



Department of English Language and Literature

**A Critical Discourse Analysis of *Los Angeles Times* and  
*Tehran Times* on the Representation of Iran's Nuclear  
Program and the Pedagogical Implications**

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**Dedicated to:**

my caring parents who are a beacon in my life,  
who have always guided me towards the light at the end of the tunnel by their  
magic *words* and by this, inspired in me the interest of studying about the power  
of *words* in changing one's world!

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## Abstract

*Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aims to show how discourse shapes and is shaped by power relations in society. Conducted in a CDA framework, this study aims to investigate how ideological differences manifest themselves in the discourse of **Los Angeles Times** and **Tehran Times** dealing with Iran's nuclear issues, in order to give a consciousness-raising about the power of language in changing one's view about the events. In this study, van Dijk's (2000) framework has been used to detect the **discursive strategies** which are used in the two newspapers to represent the issues related to Iran's nuclear program according to their different perspectives. To this end, among the data collected from May 15 to June 21, the researcher focused on four subjects which were covered in the two newspapers: 1) a deal signed by Iran, Turkey and Brazil, 2) the reaction of Russia after a speech delivered by Iran's President on May 26, 3) the fourth round of sanctions against Iran on June 9, and 4) the cooperation of Brazil with Iran in its development of nuclear energy. After the analyses of four pairs of news reports with the same subjects and the comparisons of the results, it was found that the two newspapers represent these issues differently to their readers, according to their different ideologies by the use of two overall semantic macro-strategies of **positive self-presentation** and **negative other-presentation** which are realized by other discursive strategies such as: **lexicalization**, **repetition**, **consensus**, **hyperbole** and **vagueness** as the most frequent ones used in the news reports which were analyzed in this study. Possible implications of the study for language pedagogy have been also discussed.*

**Key words:** *Critical Discourse Analysis, van Dijk's (2000) framework, ideology, newspapers, discursive strategies, Iran's nuclear program*

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## **List of Abbreviations**

**CDA:** Critical Discourse Analysis

**IAEA:** International Atomic Energy Agency

**NOP:** Negative other-presentation

**PSP:** Positive self-presentation

**SFL:** Systemic Functional Linguistics

**UNSC:** United Nations of Security Council

# Chapter One

## Introduction

In this chapter, first a general overview of the study is presented. Then, the problem leading to the designing of the study will be stated. This will be followed by research assumptions, the research question, and the research hypothesis. Limitations of the study, definitions of some key terms, and the organization of the study will also come next.

### 1.1.General Overview

Newspapers are one of the main sources of information to keep us in touch with the world. They inform us of the changes that are taking place every day. In doing so, they are of great significance both in our daily life as providers of information and in our EFL teaching/learning system, since they are authentic materials which reflect the real language use in a society.

However, there is a fact that should be taken into account when making use of newspapers either as a teaching material or as a source of information. The fact is that in newspapers, the events are not usually (re)presented as they are in reality, but are represented in a way that the newspapers intend to be (Reah, 2002). The events are not mirrored but they go through journalistic practices which involve linguistic recontextualization in language. Through this, one single reality can be represented differently by different writers in different newspapers with different attitudes and *ideologies*. In other words, the words are played with and different linguistic devices are used to influence the readers' view of the events. Fowler (1991) states that: "news is not just a value- free reflection of facts. Anything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a particular ideological position" (p.101).

Usually, ordinary people do not have this knowledge and consider the news as the

mirror of the events. For example, very few people would agree with the statement that: *Women are weak and can have only limited number of roles*, but they encounter this view expressed in newspapers without even challenging it, because this view and the likes are not clearly expressed, but hidden in the words, grammatical constructions and argumentation lines that the writers may employ (Reah, 2002, p. 71).

This is related to the concepts of: manipulation, hidden ideology, hidden meanings, bias, power of language, discursive structures, etc. These concepts belong to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), an approach which equips us with different models and devices to demystify the hidden meanings in different kinds of discourses.

Generally, CDA is concerned with discourse in forming and being formed by social political practices (Fairclough, 2001a). It aims to raise the readers' consciousness of the power of language in changing the events and influencing the readers' views. CDA practitioners claim that discourse reveals and contributes to power relations, in/equalities, dominance, and discrimination (Fairclough, 2001a).

Since newspaper discourse is a kind of discourse in which the manipulation of language is obvious, many CDA practitioners have used one of the CDA models to reveal the biased language which is used in newspapers.

Using van Dijk's (2000) framework, this study attempts to elucidate how Iran's nuclear issues are represented in *Los Angeles Times* and *Tehran Times* and to investigate whether there is any bias in the representation of this issue in these two newspapers. It should be noted here that Iran's nuclear program is selected to focus on in this study just as a social and political event which among other events has received more media attention in Iran and America. Therefore, this study is not concerned with political issues and official relationships between the two countries. Rather, it focuses on the role of *language*, on the power of *language*, on

how *language* and its structures are manipulatively used by some in the society who have more access and control over discourse, and, finally, on the need of being more alert when using and encountering language in our daily life. Bearing all these in mind, the major purposes of this study are to show how media workers and journalists' linguistic choices differ from a diverse ideological point of view to another one in the treatment of the same event (Iran's nuclear issues) and its more practical goal is the same 'wake up call' and consciousness raising, which most of CDA practioners consider to be their ultimate goal along with changing the situation. About this aim, Reah (2002) states that " it is important that readers of newspapers become critical readers who are aware of, and can identify, gaps and swings in the information they are given (p.10). Moreover, this study is also concerned with CDA's pedagogical implications for an EFL context. By reviewing the works conducted about the possible implications of CDA for EFL students and teachers alike, this study aims to introduce some possible applications of CDA to EFL classes.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Newspaper discourse has been the center of attention for many CD analysts to detect the biased language and raise the readers' consciousness of the manipulation. Some of them investigated the representation of an event in a newspaper, the others investigated the representation of an event in two opposing newspapers with different ideologies. However, no CDA study has been conducted comparing the discourse of *Los Angeles Times* and *Tehran Times* on the basis of van Dijk's (2000) semantic-oriented framework to see whether there is any bias in the language of these newspapers speaking in the case of Iran's nuclear issues and to reveal how opposing ideologies are represented differently in these newspapers.

Moreover, considering the significance of newspapers in EFL teaching since they are authentic materials and the prevalence of manipulation in these texts, it can be felt that there is a need for CDA studies like this which focuses on the language of news in newspapers to detect the biased language and accordingly to raise the EFL learners' **consciousness** of this manipulation.

### **1.3. Significance of the Study**

Recently, Iran's nuclear program has been one of the issues which many newspapers, TV, and radio broadcasts in many countries have focused on. Taking a cursory look at the headlines of newspapers, one can easily notice that Iran's nuclear issues are of great significance for many countries with different ideologies and every country tries to represent this issue to its people in a way that is in harmony with its policies. Thus, investigating this issue represented in the discourse of two newspapers: *Los Angeles Times* and *Tehran Times* with different point of views seems to be insightful in elucidating the role and power of language in changing of perspectives on events, as the CDA practitioners claim (Fairclough, 2001b).

Moreover, finding the underlying meanings and attitudes in the news reports of *Los Angeles Times* and *Tehran Times* on Iran's nuclear issues to investigate the relationship between language and ideology, may have implications for EFL contexts. It may shed light on the need and importance of critically reading of not only news but also every kind of texts the learners encounter and also being able to read between the lines in order to be able to comprehend the real intention of the writer and also equip them with tools to demystify the manipulative and biased language.

This study can also be insightful in courses dealing with journalism. Along with the common use of news in these courses, the teachers can also make use of the findings of this study to have students have a critical view when reading the news reports as sources of information. The teachers can introduce some categories of the framework which is used in this study to their students, to equip them with tools to critically analyse the news reports as an activity in their classes.

By using the findings of this study in, the teachers can also increase students' critical thinking and argumentation. Moreover, students become more creative and active in language classes in contrast to their current submissive role (Rahimi & Sahragard, 2007). Moreover, this study can also raise students' awareness of

the importance of being careful about every word and grammatical structure they choose to use in their speech and writings.

#### **1.4. Research Assumptions**

Based on CDA, it can be assumed that discourse structures are constructed according to the ideologies of the news writers and there is a relationship between language and ideology.

#### **1.5. Research Question**

With respect to the above assumptions, the following question is raised for this study:

- How do ideological differences manifest themselves in the discourse of *Los Angeles Times* and *Tehran Times* dealing with Iran's nuclear issues?

#### **1.6. Research Hypothesis**

To answer the above question, the following hypothesis is made:

- Ideological differences manifest themselves in the discourse of *Los Angeles Times* and *Tehran Times* dealing with Iran's nuclear issues by the use of discursive strategies.

#### **1.7. Limitations of the Study**

Most works in CDA deal with only small corpora of data. This study also for the limitation of time has chosen eight news reports, four news reports from each of the newspapers as its corpus of data. The other limitation of this study is that it overlooks the visual images of the newspapers, focusing only on the verbal texts. However, as Anthonissen (2003) states " images of whatever kind are not natural or neutral, but that they fall as much within the realm of ideology as any other mode of discourse" (p.300).

## 1.8. Definition of the Key Terms

Some key terms have been used in this study. These terms along with their most common definitions are presented as follows:

**Discourse:** Discourse has several different definitions in the CDA literature. Fairclough (2001a) considers discourse as a social practice, meaning that language is a part of society, a social process and a process which is conditioned by other non-linguistic parts of society.

**Discursive strategy:** “Any systemic representation in discourse which pertains to certain ideology and/or constitutes it” (KhosraviNik, 2009, p.496).

**Ideology:** Systems of ideas which are sociocognitively defined as shared representations of social groups, and more specifically as the ‘axiomatic’ principles of such representations (Van Dijk, 2006).

**Negative other-presentation:** A semantic macro-strategy in van Dijk’s (2000) framework which is related to the use of derogatory terms and focusing on the negative characteristics of outgroup members by the use of other discursive strategies (van Dijk, 2000).

**Positive self-presentation:** A semantic macro-strategy within van Dijk’s (2000) framework that is employed either for individual face keeping or for collective purposes by focusing on the positive aspects of one’s group. This strategy is usually accompanied with negative other-presentation (van Dijk, 2000).

## 1.8. Organization of the study

This work has been designed to consist of five chapters. After this introductory chapter, in Chapter Two, the review of related literature on CDA's history, the main assumptions, its nature as a multidisciplinary paradigm of study, and the fundamental scholars along with their most influential works will be presented. Moreover, since this study focuses on newspapers discourse, a part is devoted to the introduction of studies which are conducted on the discourse of newspaper discourse using CDA analytical tools. Reviewing the studies on the implications



of CDA for EFL contexts and the criticism literature of CDA will come after. In Chapter Three, the methodological framework, procedure of data collection and data analysis will be presented. The result of news reports analysis and discussions will be elaborated upon in the fourth chapter. Finally, in Chapter Five, a summary of the study, along with the conclusions and pedagogical implications will be discussed. Some tentative suggestions for further research will also be offered.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of the Literature**

In this chapter, first, the history of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and its main principles and assumptions will be discussed. Next, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and its contributions to CDA will be introduced and elaborated. Then, fundamental scholars and their works within CDA will be reviewed. Discursive strategies of van Dijk's (2000) framework will also be explained since the analyses of this study are based on this framework. Afterwards, practical CDA studies based on newspapers discourse and criticisms of CDA will be introduced. Finally, a part will be devoted to the review of the studies which have been conducted on the implications of CDA for EFL contexts.

#### **2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis: History and Main Issues**

CDA has its roots in Critical Linguistics (CL) which appeared in the University of East Anglia in 1970s, by linguists such as Fowler, Hodge, Kress, and Trew who were interested in the relations between language, power, and ideology. These linguists declared a "critical and emancipator agenda for linguistic analysis" (Bloomaert, 2005, p.22). Their seminal works are Hodge and Kress (1979) and, Fowler, Hodge, Kress and Trew (1979). Critical linguists' works were based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and social – semiotic linguistics of Halliday (1994). CL believes that discourse does not merely reflect social processes and structures, but affirms, consolidates, and in this way, reproduces existing social structures (Teo, 2002, p.363). Critical linguists were also interested in 'ideological levels of meaning'. Richardson (2002) states that one of the tasks of critical linguists is to make present- but- concealed meanings visible (p. 361).

Fowler (2002) in his essay on CL stated that:

Critical linguistics insists that all representation is mediated, moulded by the value-systems that are ingrained in the medium (language in this case) used for representation; it challenges common sense by pointing out that

something could have been represented some other way, with a very different significance (p. 347).

Following this, CDA as a research paradigm emerged in the early 1990s in a meeting at the University of Amsterdam where Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak had the opportunity to discuss their different theories and methodologies of discourse analysis and specifically CDA. The publication of *Language and Power* (1989) by Fairclough is considered to be the landmark of CDA's start (Bloomaert, 2005). Moreover, the publications of *Language, Power, and Ideology* by Ruth Wodak (1989) and *Discourse & Society* by Teun van Dijk (1990) have been very influential in the growing and extension of CDA to many different disciplines.

Van Dijk (1998a) described CDA as follows:

Critical Discourse Analysis is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power, abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose and ultimately to resist social inequality (p. 1).

According to Sheyholislami (2001) recent studies in CDA are different from earlier works in CL in that the recent works have considered the role of audience's interpretations and have extended their analysis to the intertextual analysis.

One of the major characteristics of CDA is that it is not a single, homogenous method or approach but a paradigm of research, a program, or as Wodak (2001a) suggests a 'school', with leading scholars who have different backgrounds of their own and have their own approaches with different analytical tools. However, all of them address the same issues and agree on certain principles of analysis (Bloomaert, 2005). According to Wodak (2001a) this *heterogeneous* quality of CDA "allows for open discussions and debates for changes in the aims and goals, and for innovation" (p. 8).

Racism, gender inequality, sexism, xenophobia, colonialism, employment, war, nuclear weapons and nuclear power (Fowler, 2002) are among the topics which most of critical discourse analysts are interested in. They also focus on different types of public discourse: newspapers, advertisement, political propaganda, official documents, regulations, and the institutional discourse.

Discourse for 'critically-minded discourse analysts' (Teo, 2002, p. 363) is both shaped by and shaping the social processes. Discourse for these scholars is “ a major instrument of power and control and critical discourse analysts, unlike Chomsky, feel that it is indeed part of their professional role to investigate, reveal and clarify how power and discriminatory value are inscribed in and mediated through the linguistic tools”( Coulthard & Coulthard, 1996, p. xi).

Fairclough and Wodak (1997, p. 271) provide eight main tents of CDA as follows:

- 1- CDA addresses social problems
- 2- Power relations are discursive
- 3- Discourse constitutes society and culture.
- 4- Discourse does ideological work
- 5- Discourse is historical
- 6- The link between text and society is mediated
- 7- Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory
- 8- Discourse is a form of social action

CDA supports those groups in society who suffer from inequality, injustice, prejudice, and discrimination, those who are less powerful, disadvantaged and dominated, those who are usually the minorities and those whose minds and discourses are controlled. On the other hand, it also analyzes the language use of the dominant groups, those in power, those responsible for the existences of these situations. CDA scholars also aim to recognize how these "situations are reproduced, legitimated or enacted through discourse and, hence, they analyse discourse in relation to the wide social and historical contexts in which it occurs. Or put it other way round, CDA analyses social life in its discursive aspects,