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The Discourse of War in the Middle East: Analysis of Syria's Civil Crises in English Editorials Published in Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationships between language and ideology and how ideology is constructed and presented via different language choices in English editorials published in different socio-cultural contexts. Van Dijk's (2000a) *ideological square* in terms of representation of the *self* and *other* was applied to the editorials. Through a comparative analysis of Iranian, Turkish and Saudi Arabian newspaper editorials with different ideologies, the study attempts to reveal how these ideologies are represented differently in the texts regarding civil crisis in Syria in 2012. It aims to show how writers, by using various strategies such as *evil doing*, *humanitarianism*, *cause of crisis*, and *history as lesson* manipulate the realizations of agency and power in the representation of action to produce particular meanings which are not always explicit for all readers. Data gathered for the analysis were 45 editorials from three newspapers of *Tehran Times*, *Today Zaman*, and *Arab News* during the first half of the year 2012 (15 from each). Careful selection of 6 editorials for qualitative analysis indicates that the three newspapers focus on different aspects of reality and, by using various language strategies, influence readers' understanding of the events.

Keywords: editorial, ideological square, x-phemism, (De) legitimization

1. Introduction

Language cannot be separated from its context of occurrence, and any linguistic form communicates both its meaning and its ideological significance or function (Kress, 1990). Being the representative of a system

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of linguistic elements, language is realization of discursive and ideological systems (Kress, 1990). Ideology and discourse, in this regard, are not separated from each other; however, they are two interlocked and interwoven elements of social sciences. Ideology as a way of thinking, speaking, and experiencing is engraved in discourse; it is not a “detached element which exists freely and independently in some free-floating domain of ideas” (Belsey, 1980, p. 5). The general assumption in CDA is, although neutral, impartial, naive, and innocent on superficial level, language is thoroughly charged with biases, constraints, forces, powers, and many opinions of a definite intellectual community. Generally speaking, all discourses are “ideologically positioned; none are neutral” (Macdonell, 1986, p. 59).

In recent decades, mass media especially newspapers have been the hub of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) studies. Newspaper discourse is one of the most important means of expressing opinions and ideologies on a massive scale. Along the same line, the editorial as a genre is considered a type of opinion discourse (Van Dijk, 1995a). An understanding of opinion and what function it serves is important, because it is “by way of opinions” that the relation between ideology and discourse can be understood (Van Dijk, 1995b, p.8).

The opinions found in editorials often express ideologies that play an important role “in the formation and change of public opinion, in setting the political agenda, and influencing social debate, decision making and other forms of social and political action” (Van Dijk, 1996, p.2). This definition is useful as it directly links the opinions in editorials to their role in changing and sustaining existing ideologies, how ideologies are presented as commonsense or naturalized and how these ideologies support dominant group interests.

One of the interesting issues is that regarding the political context, various and sometimes even contradictory positions are taken toward one single event by the governing political agenda of countries of the world. These different positions stem from different ideologies dominant among the political bodies in these countries. That is, any government, according to its established sociopolitical and sometimes religious ideology, views the issue differently and takes its own standpoint.

Since the mass media and especially newspapers are the main channels for providing people with the information regarding political events, it is really important to see how mass media in different political contexts present and interpret world's events according to the dominant ideologies. In the context of the Middle East (considered as the geopolitical heart of the world), there are about 17 countries. Considering that all of these countries

are Moslem, it might be expected that they hold the same position toward world's political challenges. However, such a unity in their opinions borders on the quixotic. In spite of all existing similarities in religion, culture, economy, and lifestyle of these countries, their governments view the world's political scenes differently based on their own political and economic interests. Consequently, governments, by means of mass media, try to win the acquiescence of the public on every issue.

Therefore, if readers of a newspaper, for example, want to see the real facet of happenings and read the conceived realities, they need to be equipped with the knowledge of linguistic strategies and how they are used by the writers to present the reality according to their own ideological interests.

Considering all mentioned above, the present study aims to show the roles of ideology as the main cause in determining how editorial writers interpret the world's events as well as language as the main tool to manipulate the reality. The study analyzes the English editorials published in three contexts of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey to see how they present realities of Syria crises according to their own ideologies and by deploying linguistic strategies. In so doing, it might become possible to investigate the context in which newspaper columnists have found it pertinent to employ certain linguistic elements to arrive at some enlightening conclusions on how words are used to envisage the reality.

2. Media Discourse

Van Dijk (1998) defines media power first of all in terms of the social power of groups and institutions, and social power is usually defined as the control of actions, or access to scarce resources of one dominated group by (members of) a dominant group. Control of action usually implies loss of some freedom. Freedom of the press should, therefore, also be understood as power of the press. Given the rule of intentions, purposes, and goals in the definition of action, however, action control presupposes mind control. This is the essence of persuasive social power, and typical of the power of the media and of other types of public discourse. The traditional study of media effects, thus, needs to be reformulated in terms of cognitive processes and representations. A socially oriented cognitive science provides insight into these structures and strategies of cognition, and hence offers a foundation for a new understanding of the persuasive power of the media (Van Dijk, 1988).

If we discuss the influence of media messages, we should begin with an explicit and systematic analysis of text and talk and go beyond superficial content analysis or a simplistic enumeration of repertoires. If we want to

understand media effects and uses, we should then examine the detailed cognitive processes and representations involved, so that we know what it means exactly when we speak about (changes in the) opinions, attitudes, or ideologies of the public, and how these are, in turn, related to the social practices of media users. The same is true for the microsociology of news and program making and for the relations between social contexts and the minds of media workers. And we might as well start to integrate, finally, various micro level insights with macro level studies of economic, institutional, and cultural constraints of the media and their consequences.

Studies on the media discourse are not few (e.g., Al-Khattabi, 2008; Atawneh, 2009; Bhatia, 2009; Mazid, 2004; Rahimi & Sahragard, 2006). Mazid (2004) examined the use of euphemism and dysphemism in the war-on-Iraq discourse; how they index some of the ideologies and attitudes of the parties involved, most importantly the US and Iraq, and how they were used as an integral part of their weaponry. Rahimi and Sahragard (2006) studied how a single reality, that is the death of the Pope, John Paul II, is presented and viewed entirely differently by different people having a range of religious and political perspectives reflected in their emails. Al-Khattabi (2008) studied, within the framework of CDA, some transcribed English press conferences held after the attack on the World Trade Centre (September 11, 2001) and during the second Persian gulf war, in order to explore the role of X-phemism in English political discourse and to clarify the fallacy of such language and its role in communication. Atawneh (2009) investigated how the language of the Israelis and the Palestinians, in the headlines reported in the local and world media at times of crises and major reported events during the second Palestinian Intifada (2001–2004), mirrors the strengths and weaknesses of both sides. Bhatia (2009), employing a combination of analytic models, investigated the discourse of terrorism and documented the changing perceptions of terrorism by the Bush administration based on a corpus of official governmental documents and political speeches and statements made to the press dating from 2001 to 2004. Subtirelue (2013), applying both critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics, worked on a corpus of U.S Congress's debates and hearings concerning provision of Voting Right Act to show the role of Congress's members' ideology in their debates on providing language rights for minorities.

Findings have suggested that euphemization and derogation, language as a shield and language as a weapon, are two discursive structures applied to enhance, mitigate, avoid, or exacerbate an issue (Mazid, 2004; Rahimi & Sahragard, 2006). X-phemism has shown to play an important role in general, and in the “War on Terror” in particular as being one of the aspects

of doublespeak or, what I might here call, language as *a velvet glove* and language as an *iron fist*. It has also revealed how events, participants, and objects could be relexicalized in a way that evokes and reconstructs a positive/negative image and at the same time could diminish the negative/positive connotations (A-Khattabi, 2008). Results have also shown that the more powerful side in a conflict uses many more threats than do the less powerful side. Conversely, many more appeals are used by the less powerful side, which reflect their weakness. This acknowledges that power is a major leading factor in shaping the publicized language use of the adversaries (Atawneh, 2009). Accordingly, within the discourses of terrorism which confirm the Us-Them division, categorization leads to a kind of polarization of the world which is effectually a black and white matter (Bhatia, 2009). Furthermore, findings suggest that language ideologies are not necessarily in favor of the rights of language minorities (Subtirelue, 2013).

3. Theoretical Framework

One of the causal effects of texts which has been of major concern for critical discourse analysts is ideological effects — the effects of texts in inculcating, sustaining, or changing ideologies (Van Dijk, 1998). Ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining, and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation. This critical view of ideology, seeing it as a *modality* of power, contrasts with various *descriptive* views of ideology as positions, attitudes, beliefs, perspectives, etc. of social groups without reference to relations of power and domination between such groups (Fairclough, 2003, p.9). Ideological representations can be identified in texts, but in saying that ideologies are representations which can be shown to contribute to social relations of power and domination, textual analysis needs to be framed in this respect in social analysis which can consider bodies of texts in terms of their effects on power relations. Moreover, if ideologies are primarily representations, they can nevertheless also be *enacted* in ways of acting socially, and *inculcated* in the identities of social agents. In order to identify the ideology, the linguistic resources of the text should be analyzed in relation to their sociocultural context (Subtirelue, 2013; Caffaral & Rechniewski, 2009; Van Dijk, 1996b).

Editorial as a type of opinion discourse thus aims to persuade the reader to accept the writer's ideology. According to Sornig (1989), persuasive communication requires a change in the style of language (whether lexical choice, syntactic or discursal arrangement, etc) used in order to encourage behavior and opinion change in the recipients. This is achieved by how

things are said to persuade an audience rather than capitalizing on the truth-value of what is said.

Van Dijk (2000a, p. 44) proposes two general strategies of most, if not all, ideological representations: “say positive things about *Us*; say negative things about *Them*.” Van Dijk (2000a) extends this general positive-negative representation of the *self* and *other* and suggests an “ideological square” (p. 44) which could be applied to all levels of discourse. This ideological square consists of the following moves: emphasize positive things about *Us*; emphasize negative things about *Them*; de-emphasize negative things about *Us*; de-emphasize positive things about *Them*.

In sum, ideological square shows how discourse participants use language as a *shield* to protect themselves against the brickbats and as a *weapon* to attack their opponents. Those who are involved in power relations exploit language as a shield to de-emphasize negative things about self and to de-emphasize positive things about other. In other words, *legitimation* of self is the main function of using language as a shield. On the other hand, exploiting language as a weapon is equivalent with accentuating positive things about self and accentuating negative things about other. *Delegitimation* of other is the main function of using language as a weapon.

4. Methodology

4.1 Data collection and sampling

As mentioned earlier, since Syrian crises have become an international issue, and there are different and even controversial opinions considering who is right and who is wrong in the battle field, this paper was to analyze how media cover and represent this issue. To achieve this aim, three newspapers from three contexts of various and even opposite ideologies were selected (Tehran times from Iran, Arab News from Saudi Arabia, and Today Zaman from Turkey). Careful scrutiny of the papers led to 45 editorials representing the three newspapers mostly during the first half of the year 2012. This limited dataset restricts the generalizations that can be made, but there are a sufficient number of editorials to indicate how their writers have established themselves as members of their respective discourse community. The analysis provides the baseline for the examination of editorials. Further surveillance into the context of these texts culminated in two editorials from each newspaper that covered major events of the time. All data were gathered from electronic versions of the newspapers. The selected editorials were then subjected to detailed qualitative analysis.

4.2 Instrumentation and procedures: X-phemism typology

The analysis carried out in the study builds on the notion of Us-Them which was proposed by Van Dijk's (2000a) "ideological square" (p. 44). Van Dijk (2000a) names 27 ideological strategies among which the dichotomy of euphemization and derogation stands out. As the study aimed to discover the ideologically biased aspects of language, which are represented in word choice, the Van Dijk typology (2000a) was chosen to cover a wide range of X-phemism. However, this typology was modified in the throes of the analysis, "allowing the focus of the research to emerge during data collection and analysis" (Friedman, 2012, p. 181) and other categories that were enforced by the data were developed and added to the X-phemism typology. A fundamental principle of qualitative research is that a phenomenon can only be understood by attending to the context of its occurrence (Friedman, 2012). Accordingly, our analysis remained loyal to Van Dijk's ideological square; however, our typology, being context sensitive, included strategies not necessarily cited in Van Dijk's model (e.g., cause of crisis or evil doing). The data were analyzed and reanalyzed by the researchers with an interval of about three weeks and the index of correlation was 0.82. For further reliability of analysis, the texts were reanalyzed by two PhD students in applied linguistics. Then an experienced applied linguist compared judgments, mediated differences and final agreement was reached on the choice of tropes.

This study adopted a qualitative method of analysis and, following Van Dijk's (2000a) taxonomy, the researchers placed the X-phemism examples in the right category. The elements in each category were compared in the editorials in order to locate similarities and differences. The study aimed at assessing and valuing the role of these elements and evaluating their effectiveness with respect to the supposed political and ideological goals of the writers.

4.3 Situational Context

It is about two years that what is happening in Syria is at the center of attention for millions of people around the world. News about Syria's civil war is the top headlines of nearly all international news agencies. This importance arises from the fact that all international powers are engaged in the Syrian civil war. On one side of the clashes are United States and its allies including most of Arab countries and on the other side are Russia, China, and Iran. The first group is against President Bashar Al Asad while the second group is backing him. All media related to each of these power blocks narrate events and discuss issues in such a way that benefit their interests. Even sometimes, they represent two completely different versions

of the same issue. News writers do this by making various linguistic choices at different levels of discourse. In this paper, having Van Dijk's concept of Us- Them in mind, the researchers analyzed 45 editorials from three Iranian, Turkish, and Arab newspapers. Then six of the editorials were selected for detailed analysis and subsequent presentation in the paper. Careful scrutiny of the editorials revealed the following tropes:

1. **Categorization:** In this ideological move, people tend to assign people to different groups (Van Dijk, 2000a). In this way, speakers or writers could euphemize in-groups' actions and dysuephemize out-groups' actions.
2. **Cause of crisis:** This strategy introduces out-groups as the major agent behind all crises and problems.
3. **Comparisons:** Discourse users utilize comparison to "emphasize positive things about in-groups and to de-emphasize positive things about out-groups" (Van Dijk, 2000a, p. 65).
4. **Dramatization:** Dramatization means embroidering the facts in one's favor (Van Dijk, 2000a).
5. **Empathy:** Expressing "empathy or sympathy for victims of the Others actions can enhance the brutality of the Other" (Van Dijk, 1995b, p. 154).
6. **Evil Doing:** Attributing an act of doing evil to out-groups' members simply helps discourse producers to derogate out-groups.
7. **Exemplification:** Argumentation in political discourse calls for "concrete examples, often in the form of a vignette or short story, illustrating or making more plausible a general point defended by the speaker" (Van Dijk, 2000a, pp. 69-70).
8. **Generalization:** Instead of providing concrete stories, speakers may make generalizations in ideological discourse to formulate prejudices about generalized negative characteristics of out-groups (Van Dijk, 2000a).
9. **Humanitarianism:** Humanitarianism is the defense of "human rights, critique of those who violate or disregard such rights, and the formulation of general norms and values for a humane treatment" of victims (Van Dijk, 2000a, p. 73).
10. **Hyperbole:** Within the overall strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, hyperboles like dramatization are semantic rhetorical devices for enhancing and exaggerating meaning (Van Dijk, 2000a, p. 73).

11. **History as Lesson:** Like comparison, it is often practical in an argument to show “that the present situation can be relevantly compared to earlier (positive or negative) events in history” (Van Dijk, 2000a, p. 72).
12. **Legality:** Positive in-groups representation can be implied through attributing legality to their actions (Van Dijk, 2000a).
13. **Negative attribution:** Negative attribution is use of negative qualities to call out-group members.
14. **Norm and Value Expression** Norm and value expressions are regarded as crucial in ideological discourse. They involve what We find good or bad, right or wrong, and what Our actions and goals try to respect or achieve (Van Dijk, 1995b).
15. **Norm and Value Violation:** Us-Them distinction allows for description of ourselves in benevolent terms and them in malevolent terms, but it emphasizes that the “Others violate the very norms and values we hold dear” (Van Dijk, 1995b, p. 156).
16. **Number Game:** Number game is using numbers and statistics to appear credible (Van Dijk, 2000a).
17. **Planned Question:** This move is enforced by the corpus, developed, and added to the X-phemism typology. Planned questions are those questions in the data that try to draw the attention of audience to a predetermined point and, in fact, the writer through discourse makes its audience give a decided beforehand answer to such questions.
18. **Reasonableness:** This shows the speaker is “sound”, in the sense of being rational or reasonable. “Such a move is especially relevant when the argument itself may seem to imply that the speaker is unreasonable or biased. Therefore, the move also has a function in the overall strategies of positive self-presentation and impression management” (Van Dijk, 2000a, p. 83).
19. **Terror:** Use of negatively loaded terms to show the terribly complicated situation is a proper strategy to derogate out-groups.
20. **Trickery:** As the name suggests, trickeries (negatively charged words, which accuse out-groups of trickery) derogate out-groups in one’s favor.
21. **Unification:** This move is compelled by the data, developed and added to the X-phemism typology. In contrast to categorization, unification integrates groups, people, parties, and members to either positively or negatively represent them.
22. **Victimization:** As Van Dijk (2000a) mentioned, ideological discourse organized by the binary Us-Them pair of in-groups and out-groups means that “when the Others tend to be represented in negative terms, and especially when they are associated with threats, then the in-group needs to be represented as a victim of such a threat” (p. 84).

- 23. Warning:** In the warning strategy, generally and even without sufficient evidence about facts or probable developments, writers or speakers emphasize possible threats and terror (Van Dijk, 1995b).
- 24. Disclaimer:** This semantic move is very typical of any prejudiced discourse. The writer first denies adverse feelings against another group while the rest of discourse may say very negative things about the other (Van Dijk, 2000a, p. 50).
- 25. Evidentiality:** Being accountable for what say, if speakers express a belief they are often expected to provide some proof for their beliefs. This evidence may be taken from the media (e.g., *I have seen it on TV*) (Van Dijk, 2000a, p. 52).

5. Data Analysis & Discussion

X-phemism strategies obtained from the analysis were put in their context of use and were examined in what way they legitimize/delegitimize the two parties in conflict, that is, Al Assad (and its backers) and opposition groups (and their backers). In what follows, the most salient examples of X-phemism used by journalists in order to persuade, convince, and tempt readers to their belief system are discussed.

5.1 Arab news

Arabs' X-phemism in the Syrian war is predominantly used to demonize Al Assad and its perpetual supporters--Iran and Russia. They categorize all engaged in Syrian crises into three groups: Syrian nation who are the subject of government's brutality, Assad's regime, and his supporters, Iran and Russia, which are considered as the only external forces interfering in Syria. In examples 1 and 2, the writer delegitimizes Assad and his supporter Iran by using negative lexis (evil doing, evil labeling) while referring to them and exaggerating about the situation.

- 1) **Evil doing, Negative attribution, Cause of crisis:** *Therefore, we find that the Assad regime has reached the point of despair, and that is why it is carrying out one massacre after another, which led to the recent noticeable movement on the international scene.* (Arab News, 9/5/2012)
- 2) **Evil doing, Negative attribution:** *Iran's role is based on supporting the tyrant of Damascus, and the Syrians have not revolted in order to negotiate with Tehran. The Syrian people have launched their revolution in order to rid themselves of a tyrant, not replace him with another agent of Iran!* (Arab News, 9/5/2012)

The Arab news diligently persists on the point that Russia and Iran are the main directors of the scene who are helping Assad to carry out massacres

on his people. Especially, Iran is seen as the most evil, supplying the regime with weapons and finance. Arabs state that the presence of Iran and Russia in Syria is only for realizing their own interests and not supporting Syrian oppressed people.

3) **Evil doing, Warning, Generalization, Hyperbole, Cause of crisis:** *So when Lavrov warns of a Sunni — Shiite war (in Syria), it is Iran that is most responsible for inciting this! Since the Khomeinist revolution, Iran's most effective weapon has been that of sectarianism, and this is a weapon that has been used across the entire Arab world, particularly in Syria, and this is something that cannot be denied. (Arab News, 9/5/2012)*

4) **Planned question, Comparison:** *One might say: what about Iran involving itself in the situation in Syria? It is clear that this is nothing more than an attempt to promote the conditions for the negotiations; in other word, if you don't want Iranian involvement, then this is the price! Therefore, regardless of what Lavrov said about Iran, the Iranians have nothing to do with the Syrian situation, for Syria is not Iraq or Lebanon, and it must not become so! (Arab News, 9/5/2012)*

Arabic news all the time united Russia with Assad to illustrate Russia's trickery and to show how Russia takes evil benefit from Syria. As in examples below, the writer drew the attention of its audiences to what is called Russian politics and persuaded their readers that Russia is not a friend of Syrians.

5) **Evil doing, Empathy, Negative attribution, Clarity:** *It is natural that many have felt frustrated by Lavrov's statements, for some thought that he would openly announce that Moscow has taken the decision to stand with the Syrian people, rather than procrastinating and continuing to defend a tyrant; however, unfortunately that is politics, and to be more precise, this is Russia's policy in our region (Arab News, 9/5/2012).*

6) **Planned question, Trickery:** *For Russian will not accept the departure of Assad without negotiations guaranteeing a "price" for this and from here the question that must be asked is: Who will negotiate with the Russians? And what is the price? (Arab News, 9/5/2012).*

7) **Trickery:** *Moscow conducts its policy giving priority to its narrow interests (Arab News, 15/5/2012).*

8) **Negative attribution, Trickery:** *Some Syrians believe that Russia is using the regime to get a quid pro quo from the West and at one point it will make the regime a scapegoat (Arab News, 15/5/2012).*

- 9) **Evil doing:** *He said that the bombardment of Syrian villages came at the behest of Russia (Arab News, 15/5/2012).*

Arabian press by pointing to evil doings of Assad's government considers it as an aggressive regime that not only oppresses his people and deprives them of any freedom and dignity, but also interferes in its neighbors' internal affairs and violates their rights. Consequently, in addition to Syrians, neighboring nations are also looking forward to seeing the end of Assad. To convince his readers, the Arab writer presents a host of examples proving the regime's aggression toward its neighbors.

- 10) **Generalization, Norm violation:** *There are many people who wish to see the end of the Assad regime. And here we are not only referring to Syrians, but also Lebanese who have been subjected to pro-Hezbollah Syrian meddling in Lebanon's internal affairs (Arab News, 15/5/2012).*
- 11) **Negative attribution, Evil doing:** *Palestinians also blame the Syrian regime for much of the obstacles they faced in their liberation struggle. Palestinian-Syrian differences have been the norm because of Assad's manipulation of Palestinian issue to further his agenda (Arab News, 15/5/2012).*
- 12) **Irony, Trickery, Victimization, Negative attribution, Exemplification, Generalization:** *Additionally, Jordanians have often complained of the double standard of the regime that preaches unity while trying to sow discord. Though Jordan is not for change of regime in Syria, it is affected by the regime's policies. For instance, the Syrian regime has manipulated the issue of water to put pressure on Amman (Arab News, 15/5/2012).*
- 13) **Exemplification:** *The Syrian media irritate Jordanians with frequent references to their country as southern part of Syria (Arab News, 15/5/2012).*
- 14) **Exemplification, Evil doing, History as lesson:** *Jordanians still remember when the Jordan army helped the Syrians in the October war only to be rewarded by ingratitude and harassment at border (Arab News, 15/5/2012).*

Arabic press believes that Syria's restlessness has an internal cause. It is the Assad's unfair sectarian policy and lack of respect toward his people which have brought about this tragic situation in the country not external powers' interference as Assad believes. Arab writers state that if there are external forces interfering in Syria, they are Assad supporters-- Russia and Iran.

- 14) **Hyperbole, Evil doing, Cause of crisis:** *The repeat of mistakes and the bloody handling of the situation paved the way for international interference and indeed the country is now on the brink of civil war (Arab News, 15/5/2012).*
- 15) **Cause of crisis:** *Time and again, we have said that the root cause of the Syrian crisis is internal and should have been seen as such. The problem is not external (Arab News, 15/5/2012).*
- 16) **Negative attribution, Game playing, Hyperbole, Trickery:** *Hence, the desperate attempt of the regime to play on the "existence" of an external plot and use the sectarian card has backfired and has not helped in defusing the crisis. It seems that few have been duped by this kind of propaganda (Arab News, 15/5/2012).*

On the whole, Arabs believe that what is happening in Syria is the consequence of the regime's oppression and its evil doings backed by Russia and Iran. Nothing is mentioned of presence or influence of other groups or forces as if Western or Arab powers have no role in the play.

5.2 Tehran times

Iranian news' prevalent theme in Syrian crises is on the one hand legitimizing Assad and on the other hand delegitimizing opposition groups and their backers including Western and Arab countries. In the eyes of the Iranian press, there are three groups engaged in Syria clashes; Syrian government, opposition armed groups, and the external forces which are exclusively West and Arab powers. Contrary to Arab press, they talk of Syrian popular government not Assad's regime or Baath government. Moreover, Tehran Times writers downgrade oppositions by introducing them as small and unpopular political or armed groups which are supported by foreign powers not Syrian people.

- 17) **Categorization, Comparison:** *The Muslim Brotherhood is the second major bloc of the Syrian opposition. The group is less sophisticated in terms of organization and has less political influence than the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt. (Tehran Times, 10/1/2012)*
- 18) **Categorization:** *The third important group is the Federation of Tenseekiet Syrian Revolution, which has a much smaller base of support in the country. (Tehran Times, 10/1/2012)*
- 19) **Categorization:** *The fourth component of the opposition is mainly comprised of people and politicians who actually have no popular base in Syria. They are mostly backed by the Western powers, and*

they have also formed a council to continue their struggle. (Tehran Times, 10/1/2012)

- 20) **Categorization, Evil doing:** *The fifth segment of the opposition is a group of adherents of the Salafi sect. They are directly sponsored by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, both of which have played a major role in fueling the crisis in the country over the past 10 months.* (Tehran Times, 10/1/2012)

Iranian journalists hold the view that Syrian people's call is only for reform not revolution and change of the government. The writers also express the norm that the reform should be conducted according to Syria's Constitution which considers Baath party as the only legal framework for political participation.

- 21) **Legality, Norm expression, Disclaimer:** *However, the Syrian people's call for reform is definitely a legitimate demand. But the reform process should be conducted in a peaceful atmosphere and according to the Syrian Constitution.* (Tehran Times, 17/2/2012)
- 22) **Legality:** *Article 8 defines the Baath Party as the "leading party in the society and the state" and cites the National Progressive Front as the only framework for legal political party participation for citizens.* (Tehran Times, 17/2/2012)

The external side of the Syrian crises, according to Iranian journalists, is Assad's enemies including United States, European Union, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, etc. Iranians believe that these Arab and West powers are allied to increase the bloodshed in Syria and collapse its legal government by any means like Salafi armed groups. The Iranians follow the trace of USA in every event and insistently try to introduce the USA as the main director of the scenario. The writers refer to various evil plots implemented by USA and its allies in different countries to achieve their goals.

- 23) **Evil doing:** *This can thwart Western countries' efforts to interfere in the internal affairs of Syria.* (Tehran Times, 17/2/2012)
- 24) **Evil doing, Hyperbole, Cause of Crisis:** *The instigation of sectarian strife and factional conflicts is the main U.S. policy in countries experiencing unrest. In other words, whenever its political plots reach an impasse, the U.S. starts supporting gangs and thugs to create violence.* (Tehran Times, 10/1/2012)
- 25) **Evil doing, Exemplification, Comparison, Number game, Hyperbole:** *The same strategy was pursued in Iraq, where the U.S. repeatedly resorted to violence from 2003 to 2011 and over a*

million people lost their lives, only because the U.S. was unable to realize its nefarious designs. (Tehran Times, 10/1/2012)

- 26) **Evil doing, Unification, Victimization, Generalization:** *The recent series of mindless terrorist acts committed by Al-Qaeda in Syria was undoubtedly encouraged by the United States, Israel, and their Arab proxies, which are all using every means at their disposal to topple the popular government of Syria.* (Tehran Times, 17/2/2012)

One interesting point is that, as above examples show, in the eyes of Iranian newspapers, those who are fighting against Al-Assad are not Syrian common people but terrorist groups supported by United States, Saudi Arabia, and some other West and Arab governments.

- 27) **Evil doing, Exemplification, Hyperbole:** *From the very beginning of the unrest in Syria, Western governments continuously intensified their efforts to increase the bloodshed and spark a civil war. The best tool to implement such a policy in the current situation is the extremist Salafi group.* (Tehran Times, 10/1/2012)
- 28) **Evil doing, Exemplification:** *The recent wave of suicide bombings in Damascus is a clear illustration of this policy, which is directly sponsored by the United States and is being implemented by the Salafis.* (Tehran Times, 10/1/2012)
- 29) **Evil doing, Hyperbole, Cause of crisis:** *The followers of the Salafi sect have adopted the most violent methods to realize their objectives, and they are the main factor behind the terrorism and bloodshed in the country.* (Tehran Times, 10/1/2012)

Iranian journalists point to the cruelties of Arab regimes toward their people as a proof that they are not in a position to decide for Syria and help its people realize their rights.

- 30) **Trickery, Humanitarian, Evil doing:** *Paradoxically, the Arab governments that have dispatched representatives to monitor the situation in Syria actually have terrible records in terms of human rights and political liberty in their own countries.*
- 31) **Evil doing, Trickery:** *This hypocrisy shows that instigating a civil war in Syria is the real goal of these countries.* (Tehran Times, 10/1/2012)

5.3 Today zaman

Editorial samples from Today Zaman newspaper had multi-faceted structures. Contrary to Arab News and Tehran Times which are mostly

devoted to delegitimizing their ideological oppositions, Today Zaman presents a broader and more real picture of the situation on the ground. In fact, Turk writers are more impartial in their interpretation of the events.

One part of these editorials is allocated to showing sympathy toward Syrian people as Turkey's neighbor and also kin. Instead of directly attacking Al-Assad by giving examples and evidence of what his army is doing, Turks refer to catastrophic condition of Syrian nation (humanitarian, dramatization and empathy strategies) and, indirectly, accuse him of violating his people rights.

- 32) **Humanitarian, Empathy, Unification:** *The people of Syria, who are next door to us and with whom we share a 910-kilometer border, have been in a fight for their most basic human rights and freedoms, which has just marked its first anniversary.* (Today Zaman, 15/3/2012)
- 33) **Humanitarian, Empathy, Evil doing, Negative attribution, Dramatization:** *Civilians who are being oppressed by the regime are experiencing a great deal of trouble in receiving food, medical equipment, fuel and health services.* (Today Zaman, 15/3/2012)
- 34) **Humanitarian, Empathy, Evil doing:** *The civilian deaths in Syria have caused deep sorrow and concern in Turkey. Under no circumstances can there be any justification for the killing of civilians.* (Today Zaman, 15/3/2012)
- 35) **Humanitarian, Empathy, Evil doing, Norm violation:** *The Syrian administration should cease its human right violations and attacks against civilians and provide easy access to the country for organizations such as the United Nations and other humanitarian aid groups in order for them to determine the humanitarian needs on the ground and deliver aid to all civilians who have been affected by the violence, primarily those living in cities under invasion.* (Today Zaman, 15/3/2012)

Turk writers also believe that Turkey's position in the region and particularly in Syria crisis is unique and, unlike other countries who are only seeking their own interest, Turkey follows a policy which benefits the entire region.

- 36) **Comparison:** *With this in mind, Turkey's approach to Syria is quite different from that of other nations.* (Today Zaman, 15/3/2012)
- 37) **Unification, Comparison:** *Turkey's approach is determined by its historical reality, geographical position and above all, its*

sociological structure. Our historical ties and kinship with the people of Syria is more important than all other kinds of interest-oriented policies pursued by other nations. (Today Zaman, 15/3/2012)

- 38) **History as a lesson,** *Those who think that Turkey is not exerting sufficient effort vis-à-vis Syria should know that history will justify Turkey's stance, and the people of the region, beginning with the Syrians, will appreciate with time Turkey's position in standing up against the dangerous plans regarding the country in order to protect the future and pave way for peace in the entire region. (Today Zaman, 15/3/2012)*

Before suggesting solution for Syria's crisis and guiding the Turkish government on how to approach Syria's conflict, the writers warn their readers or, in fact, the Turkish government of criticality of the situation in Syria and its negative consequences for Turkey.

- 39) **Warning:** *An agreement to change the current regime will only lead to another internal war even if the current regime collapses. This is one of the greatest risks in Syria because the opposition does not have a leader, a central military plan and a political strategy. (Today Zaman, 1/11/2012)*
- 40) **Warning:** *Every Western intervention in the Middle East has exacerbated the situation there. (Today Zaman, 1/11/2012)*
- 41) **Warning:** *An impression that it is inviting military intervention in Syria undermines Turkey's image and becomes detrimental to its interests. (Today Zaman, 1/11/2012)*
- 42) **Warning:** *The preservation of the current policy may cause Turkey to pay a greater bill. In addition, our image may be permanently undermined in the region. (Today Zaman, 1/11/2012)*

Describing the situation and identifying the threats, the writer presents his proposals about how Turkey should behave in this critical moment and what policies benefit the country.

- 43) **Norm expression:** *Our Syrian politics should be revisited. (Today Zaman, 1/11/2012)*
- 44) **Norm expression:** *Attempts to bring democracy to Syria via a domestic war that is externally supported should be given up. Practices and policies including protecting defectors from the Syrian army and hosting the headquarters of the Free Syrian Army as well*

- as supplying logistical support should be reviewed.* (Today Zaman, 1/11/2012)
- 45) **Norm expression:** *On the other hand, even if all conditions are met and an external intervention is made, Turkey should stay away from such an initiative because of its special status.* (Today Zaman, 1/11/2012)
- 46) **Norm expression:** *Second, we should also review our alignment with friends such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Instead of an enemy-of-my-enemy-is-my-friend approach in a complicated issue like Syria, the allies should be chosen by reliance on more comprehensive analyses.* (Today Zaman, 1/11/2012)
- 47) **Norm expression:** *Third, Turkey should clarify its demands and expectations from the US.* (Today Zaman, 1/11/2012)
- 48) **Norm expression:** *In order to meet the fundamental needs of Syrians, Turkey should not fail to provide full support to Syria, by way of enabling health services and delivering humanitarian aid.* (Today Zaman, 15/3/2012)
- 49) **Unification, Humanitarian:** *We stand with them in their march to obtain their rights and freedoms.* (Today Zaman, 15/3/2012)
- 50) **Norm expression:** *The solution is based on negotiation and political process rather than domestic war. This implies that diplomatic channels should be opened to maintain ties with Syria.* (Today Zaman, 1/11/2012)

Delegitimization strategy in Today Zaman was applied to demonize those foreign countries that have been instigating crisis in Syria. The writers attempt to reveal that USA and Saudi Arabia's interference in Syria is only for the sake of their own interests not Syrian people's rights and freedom.

- 51) **Irony, Trickery:** *Regardless of who wins, most probably the US will extend limited support to the opposition, which will be enough for them to stay in the fight but not enough to win victory because the first preference of the US is the fall of Assad and the opposition as well.* (Today Zaman, 1/11/2012)
- 52) **Comparison, Exemplification, Trickery:** *The US pursued a similar strategy in the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. It manipulated the support to Iraq depending on the course of the war.* (Today Zaman, 1/11/2012)
- 53) **Evidentiality:** *Henry Kissinger made the following statement on that war, which lasted eight years and claimed 750,000 lives: "Unfortunately, there is no possibility that both lose."* (Today Zaman, 1/11/2012)

- 54) **Trickery:** *For Saudis, the greatest impact to Iran is, in addition to a regime change in Teheran, detachment from the Syrian connection. They will prefer this option even if this means a great number of casualties in Syria or even its partition.* (Today Zaman, 1/11/2012)
- 55) **Trickery:** *The second goal of the Saudis in the Syrian crisis is the emergence of ground where the Wahhabi ideology would gain strength. For their failed attempts in Bosnia, Lebanon, Iraq and Central Asia, there might be a better environment in Syria.* (Today Zaman, 1/11/2012)

Considering two general strategies of legitimization and delegitimization proposed by Van Dijk (2000a), text analysis of Arab news samples revealed that Arab writers mostly utilize delegitimization strategy to demonize Assad and his supporting countries Iran and Russia. Strategies like evil doing, negative attribution, hyperbole, trickery, etc. were all applied by them to present a negative impression about Assad and his backers. Iranian newspaper writers also follow the same general strategy as their Arab colleagues. Utilizing strategies like evil doing, exemplification, and hyperbole, they tried to delegitimize the West and Arab countries.

Another important point is that use of legitimizing strategies was not significant in Iranian and Arab editorials. In fact, no trace of the West, Arab countries, and their role or influence on Syria's crisis was found in Arab News samples as if they were not present there. On the other hand, in Tehran Times editorials, nothing is mentioned of Iran and Russia's roles. Consequently, there was no need for use of legitimizing strategies in these two newspapers.

As it was mentioned earlier, Today Zaman's editorial writers approach the Syria's issue differently or, to put it another way, in comparison to Arab and Iranian writers, they were more objective and impartial in their interpretation and analysis. Little use of legitimizing and delegitimizing strategies was observed in the samples of this newspaper which proves that these texts were less ideologically biased. Turkish writers were mostly concerned with analysis of the situation and suggesting proposals for Turkish policy in the form of *should* and *should not*.

6. Conclusion and Suggestion for Further Research

Manipulating X-phemism strategies in an intelligent and biased fashion could inject negative and positive attitudes through discourse. This study probed the Syria' crisis news in a specific time span and findings showed the image-creating process of discourse manipulators in the media domain. This

process was reflected in their style of reporting different dimensions of the situation and through ideologically different lexical choices. In other words, journalists inclined to disguise the realities and provoke positive and negative attitudes on the part of their audiences.

The results clear this point that realities could change, reverse, reinforce, infirm, produce, and reproduce through utilizing discursive strategies. Using language as a shield, as the study reveals, means over-stating positive side of realities and under-stating negative side of realities. Results also indicate that language as a weapon means over-stating negative side of realities and under-stating positive side of realities. Comparing different context-bound narration and word choosing style of war news shows how media manipulators all over the world control realities in favor of their own “ism”. In case of Syria's crisis, different countries dictate their own beliefs and ideologies through lexical choice to their readers and persuade them to accept what *they* want.

It appears that some of the strategies traced in our dataset might also be identified in other contexts. Thus, studying the role of ideology can be applied to the vast context of written as well as oral political texts including newspapers and magazines' articles, TV and radio news, politician's speeches, round tables and debates, etc. It would be really interesting to investigate whether the diversified strategies used by discourse members to euphemize or derogate in or out-groups rely heavily upon genre specific conventions. The present study put on display the drastic differences between three political ends. Van Dijk's ideological square can be a good framework for conducting further studies. Therefore, studies on the use of linguistic and ideological strategies in different political genres can offer further insights into the nature and function of political texts.

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