Language and ideology in newspaper headlines on Iran's nuclear program

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Abstract

This study is a critical discourse analysis of some western and Iranian newspaper headlines related to Iran's nuclear program. Newspaper headlines serve as precursors to news reports and reveal the social, cultural, and political representations disseminated in a community at any time. Thus, comparing newspaper headlines in two societies will bring into light interests and ideological intentions of the producers of those headlines. In this study 930 headlines, 460 headlines from two Iranian newspapers (Tehran Times and Iran Daily) and 470 headlines from three western newspapers (Washington Post, Fox News, and Haaretz), were analyzed for their vocabulary, topics, and referential devices. These features clearly indicated the hidden agenda or the ideological dimension underlying the construction of these headlines.

Keywords

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Introduction

Discourse Analysis (DA) which "emerged as a new transdisciplinary field of study between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s" (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 108) is mainly related to the study of language above and beyond sentence level. The word 'above' refers to the fact that discourse analysis (DA) moves beyond word and sentence level and concerns the relationship between sentences. The word 'beyond' indicates that DA, as its second concern, pays much attention to the relationship between text and the outer world; that is, the social, cultural and political contexts in which texts are produced and consumed. The second concern of DA has gained more attention in recent times. Titscher et al. (2000, p.149) defines DA as "the analysis of relationships between concrete language use and the wider social cultural structures". Cameron (1999, p123) suggests two senses for the term discourse: the linguist's sense and the critical social theorist's sense. The former refers to 'language in use' and the latter is 'a form of social practice that constructs the objects of which it purports to speak'. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which is highly related to DA, pertains to and "explores the connections between the use of language and the social and political contexts in which it occurs"(Paltridge, 2000, p.179). CDA applies the knowledge and methodologies developed in DA to reveal how text and talk play an important role in legitimating and sustaining inequality, injustice, and oppression in society. Cameron (1999, p.123) suggests that the word 'critical' in critical discourse analysis relates to a way of perceiving the social world which is drawn from critical theory. According to Leeuwen (2006), CDA "is not associated with a specific school of linguistics or discourse analysis" and "What unites critical discourse analysis is neither methodology nor theoretical orthodoxy, but a common goal: the critique of the hegemonic discourses and genres that effect inequalities, injustices, and oppression in contemporary society" (p. 291).

CDA is mainly concerned with the hidden agenda of discourse or its ideological dimension. Therefore, CDA investigates discourse to

find the "hidden meanings" in texts (McGregor, 2003). CDA analysts have a tendency to work with institutional rather than ordinary talk and many of them are specially inclined to study the language of the media. Words are never neutral; they carry power and reflect the interests of those who use them. News reporters and editors are never ideologically impartial; that is, they project their and the society's ideology and worldview in the text they produce. Fairclough (1995) asserts that "tendencies in the representation of … discourse in newspapers … accord with ideologies which are implicit in practices of news production" (p. 54). Olowe (1993), cited in Taiwo (2007), states that:

> the editor and his reporters on the one hand and their audience constitute
> an ideological empire. The newspaper subjects all newsworthy events that
> constantly come up in social life to rigorous linguistic manipulation to
> make them suit the ideological expectation of the audience. (p. 8)

In recent times the media has been a domain of discourse to which much CDA has been applied and plenty of research has been carried out on the media. The aim is to work out the hidden agenda or the ideological dimensions of newspapers and the interests of their producers and the audiences. According to Richardson (2007, p. 26) "society and culture are dialectically related to discourse" and that journalists and readers are the subjects in discourse practices who influence and are influenced by society and culture. Richardson (2007, p. 42) proposes the following diagram.
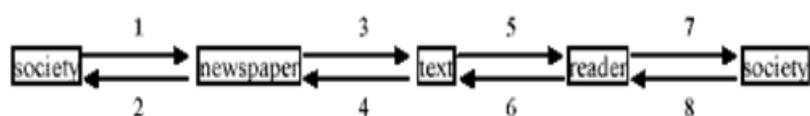
On one hand, various social events and opinions determine the context of their production ($\rightarrow$1) that influences texts (e.g. newspaper articles) ($\rightarrow$3). At the same time, based on the convention of a newspaper article, the collection and presentation of information is shaped ($\leftarrow$4). Such a presentation of information is the opinion of journalists toward the society ($\leftarrow$2). On the other hand, newspaper

articles influence society（→7）via determining opinions of people (→5) who read them and decode the meaning (←6). Moreover, such readers who try to influence society may get oppressed or supported in the process (←8).

Issues such as power imbalance, social inequalities, non-democratic practices and other sources of injustice are investigated in the media. According to Bell (1998), cited in Kong (2000, p. 253) a news story consists of three key components: *attribution*, *abstract* and *story*. Attribution includes information such as the name of the news agency and the journalist's by-line. The abstract includes information such as the headline and lead. The story is the most complicated component and can be subdivided into episodes and events. In each event, there are attribution, actors, action, setting, follow-up, commentary, and background. There have been some studies on each of these parts, although most of them addressed the story, i.e. the content of the news reports.

Previous Research

As mentioned before, newspaper discourse manifests the ideology and worldview of the editors and news reporters and their audience and these can be worked out by critical analysis of newspaper texts. Hence, there have been many studies critically analyzing newspaper discourse to display the language features of the media and the hidden agenda or the ideological viewpoints which they serve. Some studies will be mentioned in this section to clarify the point more.

Cameron (2000) points to the study by Glasgow Media Group (1980). They noticed a recurring pattern in the words used by the media to describe actions taken by two groups of people: workers and labor unions on the one hand and managers and employers on the other hand. The word 'workers' was collocated with such words as 'demanding' and 'threatening' and workers were described as demanding more money and threatening to leave their workplace, while the employers were depicted as 'offering' terms and appealing to workers to accept their offers. They suggested that linguistic patterns which were found in news reporting naturalize an outlook of

industrial disputes as arising from the aggressive and irrational behavior of workers.

Van Dijk (1991) explored ethnic relations in press reports. He studied the labeling of the minority ethnic groups in newspaper articles; they were mostly marked by terms like 'foreigners' and 'immigrants'. The European-born children of immigrants are not immigrants themselves but they are described as 'foreigners' and as 'them' rather than 'us'. The study suggests that many of these labels and descriptions are not factually accurate.

Clark (1992), cited in Richardson (2007), examined the ways in which the Sun Newspaper reported incidents of sexual violence. In the news articles always one of the participants were blamed for the incident and the other one was considered as innocent and blameless.

Olowe (1993), cited in Taiwo (2007, p. 221), looked at the interplay of language and ideology in Nigerian English-medium newspapers. Focusing on editorials, on nationally important issues of religion, labor relations and politics, Olowe identified the various linguistic devices used by these newspapers in projecting their ideological viewpoints, such as thematization, pasivization and nominalization.

Develote and Rechiewskey (1998) examined the representations of the newspapers in France and Australia over the crisis in Franco-Australian relations provoked by France's decision to recommence nuclear testing in the South Pacific in June 1995. A corpus of headlines was collected in a range of media over the months before, during and after the crisis. A quantitative analysis of the corpus revealed the relative importance each paper gave to an issue during a particular period.

Fang (2001) examines the discourse strategies of news stories on civil unrest in two Chinese language newspapers, People's Daily (mainland China) and Central Daily (Taiwan). Based on the analytic method used by van Dijk, Fang examines the textual and contextual components of a news discourse on the students' protests in South Africa in 1985 and the unrest in Argentina in 1989. After analyzing headlines, thematic structures, and lexical and grammatical factors,

Fang (2001) found that there were many differences in representing the South African case but not in the case of Argentina. For example, People's Daily calls the event "black demonstrations" and an "anti-Apartheid struggle" emphasizing inequality and showing sympathy to the black people, whereas Central Daily calls it a "riot" and considers the actions by the police as a "matter-of-fact". Moreover, while the dominating topics and themes of People's Daily are suppressing of the blacks by the police, those of Central Daily are the unrest and chaos that have been caused by one individual, not by the government. However, compared with the case in South Africa, the unrest in Argentina was shown to be dealt with in a similar way by the two newspapers. The difference in representing the South African case indicates the difference in ideologies of the two newspapers: whether they justify the policies of the South African government or not. And it was clarified that People's Daily condemns it while Central Daily admires it. This was a study which clarifies how political views of news reports are interpreted.

A Study published in the Guardian weekly examined the words used by journalists during the 1991 war against Iraq (cited in Allan 2004, pp. 162-163). The following list represents the words used to refer to people and actions in Iraqi and British troops.

THEY HAVE	WE HAVE
A war machine	Army, Navy, and Air force
Censorship	Reporting restrictions
Propaganda	Press briefings
THEY	WE
Destroy	Suppress
Kill	Eliminate
Kill	Neutralize
THEY LAUNCH	WE LAUNCH
Sneak attacks	First strikes
Without provocation	Pre-emptively
THEIR MEN ARE	OUR MEN ARE
Troops	Boys
Hords	Lads
SADDAM HUSSEIN IS	GEORGE BUSH [Snr] IS
Demented	At peace with himself
Defiant	Resolute

The alternatives in each pairings could have been employed to describe solders and actions of both Iraqi and British troops. But the ideological constraints of The British newspapers led them to use the negative terms for the Iraqis and the positive words for the British and American troops and authorities. Iraqi soldiers were described as 'violent, shelling rioting crowds with mortars and using machine guns to cut down unarmed protesters'. However, the British troops were represented in terms of "movement", "advancement", and "being poised to enter Basra". Shelling and killing of the British troops was glossed over by the choice of verbs.

Murata (2007) is a cross-cultural study between Japan and England on their media representation of whaling and seeks to explore possible cultural values and assumptions that may influence biased perspectives or ideologies. Two Japanese articles (*The Yomiuri Newspaper*) and one British article (*The Independent*) were analyzed and compared in detail: the result is that while *The Independent* article indirectly shows its anti-whaling ideology in terms of choice of lexis, grammatical structures, rhetorical devices, overall organization, and control of information in the text (e.g. Japan is described as an agent of the "outrageous" action of whaling), the articles in *The Yomiuri Newspape*r take the Japanese pro-whaling perspective for granted, and report the news in an objective tone. Thus the emotional tone of *The Independent*'s opposition to whaling and the rather neutral stance and reporting style of *The Yomiuri Newspaper* are shown in a detailed textual analysis on the pro- and anti-whaling discourses.

Taiwo (2007) analyzed three hundred Nigerian newspaper headlines for peculiarity in the vocabulary and rhetorical devices used in order to identify the ideologies that underlie their constructions. A critical study of the headlines revealed that the headlines have hidden ideological meanings, being divided along some ideological lines reflecting the views of those whose interest is being served and those whose interest is being undermined. The study concluded that headlines were emotion-inducing strategy in the hands of the editor used to initiate, sustain discourse and shape the views of the readers on national issues.

Tagaki (2008) compared the different representations of the case of a Japanese girl in Okinawa who was raped by an American marine in some newspapers in Japan and the USA. Some Newspaper articles were analyzed for their linguistic construction based on the influence of social situations. The study explored the media discourse from the perspective of newspaper production as well as linguistic analysis based on the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA) put forward by Fairclough (1995a, 2003) and Richardson (2007). The study indicated that both a criminal and a political discourse existed in the newspapers but what was represented in each discourse was different and that different ideologies were seen in the newspapers in Japan and the US.

A Frameworks for Analyzing News

A number of different frameworks for analyzing news discourse have developed over the years enabling media researchers to tailor investigations in specific directions depending on the text and what they are looking for. The following illustrate some examples which can be adopted or adapted.

Van Dijk's work on media discourse (1985, 1988a, 1988b, 1991) proposes an analytical framework for the structures of news discourse by bringing together production and interpretation of discourse as well as its textual analysis. Thematic analysis goes beyond micro-analysis of language and concentrates on the arrangement of themes in news reports, such as narrative patterns which create dramatic tension in a story, or the non-chronological description of events influenced by its news value or relevance. Van Dijk parallels this broad semantic structure with a syntactic structure termed 'schemata'- the conventions and rules that organize content and the complexity of news themes. This includes categories such as the headline, lead paragraph, previous events (what happened before), background and the main event, which can be analyzed and their interrelationships investigated. Bell (1998) offers a step-by-step guide to analysis, which is used to determine the event structure in a news story and establish what a story actually *says* happened. Analysis of events, actors, times and places in a story

'shows up inconsistencies, incoherence, gaps and ambiguities within the story, conflicting forces during the story's production by journalist and copy-editor, and implications for readers 'comprehension' (Garrett and Bell1998, p. 9). In *The Language of News Media* (1991), Bell focuses on three themes: the processes which produce media language; the notion of the news story; and the role of the media audience. By analyzing news discourse through a framework that draws on analysis of personal narrative and van Dijk's structural approach, Bell emphasizes the concept of the 'story' as being central to the news.

Fairclough's (1995) framework for critical discourse analysis of communicative events involves the three overlapping dimensions of text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice. Each area can be dealt with separately but the interrelationship of all three is integral to the framework. Analyzing text involves areas such as structure, vocabulary or representation of actors through image, language or sound. Discourse practice relates to processes of text production and consumption which Fairclough divides into two threads: institutional routines such as journalistic practices of news selection, and discourse practices.

Last but not least, content analysis is widely used for the analysis of newspaper discourse. Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts. Researchers quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of such words and concepts, then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of which these are a part. Berelson (1952), sited in …………, defines content analysis as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest of communication" (p. 263). There are two types of content analysis: Conceptual analysis and relational analysis. Conceptual analysis can be thought of as establishing the existence and frequency of concepts "most often represented by words of phrases" in a text. For instance, say you have a hunch that your favorite poet often writes about hunger. With conceptual analysis you can determine how many

times words such as "hunger", "hungry", "famished", or "starving" appear in a volume of poems. In contrast, relational analysis goes one step further by examining the relationships among concepts in a text. Returning to the "hunger" example, with relational analysis, you could identify what other words or phrases "hunger" or "famished" appear next to and then determine what different meanings emerge as a result of these groupings.

The Present Study

This research employs the last technique, content analysis, to explore the hidden agenda in the headlines of some Iranian and Western newspapers regarding Iran's nuclear program. Both conceptual analysis and relational analysis are used to avoid the problems mentioned for content analysis by Berelson (1952): That agency of actions is not considered and textual absences (topics which are absent in some newspapers due to their ideological tendencies) are not realized. Since in this study the collocations of the frequent words were examined, agency of actions and the viewpoints of the news reports and editors regarding any topic were well realized. Moreover, since the headlines come from opposing communities and political fronts, topics which were absent in one front were well treated in the other front.

The comparison of frequent words in these newspapers would reveal the viewpoints of the reporters and editors. For instance it is expected that the Iranian news headlines would use words which suggest that the nuclear program is peaceful and for economic and energy purposes, on the other hand, the American news headlines would be abundant in words such as bomb, nuke, and danger. Also the collocations of every word would reveal how those words are viewed by the journalists and their audiences. Finally, referential devices in each newspaper indicate the editors and reports' attitudes toward the referred people and objects.

Results and Discussion

As it was expected the frequent words, their collocations, topics dealt

with, and referential devices used in headlines of Iranian and Western newspapers were consistent with their producers' ideology, worldview, and interests. In the Iranian newspapers the mentioned linguistic features tried to imply to the reader that:

Iran's nuclear program is absolutely peaceful and it imposes no threat to the world. Moreover, they indicated that Iran's nuclear program is discussable and only diplomatic talks can solve the problem and sanctions and military actions are ineffective. On the other hand, the American and Israeli newspapers used the same features to impose to the readers that Iran's nuclear program is an imminent danger to the world. Through the collocations of Iran, nuclear bomb, sanctions, and military actions contributed to the sense that Iran's nuclear activities are dubious and something should be done to stop Iran from producing and using atomic bombs. They suggested that if Iran refuses to halt its Uranium enrichment, the only solution is tougher sanctions and military actions.

Frequent words and their collocations

The following were among the most frequent words in Iranian news headlines but absent or of low frequency in western newspaper headlines.

- ✓ *Program, fuel, plant, peaceful, technology, rights, talks, discuss, dialogue, diplomacy.*

The first five words suggests that Iran's nuclear program is peaceful and for civilian purposes. The second five words imply that the nuclear crisis is still discussable and the only appropriate solution is diplomatic talks. Table 1 compares the frequency of these words in the Iranian and western newspapers headlines.

Table 1. Frequency of the words in the Iranian and western newspapers headlines

Words	Iranian papers	Western papers
Program	48	26
Fuel	41	12
Plant	34	2
Peaceful	10	1
Technology	10	0
Rights	17	3
Talk(s)	56	22
Discuss	11	1
Dialogue	8	3
Diplomacy	7	2

Other words which were much more frequent in Iranian newspaper headlines than in western ones include *solution, global disarmament, energy, constructive, civilian, reactor, hypocrisy.* The frequencies are indicative of the mentioned ideologies, worldviews and interests of those who produced and those who consumed these newspaper headlines.

These ideologies can be further revealed by the analysis of the above words'collocations in the Iranian and American and Israeli newspapers. Table 2 lists the common collocations of these words in the newspaper headlines.

Table 2. Common collocations of the words in the newspaper headlines

Words	Collocations in Iranian news	Collocations in Western news
Program	legal, peaceful, support, civilian	halt, atomic, nuke, threat
Fuel	Production, plant, sources	Nuke, bomb, atomic
Plant	Power, nuclear, Bushehr	Secret, enrichment
Talks	Continue, room for, preferable	Fail, disappointed, skeptical
Dialogue	Goes on, constructive, solution	Useless, disappointed
Rights	Nuclear technology, defend, support	U.N., rule out

Similarly, it is expected that some words must be more frequent in western newspapers than in Iranian papers and their collocations also differ. The following ten words were among the most frequent words in the American and Israeli newspaper headlines, but they occurred few or no times in Iranian news headlines.

✓ *Nuke, bomb, missile, threat, secret, sanctions, arms, military, strike, war.*

Taking a glance on these words, one can identify the ideology and views of the journalists who have produced them and the audience who consume these headlines. The first five words implies to the reader that Iran's nuclear program is dubious and most probably a threat to the world and the second five words suggest that something should be done to stop Iran from producing and using atomic bombs. The last five words convince the readers that the west should impose more and tougher sanctions on Iran or even start military actions against it. Table 3 displays the frequency of these words in the Western and Iranian newspaper headlines.

Table 3. Frequency of the words in the Iranian and western newspapers headlines

Words	Western papers	Iranian papers
Nuke(s)	45	3
Bomb	11	4
Missile	11	2
Threat	12	6
Secret	11	1
Sanctions	44	21
Arms	17	6
Military	14	2
Strike	17	8
War	9	0

Other words which were highly frequent in the western headlines but less occurring in Iranian news headlines involve *warn, action, defiance, world, site, atomic, tough.*

The collocations of the above words were figured out to further reveal the ideologies, viewpoints, and interests of the producers of these headlines. The collocations confirm the west's *threat-so-actions* theory and Iran's *peaceful- let's talk* theory. Table 4 displays common collocations of the above mentioned words in the western and Iranian news headlines.

Table 4. Common collocations of the words in the western and Iranian news headlines

Words	Collocations in Western news	Collocations in Iranian news
Nuke (s)	Program, fuel, plan	Israel, Israeli
Threat	To world, Iran, nuclear	No, Israel, hyped
Secret	Nuclear plant, nuke sites	No
Sanctions	Tougher, new, harsh	Downplay, unlikely, ineffective
Military	Actions, option, moves	Can't halt, no solution
Strike	Military, ready for, Iran	Immune to, can't halt

The collocations further corroborates the west's theory that Iran is producing atomic bombs and should be stopped by sanctions or even military actions against it. They also represent Iran's stance that its nuclear program is not a threat to the world but it is Israel's nuke sites which poses a threat to the Middle East and the world, and that the western sanctions and military actions against Iran are ineffective and will not solve the problem.

Referential devices

The way that people and actions are referred to in news discourse "can

have significant impact on the way in which they are viewed" (Richardson 2007, p. 47). Also, the way they are referred to represents journalists' attitudes and ideology. The study revealed that the western and Iranian newspaper headlines referred to actions and people differently in ways which favored their viewpoints and interests.

First, Iran's nuclear activities are referred to differently. The word 'nuclear', which is neutral and does not represent atomic bombs, was used 305 times in the Iranian news headlines while it occurred only 131 times in the western newspapers. In the western newspaper headlines it was referred to as nuke 45 times in phrases such as 'nuke program', 'nuke plan', 'nuke work' and so on. The reference terms used by the two sides represent their ideology and interests. Table 5 displays reference terms and their frequencies in the two fronts.

Table 5. Reference terms and their frequencies western and Iranian news headlines

Reference terms	Iranian newspapers	Western newspapers
Nuclear program	46	24
Nuclear plant	22	2
Nuclear technology	9	0
Nuclear fuel	35	8
Nuclear energy	4	1
Nuke	45	0
secret	8	0

Second, the Iranian news headlines referred to the former UN nuclear watchdog with his personal name, ElBaradei, 11 times but the western news headlines never did so. In almost all of these 11 references, the watchdog was stating something in favor of Iran. The following sample headlines illustrate this.

– *Iran has not produced atomic bombs: ElBaradei*
– *Israel most serious threat to Middle East: ElBaradei*
– *ElBaradei: Row over Iran's nuclear program is 'political' and not 'technical'.*

Also Erdogan and Brzezinski, who have commented favorably about Iran's nuclear program, are referred to by their personal names. They have appeared twice in the Iranian news headlines while Clinton, who is more important authority, is mentioned only once.

Topic Preferences

Newspapers tend to involve topics which are within their interest and ignore the ones that are not. Many of the topics which were in favor of Iran's nuclear program and included in the Iranian newspaper headlines were absent in the western news headlines. Defense of Iran's right to nuclear facilities by some political and scientific authorities were not dealt with in the western papers. Turkish, Syrian, Egyptian, Bahraini, and Yemeni presidents' and the Swedish scientist's supportive statements about Iran's nuclear program and the statements by some of these authorities regarding Israel's nuke danger were ignored in the western news headlines.

The Iranian newspapers mentioned some nuclear activities by other countries, such as, Japan, France, and Israel, attempting to downplay the fuss that has been made about Iran's nuclear program. These topics are not dealt with in the Western newspapers.

Bushehr plant, which is a symbol of civilian nuclear facility and technology, is pointed at 20 times in the Iranian news headlines but it is never mentioned in the western newspapers.

Conclusion

Linguistic features (words, their collocations, referential devices, topics, and others) are always employed in news discourse to communicate their producers' ideology and viewpoints. This study revealed the hidden agenda in the Iranian and western newspaper headlines and the language which was employed to convey those ideologies. Headlines are revealing of the social, political, and ideological representations in a society. They reach an audience which is far wider than those who read news articles. Many passersby may have a glimpse of the headlines on their way home or to work. Particularly it is the case with the front page headlines which mainly involve hot political issues. This study, which explored the headlines in some Iranian and American and Israeli newspapers, was very raveling about the ideologies, viewpoints, and interests of those two fronts.

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