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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts (M.A.) in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

A Discursive Comparison of the *Tehran Times* and the *New York Times* (2003-2008) on the War in Iraq and its Relevance to TEFL

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February 2011

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my late father.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to my professors for their support and encouragement during this research. Firstly, I thank Dr. Ghazanfari for his continuous patience and guidance through writing this thesis. I also express my gratitude for his encouragement, insight and motivation.

Equally, I am grateful to Dr. Zolfagharkhani, the respectable advisor, who provided me with a lot of guidance and support. I should also thank Dr. Elyasi, Dr. Ghabanchi and Dr. Davoudi, who helped me during this inquiry.

Abstract

This thesis intended to compare the discourse of the *Tehran Times* and that of the *New York Times,* which are ideologically different, through a critical discourse analysis approach. The current work investigated how these two newspapers have used linguistic (semantic and syntactic) strategies to express their attitudes about an identical subject, the war on Iraq. To achieve this end, ten issues of the *Tehran Times* and ten issues of the *New York Times* have been selected randomly from the archives of these two newspapers. To analyze the comments of these issues, the researcher has adopted the Hallidayan linguistic model. The analysis focused on the linguistic items within the three functions or meanings of the Hallidayan model of language. The linguistic items chosen to be analyzed in the issues of these two newspapers were *active and passive voices*, *emotive language* within the ideational meaning, *nominalization* within the interpersonal meaning and *thematization* within the textual meaning. Finally, the researcher has come to the conclusion that these two newspapers have differently used these linguistic strategies in their interest to get the support of public opinion in their favorite directions.

 Key words: discourse analysis; critical discourse analysis; ideology; linguistic manipulation; Hallidayan model of language.

List of Abbreviations

DA   **Discourse Analysis**

CDA   **Critical Discourse Analysis**

 NYT   **New York Times**

SFL   **Systematic Functional Linguistics**

TT   **Tehran Times**

TEFL   **Teaching English as a Foreign Language**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One

Introduction

1. 1. Overview

Language is an indispensable part of people's life, and social life without language is very difficult if not impossible. As Woods (2006) believes, language is a social practice that in fact defines the social practice. Our social behavior and relationships are understood in language. Thus, language can influence all parts of our social life. One aspect of this social strand is media discourse. Fairclough (1989) states two reasons for the significance of media discourse. It is the most influential in society because it has a large scale and it exposes the whole population to a relatively homogeneous output.

Moreover, in media discourse, the part that gets the most attention and has the most audience is news. White (1998) believes that the modern mass-media news is the most influential written text type, influencing the terms of political, economic and cultural debates. In van Dijk's words (1998, p.18) "news is not a reflection of reality but as a product shaped by political, economic and cultural forces". According to the previous statements, there is a bilateral relationship between media news and social issues. Since news is influenced by and can influence the public concerns, it cannot be value-free and neutral.

As Fairclough (2004, cited in Wodak & Busch, 2002) suggests, media institutions, most of the time, claim that they state the public concerns as facts, without any bias and their statements are not affected by social and personal factors, but this is just a fallacy. They cannot and should not state just the factual

events. They should, as it will be elaborated, adapt them to the favor of society and, of course, the dominant group of the society.

In other words, this is just a myth that "anyone is free to say what they like" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 63). Since language is a social activity, it will have social results so it will be controlled by society. However, the control of media discourse would be more prominent because it is the most visible discourse in society. Therefore, to control the society, this kind of discourse needs the most control. Fairclough (ibid.) suggests that, media discourse is a medium in the hands of power-holders to send their voices to the mass of population, so the discourse of media is in favor of power-holders. In other words, media discourse is a means for reproducing the power and dominance on population. "This exercise of power can be by means of strategies to affect people's attitudes that not only do what power-holders wish them to do, but appear to do it willingly" (Ataveh, 2007, p. 3).

Hacket (1991) confirms this kind of persuasion and suggests that no power could last forever through imposing force. Fairclough and Chuliaraki (1999) also verify that hegemony is through consent rather than coercion. The concept of hegemony emphasizes the importance of ideology in achieving and maintaining the relations of domination. To achieve the public's consent through ideology, the mass media is one of the essential instruments (Fowler, 1991).

The relationship between discourse, ideology and power is generally elaborated in Fairclough's words. He suggests that

> On the one hand, ideology functions as a material form of discourse. Ideologies are located in both the forms and meanings of discourse and the linguistic strategies employed in discourse structures are socio-ideologically determined and invested. On the other hand discourse as a socio-ideological practice constitutes world from diverse positions in power relations. (Fairclough , 1992, cited in Xiaofei, 2001, p. 20)

The relationship between discourse, ideology and power has been discussed. However, as van Dijk (1998, p. 143) suggests, "the point of ideological discourse analysis is not merely to discover underlying ideologies, but to systematically link structures of discourse with structures of ideologies". This is why the researcher has decided to select two newspapers that seems to be ideologically different in order to investigate their semantic and syntactic manipulation through the microscope of CDA. This investigation will clarify their opposing opinions and attitudes toward the same subject, war in Iraq.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Journalists often claim that they are presenting news neutrally, without any bias but this is just a claim. As Beaugrande (2006, p.10) argues, "there is no zero

degree of uninvolvement for us to leap in prior to any understanding of the data, even hard science is affected by ideology". Thus, people willingly or unwillingly, are affected by their ideology and it influences their thought and performance indirectly. In political media discourse, this effect seems to be more obvious. As van Dijk (1998, p. 20) suggests, "all political news does have some bias".

The bias in news is usually in favor of the power- holders. As "George Orwel's *Nineteen Eighty Four* showed governments and those in power use media for the policies they want to introduce and they make demands on media to serve what they define as national interest" (Ataweh, 2007, p. 4). The media discourse that discusses the War in Iraq cannot be an exception. It is probably the voice of governments and expression of their prejudices. Iraq war may be argued differently by different media. While American media pretend that American troops are in Iraq because of sympathy, Iranian media suppose them as occupiers. This disagreement is probably the result of different ideologies (Kies, 2007).

 For investigating the disagreement in ideology and its outcome in media discourse, the newspaper texts can be helpful. The researcher will focus on the *Tehran Times* and the *New York Times* to clarify how different ideologies affected their discourse in reference to the War in Iraq and how differently they

used linguistic features (semantic and syntactic) referring to the same subject, namely war in Iraq.

1.3. Significance of the Problem

 Hall (1980, cited in Fairclough, 1985, p. 117) suggests, "the social function of media is to put across the voices of the powerful as if they were the voices of common sense". Thus, media discourse most of the time is an expression of the ruling group's ideas in the society and it usually represents their activities in a way that is dialectically acceptable. As Eaman (1987, p. 38, cited in Henderson, 2004) suggests, "news is consciously created to serve the interest of the ruling class". According to this statement, news most of the time, is the voice of governments. So the quarrel of two opponent governments can be reflected in their news media discourse.

It is evident that the Iranian and American governments, which are assumed to be enemies, have different beliefs on the war in Iraq. The American government released that they went to Iraq for beneficiary goals. They state that the American troops entered Iraq to disarm the Iraqi government of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam Hussein's support of terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people. However, the Iranian government believes that the Americans occupied Iraq to plunder that country's oil and wealth. This difference in opinion is evident in their discourses. So, the researcher has selected the *Tehran Times*

discourse as a representative of the Iranian government and the *New York Times* as a representative of the American government, to investigate how these two newspapers reflect the same event, namely the war in Iraq.

1.4. Research Question

The question this research seeks to investigate is:

1. What linguistic features (semantic and syntactic) did the *Tehran Times* and the *New York Times* use in reference to the war in Iraq in order to reflect their ideological orientations?

1.5. Definition of Key Terms

1.5.1. Discourse

The Longman Dictionary of Applied linguistics (2002, p. 160) defines *discourse* "as a general term for examples of language use i.e., language which has been produced as an act of communication". Woods (2006, p.1) defines discourse as the "language in use - real language that real people use in the real world".

1.5.2. Discourse Analysis

Norman Fairclough (1989, p. 7) as a great pioneer of CDA defines *discourse analysis* as "analysis of how texts work within socio-cultural practice". Johnstone (2008, p. 4) defines discourse analysis as,

Dividing longer stretches of discourse into parts according to various

criteria and then looking at the particular characteristic of each part.

Calling what we do 'discourse analysis' rather than 'language analysis'

underscores the fact that we are not centrally focused on language as an

abstract system. Studying language in context is a shared commitment in all

approaches to discourse analysis.

1.5.3. Ideology

Fairclough defined *ideology* as an "implicit common sense assumption"

that is shaped by power relations and governs practice (Fairclough, 1989, p. 156,

cited in Hruska, 2004). Bloor and Bloor (2007, p. 10) define ideology as "the set

of beliefs or attitudes shared by members of a particular social group". In

Simpson's words (1993; cited in Ghazanfari & Sarani, 2009, p. 26) ideology is

" the taken- for- granted assumptions, value system and sets of beliefs which

reside in texts."

1.5.4. Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough (1995, p. 39, cited in Atkins, 2002) suggests this definition for CDA,

CDA is the study of often opaque relationships of causality and

determination   between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b)

wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to

investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are

ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourses and society itself is a factor securing power.

Allan Luke (n.d., p. 30) adds that CDA is an approach to "the study of language and discourse in social institutions. Drawing on poststructuralist discourse theory and critical linguistics, it focuses on how social relations, identity, knowledge and power are constructed through written and spoken texts".

Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

2.1. Iraqi and American Relations: Overview

 Since this thesis tries to compare the discourse of two newspapers on war in Iraq, it seems necessary to have an overview of the war between Iraq and the United States and the nature of the relations between the two countries.

According to Dobbs (2006), Zini (2009) and Pack (2007), invasion of Iraq from March 20 to May1, 2003, was led by the United States, backed by British forces and smaller contingents from Australia, Poland and Denmark. Four countries participated with troops during the initial invasion phase, which lasted from March 20 to May1. These were United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Poland. 36 of other countries were involved in its aftermath. The invasion marked the beginning of the current Iraq war. The United States supplied the vast majority of the invading forces, but also received support from Kurdish troops in Northern Iraq.

According to the president of the US, G.W. Bush, and the Prime Minister of UK of that time, Tony Blair, the reasons for the invasion were "to disarm Iraq of Weapons of Mass Destruction, to end Saddam Hussein's support of terrorism, and to free Iraqi people". However, in 2005, the Central Intelligence Agency released a report that no weapons of mass destruction had been found in Iraq. Although remnants of 1991 production were found after the end of the war, US government spokesman confirmed that these were not the weapons for which the US went to war (Zini, 2009).