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Department of English Language and Literature**

**A Critical Discourse Analysis of News Articles,
by *The New York Times* and *The Tehran Times*, Covering the
U.S.-led War in Afghanistan**

By:

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**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts (M.A.) in Teaching English as a Foreign
Language (TEFL)**

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Sabzevar, Iran

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In the Name of God

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To

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Abstract

This research analyzed the discourse of news articles in *The New York Times* (NYT) and *The Tehran Times* (TT) to see if there is any underlying meaning in each newspaper's political news articles which are written on the U.S-led war in Afghanistan, and whether writers have taken biased stances and positions for the country they are representing in covering the same issue, that is, the U.S-led war in Afghanistan. To do so, 20 news articles of *The NYT* and *The TT* (10 articles each) were randomly extracted out of the 100 news articles (50 articles each). The framework used, was Hallidayan branch of linguistics known as Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), stressing the importance of social context in the production and development of language both historically and in individual discourse event. The analysis focused on the linguistic choices, that is, the meaning potential of language found in words (lexis) and grammar together with sound system available for us to use to make meaning, within the three functions or meanings of Hallidayan model of language. Therefore, the linguistic choices chosen to be analyzed in news articles of *The NYT* and *The TT* on the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan were: *active and passive voices*, and *nominalization* within ideational meaning, *modality* and *lexical choices* within interpersonal meaning and *thematization* within textual meaning. After the analysis, the researcher came to the conclusion that traces of ideological and biased political stands were found in the news articles of both newspapers. *The New York Times*, however, has used, by far more the mentioned features, to be more equivocal and consequently to convey their ideologies and ideological practices and naturalized the situations and circumstances as commonsensical.

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Abbreviations

CDA= Critical Discourse Analysis

CL= Critical Linguistics

SFG= Systemic Functional Grammar

NYT= The New York Times

TT= The Tehran Times

AFP= Agence France Presse

AP= Associated Press

MDA= mainstream discourse analysis

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

During the 1960s the focus of language learning studies was on the individual; that is, the linguists were preoccupied with the notion of how an individual learns or develops his/her language, and approached language learning from a psychological point of view. In 1970s, however, the notion of 'social man' was at the center of language learning (Halliday, 1978). The 'social man' of 1970s had nothing to do with the 'social man' as opposed to 'individual man', but the contrast made by the linguists was 'social' versus 'psychophysiological' (cf. Labov, 1972a, 1972b; Dresser, 1972; Schmidt, 1973; van Dijk, 1972; Bauman & Scherzer, 1974; Gumperz & Hymes, 1972). To put it differently, the linguists in 1970s departed from approaching language from an intra-organism approach to an inter-organism one (ibid., p. 12). As Halliday (ibid.) states:

when we refer to social man, we mean the individual considered as a single entity, rather than man as assemblage of parts. The distinction we are drawing here is between the behavior of that individual, his actions and his interaction with the environment (especially that part of the environment which consist of other individuals), on the one hand, and on the other hand his biological nature, and in particular the internal structure of the brain.

In line with the prevailing trends of linguistics in 1970s which approached language as 'behavior' versus language as 'knowledge', in the U.S.A., there was also an increasing obsession about the language used by people in power to baffle, or deceive the laymen. Facing with and recognizing the deceiving nature of the media in 1970s, linguists in the area of CL made up their minds to tackle these issues and to analyze this deceiving language in order to unveil and depict the hidden and underlying intentions of those who are in charge of producing of this type language. Then, the 1970s saw a type of discourse and text analysis that was aiming at

uncovering the role of language in the formation of power relations in society. In this regard Paul Simpson, convincingly states that:

This tradition of analytic enquiry can be traced directly to the work carried out during the 1970s by Roger Fowler and his associates at the University of East Anglia. Since the publication towards the end of that decade of two volumes outlining the critical linguistic 'manifesto' (Fowler et al. 1979; Kress and Hodge 1979), there has been a steady output of research within the tradition. What characterizes this work, first of all, is the way in which it expands the horizons of stylistics by focusing on texts other than those regarded as literary. Media language has received particular scrutiny, although analyses have been conducted on discourse types as diverse as swimming-pool regulations (Fowler and Kress 1979a) and university guidelines on student enrolment (Fowler 1981, pp. 24–45). (1993, p. 4).

If there is an intention that the people in general, and students in particular, are to be taught and familiarized with the manipulating nature of media, the Critical Linguistics Analysis would serve to meet these goals, because according to the major exponents of CD and CL, it has an emancipative nature (cf. Kress & Hodge, 1979; Fowler, Kress, Hodge & Trew, 1979; van Dijk, 1985; Fairclough 1989; Wodak, 1989, cited in Rahiminejad, 2009). Following 1970s trends in text analysis, the linguists in 1990s went so far as to analyze in critical way the media discourses to find the ideologies and worldviews hidden in them. The analysis which has come to be known as CD has constantly described this particular approach to linguistic analysis. The application of CDA in applied linguistics has resulted in development of a different approach which tackles the hidden and manipulative nature of media message. The incontrovertible power of the media which has something to do with ideological works of language and has consequently resulted in hegemony has motivated inordinate critical studies in many disciplines (e.g., linguistics, semiotics, pragmatics, and discourse studies).

Aligned with Kress' statement that "certain syntactic forms will necessarily correlate with certain discourse" (1985, p. 28, cited in Rahiminejad, 2009), and "any given discourse is highly specific concerning the statements possible within its terms and of certain linguistic features" (ibid.), the structural and lexical devices used by both groups of articles have been juxtaposed so as to answer the above-mentioned questions. My intention is to show, by analyzing both structural and lexical devices in micro level, drawing upon the Systemic-Functional Grammar of Halliday (1985), that certain lexical devices and particular structural features, for example, transitivity, modality, to name just a few, are used to convey the ideology held by different writers. Since language is regarded as the physical form or materialization of ideology and language is believed to be loaded with ideology, the analysis of language is therefore the analysis of ideology (Fairclough, 1989b, 1995; Fowler and Kress, 1979; Hodge et al., 1979; Thompson, 1984).

Through this comparative and contrastive analysis and study, the similarities and differences between the views held by the writers of the articles of both newspapers were spelt out in-depth elements of social control and inequalities of power relationship in two groups of texts. It has also been explained how particular textual features such as lexical choices, transitivity, thematization, and modality are used by the writers of the news articles to show the obscured, obfuscated meanings, attitudes, worlds views, and dominant ideologies which underlie the lexicon and structures which are used in the articles.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The language which is used in media and especially news articles is considered simply informative by ordinary people, but scholars in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis have stated that there are choices in the language of the media which aim at controlling people's minds and implying some hidden meanings. The mainstream research on media discourse in recent years have been conducted within the framework of critical discourse analysis (hereafter,

CDA), which has something to do with such issues as the projection of power through discourse, the instantiation of dominance and inequality in discourse, the ideological underpinning of discourse and discourse affiliation with social change (Fairclough 1989a, 1989b, 1995; Fowler, 1991; Fowler et al., 1979; Hodge and Kress, 1993; van Dijk, 1993).

1.3 Significance of the Study

The concept of ideology has gained a great deal of importance in the study of media and many researchers have tackled this issue (e.g., Brooks, 1985; Fang, 2004; Lee & Craig, 1992; Wang, 1993; Bell, 1994, cited in Pan, 2002, p. 51). As Simpson (1993, p. iv) puts it, “In fact, . . . , and certainly no description of the language of texts, can be neutral and objective, for the sociocultural positioning of the analyst will mean that the description is unavoidably political.” In fact, there is no a universally accepted definition as to the very term of ideology. In this regard, Simpson (ibid., p. 5), states ‘There is, unfortunately, a proliferation of definitions available for the term ideology, and many of these are contingent on the political framework favoured by the analyst.’ In the same vein, Kress (1985) maintains that:

... ‘ideology’ is one of the less settled categories of philosophical and sociological discussions of the last century or more. Its meanings range from relatively innocuous “systems of ideas” or “world view” to more contested ones such as “false consciousness” or “ideas of the dominant, ruling class”. (p. 29)

In spite of marked variant views over the definition of ideology, it seems that Simpson’s definition will serve as a starting point for this research. He argues that:

From a critical linguistic perspective, the term [ideology] normally describes the ways in which what we say and think interacts with society. An ideology therefore derives from the taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs and value systems which are shared collectively by social groups. And when an ideology is the ideology of a particularly powerful social group, it is said to be *dominant*. (1993. p. 5)

Iran and the U.S. have had, at least during the immediate three past decades, a contested and challenging relation for one means or another, of which one can refer to the events and states such as the overthrowing of former U.S. firm ally in 1979's Iran revolution, taking as hostages the then American embassy staff in Tehran, differing over the Israeli-Palestinian issues, and contention over Iran's civil nuclear energy activities, to name just a few. Correspondingly, these two highly effective countries – one as a western and the other as an Islamic country – regarding the various international issues, have taken opposing stances. Therefore, specifically-speaking, as for the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan, one expects that the media of these two countries would represent the same event differently based on the underlying ideology to which the media belong and from which they are sponsored: “war on terror” versus “occupation of Afghanistan”. Similarly, on the ground that these two countries belong to two different religions – Islam and Christianity – a contrastive study attempting to account for differences and similarities of the media coverage of similar issues by both sides can be of highly importance in giving insight into means by which the media carries out governments' policies.

As such, the results of this research can be a useful tool at the researchers' disposal in different fields ranging from literature, linguistics, language teaching, pragmatics, and discourse studies to semiotics, stylistics, and politics, not to mention those who are involved in such field as media studies.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The focus of this study was to examine *The New York Times'* (hereafter, *NYT*) and *The Tehran Times'* (hereafter, *TT*) attitudes towards/views on the issue of *the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan*, the relationship between their attitudes, the linguistic features which are employed by the two newspapers and their underlying ideological positions. The hidden meanings are to be extracted from the news articles by analyzing the texts within the framework of Hallidayan systemic functional grammar.

The purpose of this study was to examine typical American and Iranian newspaper articles covering the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan, that is, *The New York Times* and *The Tehran Times*.

1.5 Research Questions

The present study has been carried out to answer the following questions:

1. In terms of ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings, do *The New York Times* and *The Tehran Times* news articles portray an unbiased attitude toward U.S.-led war in Afghanistan?
2. In terms of lexical choice, do *The New York Times* and *The Tehran Times* news articles portray an unbiased attitude toward the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan?

1.6 Research Hypotheses

On the basis of research questions, the following hypotheses will be tested:

1. In terms of ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings, *The New York Times* and *The Tehran Times* news articles do not portray an unbiased attitude toward the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan.
2. In terms of lexical choice, *The New York Times* and *The Tehran Times* news articles do not portray an unbiased attitude toward the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

Critical discourse analysis: van Dijk (1993, p. 283), one of the most referenced and an exponent of CDA, states that in CDA the aim of researchers are ‘focusing on the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance.’ He considers Dominance in the area of CDA ‘as the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups, that results in social inequality, including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gender inequality.’

Ideational component of systemic-functional grammar (SFG): following a trend in 1970s shifting the perspective of language and language learning from individual to society in which

instead of 'intra-organism' of 1960s, the 'inter-organism' way of language learning was in the center of the picture, Halliday (cf. 1987, 1985) put forward the idea that language at the same time serves to fulfill three meta-functions, that is, ideational, interpersonal and textual functions (Halliday, 1978, p. 12). To quote the words of Halliday (1987, p. 22), 'language to do all these things simultaneously, . . . , in other words it has to be capable of being organized as relevant discourse, not just as words and sentences in a grammar-book or dictionary.' As to the ideational components of SFG, Halliday states:

language has to interpret the whole of our experience, reducing the indefinitely varied phenomena of the world around us, and also of the world inside us, the process of our own consciousness, to a manageable number of classes of phenomena: types of processes, events and actions, classes of objects, people and institutions, and the like. (ibid. p. 21)

Interpersonal function of SFG: it has something to do with social and cognitive function of language expressed from the speaker's angle, Halliday (1987, p. 21) argues that 'language has to express our participation, as speakers, in speech situation; the role we taken on ourselves and impose on others; our wishes, feelings, attitudes, and judgments.'

Textual component of SFG: it is a text-forming component in linguistic system which has instrumental function as to the other two functions of language, that is, ideational and interpersonal functions. In this regard, Halliday (1978, p. 21) adds that 'language has to express certain logical relations, like 'and' and 'or' and 'if', as well as those created by language itself such as 'namely', 'says' and 'means'.

Power: as stated in the definition of CDA, power is a key concept in the area of CDA. As stated, 'dominance is the exercise of social power (van Dijk, 1993, p. 283).' Fowler (1985, p. 61), defines power as 'the ability of people and institutions to control the behavior and material lives of the others.' The power relationships which are exercised, by those who have it over those who lack it, in society is not whatsoever 'natural and objective'; rather they are constructed in society