ideology, identity and power. However, what we concern us in this research is how ideology of media plays an important role in attracting people's attentions and emotions regardless of searching the truth.

Many researchers, writers, analysts and authors analyze the discourses of public figures such as kings, queens, princes, princesses, presidents, editorials, news, headlines and subtitles. While other writers and analysts prefer to avoid politics, doing analyses of discourses in movies, episodes, learning classrooms, everyday language, dialogues, advertisements and conversations. Here, what the study focuses on is how ideologies affect the media discourse and shape its propaganda in dealing with Arab uprisings to apply a political agenda that serve a particular nation.

7. Data Analysis and Discussions

Example (1):

*"Syrians mark **Martyrs** Day"* SANA

According to the Islamic teachings and laws, a martyr is a person who believes in Allah—the creator of the universe, and is killed when fighting for the sake of upholding the word of Allah. In addition, everyone, who was killed during battles when defending his/her honour, religion and home, is considered as a "martyr". On the other hand, overseas media dealt with this term in another way. Some called the martyr a victim, whereas others addressed him/her a murdered. It can be noticed that the Islamic ideology is well-performed in above heading. Thus, this may arouse the Syrian street to take action against the armed opposition.

Example (2):

*"Al-Zoubi: Some Arab **regimes** never stopped conspiring against Palestinian cause"* SANA

AL-Zoubi is the minister of information in the government of Syria. He used the term "regime" associated with the word "conspiring" to deliver a message to the Palestinians. This message includes that there are some Arab dictators who have contribute to help the West. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (1998), the term "regime" means "a method or system of government" (p. 982). Obviously, this term often refers to the government which has an authoritative system in dealing with its people. Consequently, Al-Zoubi wanted to warn these countries in order not to interfere in Syrian affairs. Briefly, the minister's statement is considered as a kind of insult to Arab governments, especially those which have signed peace treaties with Israel.

Example (3):

*"Candle March in Damsqus marking centennial of Armenian **Genocide**"* SANA

This subtitle has a historical and political dimension. If one traces the history, s/he may ask why the Syrian government has recently celebrated this event. The Armenian genocide was carried out by the Ottomans during and after World War I. In this headline, the term "Genocide" has a negative meaning associated with barbarity. Moreover, this inhuman action is considered as a kind of ethnic cleansing. In the same vein, there is neither a permanent friend nor a permanent enemy; thus, the language of politics can be shaped according to the situation. One the other hand, the candle symbolizes the light which leads to peace. Obviously, the strategy of persuasion tries to highlight the Turkish role in the Syrian conflict when mentioning the Armenian Genocide.

Example (4):

*"**Terrorists** commit horrific massacre in Jisr al-Shughour, leaving over 30 civilians' dead"* SANA

It is worth mentioning that the word "terrorists" has a negative meaning. Obviously, the concept of "terrorism" brings to mind different themes such as committing suicide, bombing and brutality. Thus, the strategy of persuasion is skillfully used by SANA since the lexical choice plays an important role to convince the target audiences that what happens in Syria is anti-terrorism. This supports Van Dijk's (1995) assumption, that is, lexicon is a main dimension of ideologically controlled discourse meaning.

Example (5):

*"**Syrian rebels** capture Idlib city in joint offensive"* Aljazeera

From the Syrian government's perspective, it is undesirable to use the word "rebel". Consequently, SANA avows that the people, who carried arms against the Syrian state, are terrorists. On the other hand, Aljazeera tries to depict them as rebels who revolt against oppression, corruption and unemployment. Consequently, the strategy of manipulation legalized by many politicians controls the mechanism of selecting words. Here, Aljazeera introduces the concept of "rebel" which annoys the Syrian government. Since Al-asad's army is considered these rebels as terrorists; therefore, they were cruelly treated.

Example (6):

*"**Opposition** fails to get Syria Arab League seat"* Aljazeera

Aljazeera tries to legitimate war occurred in Syria by calling the other party involved in conflict. This creates some sort of tension between the two opposite outlets because the Syrian opposition is not admitted by the Syrian government. Consequently, ideology plays an important role here since each media seeks to impose its way of thinking reflected in its headlines and subtitles. According to the Syrian government, there is no factual opposition that demands constitutional reforms, but thieves, saboteurs and mercenaries whose aims are to destroy the fabric of Syrian society.

Example (7):

"Monitoring group says 17 children among 39 civilians killed in air strikes on opposition-held areas in Aleppo province" Aljazeera

It is undeniable that more victims are killed every day in this conflict. Thus, the Syrian crisis goes to an anonymous fate because no one can predict the future consequences. The above heading awakens the international community in order to move against the killing of innocent people. Aljazeera is committed to some extent in spreading the truth; hence, this worries the Syrian officials. Furthermore, this heading sheds light on the violations of human rights since civilians and children are protected by the law. Thus, the Syrian air forces are involved in murdering according to this news. Moreover, the widespread use of barrel bombs has been widely condemned because this action leads to destruction.

Example (8):

"Hezbollah and Syrian army make gains in Qalamoun" Aljazeera

Hezbollah is shi'a Islamist group and political party originated in Lebanon (en.wikipedia.org). In this subtitle, Aljazeera attempts to highlight the alliance between the Syrian army and Hezbollah. This alliance has ideological dimensions because this media wants to reveal to the world that the Syrian crisis is a sectarian conflict between two ethnic groups. Thus, the cause of crisis shifted from constitutional opposition into a dogmatic struggle. It can be noticed that the formation of any subtitle governed by ideological factors and this provides much support to Fairclough's assumptions.

8. Conclusion

The study investigated eight headlines and subtitles related to two different Arab media outlets. The results of this study showed that there is a difference in the attitude and policy of each media. Thus, the validity of Fairclough's theory is tested in this study; therefore, the ideology of each media deals with the news from its own perspective. Furthermore, strategies of persuasion and manipulation used in the headings and subtitles profoundly confirmed Fairclough's basic assumption respecting the reflection of ideology in the text.

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