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Subliminal ideology in media: representation of Iran's nuclear energy in American networks and newspapers

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Abstract

Media texts are manipulated by different hands in order to justify their own act and get positive image in the public. This study concentrates on the linguistic manifestation of “Iran’s nuclear energy” in American newspapers and networks. The model applied for the analysis of headlines and news reports is Critical Linguistics—pioneered by Fowler (1991), and Halliday (1985)—which considers them on the basis of lexico-grammatical features. The system of transitivity, passivization and nominalization is applied for the analysis of headlines and lexical one for the analysis of news reports. So, the study will call the attention of the public to the critical understanding of the lexis, strategies and structures utilized in the media text. Because the linguistic features utilized in the newspapers are very authentic and real to life they can be informative source for language learning classes but we should be meticulous of the ideology lying behind the linguistic structures.

Keywords: media, critical linguistics, ideology, and nuclear energy

1. Introduction

News agencies are so active that nobody can reject the influence of news in his life. News analyses concerning representation and ideational function crystallize how events, the people, and the objects involved in news are represented in the grammar of clauses. Through the light of CL this study is due to magnify the social, political, and mental strategies applied in American networks and newspapers representing Iran’s nuclear energy. American newspapers are widespread in all over the world and resort to linguistic structures so cleverly that confuse the public mind and show Iran’s nuclear energy as a threat to the world. So the paper clarifies that every aspect of language in news discourse is ideology-laden and is manipulated in a way that obfuscate the true reality and is to meet the requirements of the politicians masterminding the news. It provides deep and practical frameworks for analyzing news discourse in order to stop fixing the wrong ideology in the mind of public. The research question beyond this study is: Why linguistic structures applied in the news discourse for the coverage of the same fact are divergent?

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2. Literature Review

The approach called ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’ (CDA) represents an outgrowth of the work of the British and Australian pioneers of Critical Linguistics, particularly Fowler and Kress, in convergence with the approaches of the British discourse analyst Fairclough and Dutch text linguist van Dijk. CDA has an explicit sociopolitical agenda, a concern to discover and bear witness to unequal relations of power which underlie ways of talking in a society and in portions of power which underlie ways of talking in a society, and in particular to reveal the role of discourse in reproducing or challenging sociopolitical dominance Fairclough (2000). And according to van Dijk (1991), media are particular subject of CDA analysis because of their manifestly pivotal role as discourse-bearing institutions. Critical linguistics is a type of discourse analysis which was developed by a group based at the University of East Anglia in the 1970s (fowler et al.1979). Media discourse is one of its main concerns. Critical linguistics is based upon ‘systemic’ linguistic theory (Halliday 1978, 1985, 1994; Guneyli & Demirel, 2006; Hussein, 2010). It brings to analysis of media discourse systemicist views of the text: the view of the text as multifunctional, always simultaneously representing the world (ideational function); seeing texts as built out of choices from within available systems of options in vocabulary, grammar, and so forth. Critical linguistics emphasizes the role of vocabulary choices in processes of categorization. A clause which codes an event (ideationally) in terms of a particular type of process will also assess (interpersonally) the truth or probability of the proposition so encoded, and the relationship between producer and addressee(s). The concept of ‘modality’ is used in a very general way to cover features of texts which express speakers’ and writers’ attitudes towards themselves, towards their interlocutors, and towards their subject – matter’ (fowler et al. 1979).

3. Method of Analysis

Critical linguistics is central for my method of analysis because as Fowler (1991) asserts "it seeks, by studying the minute details of linguistic structure in the light of the social and historical situation of the text, to display to consciousness the patterns of belief and value which are below the threshold of notice for anyone who accepts the discourse as 'natural' (p.67). I have applied Fowler's linguistic tools - transitivity, passivization and nominalization - for the analysis of the news headlines. These tools help me to clarify the strategies utilized in forming the headlines which are various in different papers and networks. Linguistically transitivity sheds light on participant, predicate, circumstance which can make the ideology clear lying behind the linguistic structures, and make the unbiased understanding of the ideology clear. Passive transformation, compared with the active equivalent, is to switch the positions of the left-hand and right-hand noun phrases, so that the patient occupies the syntactic subject (left-hand) position, which is usually associated with an agent. Another transformation which is directly applied to data analysis in this study is nominalization and means that it is structurally possible, and actually common, for predicates (verbs and adjectives) to be realized syntactically, as nouns, which are called derived nominals. Sometimes news reports are not compatible with headlines, as such, headlines convey ideology which is fairly nonrelated with news reports in order to raise the consciousness of the people toward itself. Lexical analysis makes it clear that for better understanding of news ideology analysis of news reports are important and necessary. According to Halliday(1994), vocabulary or lexis is a major determinant of ideational structure. This fact is clarified through the focus on linguistic structures utilized in American newspapers covering the nuclear energy of Iran. They resort to the linguistic structures and lexis in a way to show the severity of the danger and to portrait Iran's nuclear energy as a menace against the peace dominant in the world. Lexical density and semantic clusters are the best strategies to fix the prefabricated ideology and control the mind of the public in a way that is masterminded in advance. In this study two other lexical structures are applied and are very important for the analysis of data. First, it is relexicalization which is "the promotion of a new term where it is claimed that a new concept is at issue" Fowler
(1991, p.84). Second, it is over-lexicalization which is "the existence of an excess of quasi-synonymous terms for entities and ideas that are a particular preoccupation or problem in the culture's discourse" (Fowler, 1991, p.85). For example, purchase and buy are used as synonyms. We now move from the ideational function, to the interpersonal, the mediation of personal roles and social relationships. Related to the nature of modality four types of comments are extended and explained. They have technical names in model logic, but in plain terms they have to do with a) truth, with b) obligation, with c) permission and d) desirability.

3.1. Analysis of headlines in American Newspapers

As it was mentioned before, Fowler’s ‘critical linguistics’ has been chosen to analyze the headlines representing Iran’s nuclear energy which is done in terms of ‘transitivity’, ‘passivization’, and ‘nominalization’. Because of limitations three headlines, out of many headlines, are chosen and analyzed randomly in the following ways – they are chosen randomly and carefully in order to show America’s perspectives truly.

3.1.1. Sanctions added to Iran shortly after nuclear talks

Linguistic tools applied in this headline are passivization and nominalization which mystify the truth and confuse public's opinion in understanding the real fact. In the word 'sanctions' we have nominalization which has concealed the actor of the negative action, America, and directs the attention against Iran. So, as it is clear this word is ideology laden and backgrounds the role of America and drag the public's opinion toward the action which is done against Iran. All of these are done through the use of the sanction as noun not as a verb. Our sentence is passive and through this strategy the paper has concealed the doer of the act which is negative and it doesn't make it clear who has added sanctions against Iran. All of these negative actions done against Iran are justified through the use of phrase 'nuclear talks' because as you study the news reports you see the paper portrays the news in a way that shows Iran evade nuclear talks and doesn't provide any transparent policy of its own nuclear plan. Through these strategies America plans to get the support of world in imposing the sanctions against Iran and tries to justify its own aggressive policy.

3.1.2. Iran atom is a real threat to Arab nations

Here cluster of ideology-laden words are around intransitive linguistic tool which contort the true reality and take people's attention away from real understanding. If you are minute, you can grasp that the words around neutral verb (is) are full of ideology which raise the public against Iran's government. The phrase 'Iran atom' intends to show that Iran has achieved atomic bomb and is to destroy the world. In the phrase 'real threat' the adjective 'real' accentuates the negativity of Iran's image and portrays it as a dangerous country which is against morality and human beings. The end part intends to accompany Arab nations with the world's people. As it is seen in this headline Iran, as negative subject and actor, has been foregrounded in order to get dislike. The phrases 'real threat', and 'Arab nations' are brought here intentionally and are used intentionally in order to create thorny issue between Iran and Arabic countries. Understanding of the fact that America seeks its own interest is not easy for average people, but it is done through these explanations.

3.1.3. Iran develops an offensive nuclear weapon program

Like other headlines, it is clear that America in the cases involving Iran's nuke tries to use the country as the actor and subject of negative material process in order to foreground its negative image. When you check the headline 'Iran' catches your attention, and then we reach to the material process 'develop' which can be both negative and positive. But when we focus on the object of the headline, semantically negative, we get a negative concept of the
material process which spoils the reputation of Iran and brings consensus of opinions against Iran. In the second part, the phrase 'offensive nuclear weapon' is fully ideology–laden and shows directly that Iran's intention isn’t peaceful but is to get weapons that are nuclear and offensive which makes Iran as a great threat against the world—especially the word 'offensive' which has emphatic intention. Here negative picture of Iran is represented directly, and if we contextualize the news we infer that linguistic structures are shaped intentionally in this way in order unify the world against Iran. So the ideology lying behind the headline is responsible for the form of the language.

3.2. Analysis of News Reports: Lexical Structure, Relexicalization, and Over-lexicalization

As I mentioned before lexis are representing the world, and politicians are resorting to linguistic structures cleverly in order to convey the preplanned ideology. Sometimes journalists are utilizing synonyms for the same vocabulary in order to represent emphatic ideology of the same fact. Here I bring some samples of ideology-laden words which American newspapers utilize in order to represent Iran’s nuclear energy. Some lexical structures which are chosen randomly include:

‘uranium enrichment’, ‘nuclear explosion’, ‘secret planning’, ‘enrichment programme’, ‘armed force’, ‘rejection of the Security Council resolutions’, ‘nuclear weapons’, ‘developing nuclear weapons’, ‘nuclear bomb’, ‘highly-enriched uranium’, ‘heavy-water activities and ballistic missile development’, ‘anti-aircraft missile system’, ‘secret pursuit’, ‘great alarm over Iran nuke’, ‘offensive nuclear weapon’, ‘defiance of council resolutions’, ‘UN security council sanctions on Tehran’, ‘dangerous plan’, ‘concern over Tehran's nuclear programme’, ‘aggressive behavior’, ‘ignorance of international obligations’, ‘mysterious programme’, ‘purify uranium’, ‘international suspicions’, ‘spinning centrifuges for enrichment’, ‘fourth round of United Nations economic sanctions’, ‘Iranian denials’, ‘deep concerns of many of Iran's neighbors’, ‘no breakthrough in negotiations’, ‘stockpile of nuclear fuel’, ’additional sanctions’, ‘pain threshold’, ‘support for tough sanctions’, ‘menace to the world’, ‘nuclear and offensive weapons’, 'real threat', ‘inhuman weapons’, 'anti peace', 'dangerous', 'cruel', 'inhuman', 'brutal', 'violent', 'devastate', 'bomb', ‘nuclear talks’, ‘international obligations', Iran's neighbors as victims’, ‘tensions’, ‘concerns of gulf leaders’, ‘attack against Israel’, ‘proactive steps’, ‘uranium mining’, ‘proliferation’, ‘missiles and missile systems’, ‘manufacture a workable atomic bomb’, ‘producing a stockpile of nuclear fuel’, etc.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

As it was clear from data analysis American newspapers on the basis of their social, political, economical, etc. interests select news structures in a way to seek their own policy and presence in Middle East. From linguistic structures utilized in the headlines and news reports it is clear that America is due to sabotage Iran’s reputation universally and is to erect harsh barriers for the advancement of Iran’s atomic energy. The words are clustered so cleverly in a way that can make the public’s mind ready for negative activities done against Iran, as such, when the audience encountered with the lexis like ‘belligerent behaviour’, ‘nuclear weapons’, ‘inhuman weapons’, nuclear and offensive weapons’, ‘real threat’, etc. it is clear that they will encourage America and cooperate with it to have tough measures against the country. When the world faces with this kind of news coverage it will sense a dangerous operation from Iran’s side and embrace any negative measurements against the country. So, the author comes to this conclusion that news discourse is not neutral and is shaped ideologically in a way that can cover the agents’ interests. This fact is illustrated through the critical linguistics which is beyond the understanding of ordinary people.
5. Pedagogical Implications

In the project I have traced the development of critical discourse analysis and critical linguistics in the areas that are relevant to teaching and learning and have managed to prove that they have played and are still playing significant roles in how we teach English through the authentic language-language of newspapers. The focus has been on what we, language teachers, and our students can borrow from the linguistic study of text and discourse and make use of in the language classroom as well as outside it. I argue that Critical linguistics has contributed to the paradigm shift in teaching English as a foreign language from several perspectives: from pure linguistic study of text to the study of language in use, from bottom-up via top-down to interactive approach, from prior knowledge-oriented approach to awareness oriented approach. I also argue that Critical linguistics has played a part in the shift, as Lundahl (2009), puts it from English being a purely proficiency-oriented subject to being a democracy-oriented subject. Pupils shall train themselves to think critically and learn to show solidarity with weak and vulnerable as well as become autonomous and prepared for adult life members of society. Critical linguistics can be used not only to demonstrate a commitment to social justice and critical reading but also to place texts in their social, cultural and intertextual contexts in order to become a more effective language user and an autonomous learner. To develop such a method that would incorporate both aspects is a promising area in teaching English as a foreign language and a natural continuation of this degree project.

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