

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Covid-19 in Iranian and American Newspapers

Ali Dezhkameh^a

dezhkameh97@ms.tabrizu.ac.ir

University of Tabriz, Iran

Nasim Layegh

nasimlayegh@yahoo.com

University of Tabriz, Iran

Yaser Hadidi^b

hadidiy@tabrizu.ac.ir

University of Tabriz, Iran

ABSTRACT

The policies and ideologies of countries are reflected in the propagated media of that country, and newspapers are no exception. Covid-19 has affected the lives of people all around the world. The present study investigated the ideological differences in reporting the news related to Covid-19 in light of Van Dijk's ideological square framework. To do so, a representative sample of 56 news articles was chosen over a period of one year (from January 2020 to the end of January 2021) from one Iranian and one American newspaper, the *Tehran Times* and *The New York Times*. Overall, 2,977 clauses were analysed both qualitatively, to find out the reason of occurrence, and quantitatively, to determine the frequency of occurrence for each micro-strategy. *Evidentiality*, *Hyperbole*, *Metaphor*, *National Self-Glorification*, *Negative Lexicalisation*, and *Number Game* were the most frequent micro-strategies. Such high frequencies of the strategies can make for effective discursive apparatus to make readers believe what news articles claim is true. The most salient implication of this study would be raising readers' and academics' awareness of the need to view news articles critically to avoid negative ramifications of ideological propagandas. In the same vein, newspapers need to be cognizant of the micro-strategies they consciously or sub-consciously employ since certain micro-strategies can be used to manipulate readers' minds and help news agencies to feed their readers certain ideological and political agendas.

Keywords: Covid-19; Critical Discourse Analysis; Ideological Micro-strategies; Newspapers; Van Dijk

INTRODUCTION

Language is intrinsically a means of communication as well as control (Hodge & Kress, 1993). This entails that the language we are surrounded by, whether spoken or written, is ceaselessly replete with the element of power as an instrument of gaining control over others. Taking into account that even authors of fiction have been shown to employ language to influence and seize control of the minds and emotions of their readers through the language and emotions of their characters (Mohammadpanah, et al., 2018; Mohammadpanah & Hamzehei, 2020), it fails to surprise us that not only the language of the press is no exception, but a prime manifestation of this controlling power (Wadi & Ahmed, 2015). In this regard, newspapers, as a popular form of the media, never aim at objective issuing forth of the news; they have their own viewpoints

^a Main author

^b Corresponding author

and, as such, their coverage of any news story is affected by their agenda, ideologies, and viewpoints (Thetela, 2001). Another important point is that upon finishing the reading process, readers often forget about the structures and forms through which the text was constructed and subconsciously hold the ideas discussed in the text to be separate from the structure and consequently, deem the underlying ideologies true (Hadidi et al., 2019). As such, newspapers are a viable source for analysing the underlying ideologies and biases of particular social groups reflected in written form.

The media stand in close connection with politics, as acknowledged by such chief contributors as Van Dijk and Wodak (Rheindorf & Wodak, 2019; Van Dijk, 2006), suggesting that political mindsets, manipulations, ideologies and mind control are always manifested, conducted and implemented by writers and agents working for the media. In fact, Kolsto (2009) argued that “the media are politically controlled”. Along similar lines, to quote Van Dijk (2006, p. 732), “if there is one social field that is ideological, it is that of politics”. In this sense, the aim of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is to shed light on what exists below the surface of discourse. In the same spirit, Gee (2004) takes CDA to be an approach which deems stretches of language in use as parts of social practices with political ramifications.

Politics in the media have been represented in multifarious forms. According to Abbas (2020), the media also have the mission to politicize health issues and pandemics. By late 2019, the world was abruptly gripped by a force it was not completely prepared to confront: a global viral pandemic caused by Coronavirus, commonly known as Covid-19. Apart from the distress it caused all over the world, it brought forth differing reactions in different countries to the status of its outbreak and the strategies employed by governments to contain the spread of Covid-19. These various reactions could be clearly observed in the media through a close scrutiny.

Analysing media discourse is always of interest to different disciplines, as it plays a crucial role in shedding light on inequalities that arise in media. Furthermore, health discourse has suffered greatly in being surprisingly under-researched. On the other hand, political discourse has always enjoyed a lot of interest owing to the fact that politics has had its impact on people’s everyday life. Health discourse, until the dawn of this deadly virus that Covid-19 is, had not received much attention. This paper analyses the news reports of *Tehran Times* and *The New York Times* from two different viewpoints: health discourse and political discourse. Thus, it acts as a bridge between these two discourses. Another significance of this study lies in the fact that the apparatus through which different discourses exercise their power are often different; however, in this case, the media has become the driving force in balancing the rivalry between the two discourses, which often have different interests. The media, often being sponsored by powerful, political organisations, have to side with the political leaders and at the same time, they have to show that people’s health is of paramount importance to them. This results in an interesting amalgamation of discourses where, at times, it seems as if the news agencies contradict what they have said before. In this spirit, the main aim of this study is to analyse the discourses of the aforementioned newspapers and shed light on their underlying ideological and political perspectives.

(CRITICAL) DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Discourse Analysis (DA) is an area of research that is composed of numerous heterogenous approaches, which are largely qualitative, to the study of relationships that exist between language-in-use and the social world. Researchers often view language as a form of social practise that directly and indirectly influences the social world (Johnson & McLean, 2020).

Teun Van Dijk advocates a model of discourse analysis that is socio-cognitive at its core. In his own words, “ideologies are not reduced to their observable uses, discourses, or other social practices, but defined as members’ socially shared underlying representations or

resources that govern such practices” (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 731). Socio-Cognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS) is an area concerned with relating social structures to discourse using a socio-cognitive interface. Like Cognitive Linguistics, this type of analysis uses a complex multifaceted model of cognitive explanations for the use of specific metaphors or concepts. SCDS also takes into account the theories of mental representation from the field of psychology (Van Dijk, 2018).

A sub-branch of DA, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aims to show that language possesses the power to form or change people’s views of events around them. Wodak (2006) argues in favour of integrating insights from socio-cognitive theories into the model of CDA, noting though that there is a salient limit to cognitive theories that are to be taken into account. According to Van Dijk (1983), cognitive processes refer to actions like understanding, knowing, and believing. These processes happen in the mind or memory of the people referred to as ‘social actors’. The important part of this model is that these social actors act as members of different communities and social groups. Another important factor in SCDS is the issue of mental representation. In line with Van Dijk (2018), knowledge, plans, attitudes, and ideologies are all different forms of mental representation.

SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

Discourse analysis has its roots in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which is mainly concerned with choices made by writers as well as the ones not made. All word choices matter and make a difference (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Having said that, this approach to language and its analysis provides useful tools to analysing language, including different levels of Clause and viewing it as message, exchange, and representation as well as discussing the levels above, below, around, and beyond the clause. Owing to this, and also the heavy reliance of any discursive research project on SFL, this study found the singular focus of SFL on Clause level very useful as in this study the level of analysis was clause. In particular, what Halliday and Matthiessen call “around the clause”, which is concerned with cohesion and discourse, and also “beyond the clause”, which is concerned with metaphorical modes of expression, played a huge role in this research for they constituted a big part of the analysis and discussion.

VAN DIJK’S IDEOLOGICAL SQUARE

In terms of power relations, a major concept for CDA is that of ideology. Ideologies are constituent parts of any form of discourse. According to Taiwo (2007), the term ideology is used to encompass the sets of attitudes, values, and beliefs which form perceptions of individuals and groups. In line with Van Dijk (2006, p. 730), “ideologies are personally acquired and socially reproduced”. Since they have both social and political functions, they could also be called political ideologies.

To capture the features of ideological discourse, Van Dijk (2006, p. 734) has proposed four macro-strategies, which he calls *ideological square*:

- Emphasize **Our** good things
- Emphasize **Their** bad things
- De-emphasize **Our** bad things
- De-emphasize **Their** good things.

These macro-strategies are materialized through various micro-strategies or ideological discourse structures (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Van Dijk's ideological micro-strategies

Actor description	Authority	Burden
Categorization	Comparison	Consensus
Counterfactuals	Disclaimers	Euphemism
Evidentiality	Example/ Illustration	Generalization
Hyperbole	Implication	Irony
Lexicalisation	Metaphor	National Self-Glorification
Negative Other-representation	Norm Expression	Number Game
Polarization	Populism	Positive Self-Representation
Presupposition	Vagueness	Victimization

The micro-strategies selected for the purposes of this study include *Evidentiality*, *Hyperbole*, *Metaphor*, *National Self-Glorification*, *Negative Lexicalisation*, and *Number Game*. These strategies will be defined according to Van Dijk (2006).

EVIDENTIALITY. To support their claims and opinions and to “convey objectivity, reliability, and hence credibility” (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 736), speakers or writers usually resort to providing some evidence or proof. This might happen by referring to authority figures or organizations (In this regard, *Evidentiality* can be regarded as encompassing the micro-strategy of *Authority*). Apart from this, people might also mention sources such as newspapers, reliable spokespeople, or personal experience to back their arguments.

HYPERBOLE. Hyperbole is a rhetorical device, and by using hyperbolic language, people can exaggerate Others' bad actions or mitigate Our bad actions, and vice versa.

METAPHOR. Although metaphors are mainly used to convey abstract, unfamiliar meanings in more concrete terms (Kövecses, 2010), they can also have a strong persuasive effect. In ideological discourse, metaphors are a valuable asset to represent people or events positively or negatively.

NATIONAL SELF-GLORIFICATION. This strategy is the most direct way to manifest positive self-representation. It can be evident in the form of positive references to one's own country, its traditions, history, and procedures.

LEXICALISATION. Specific lexical items can be used to convey particular ideas and concepts. These lexical items can have positive or negative connotations. Thus, the choice of a word that has a positive connotation over a word that is neutral or has a negative connotation, and vice versa, can express the same or similar meanings in extremely divergent ways.

NUMBER GAME. This strategy is primarily used to express objectivity and to add credibility to what has been argued. Numbers and statistics normally characterize news reports.

The literature on issues like the one at hand clearly shows a tendency in research to employ Van Dijk's micro-strategies due to the fact that it clearly categorises different types of representation. Van Dijk's framework provides a good typology for analyses of this sort. However, like other models of discourse analysis, one can still discern some shortcomings in the framework when it comes to hands-on coding that can be addressed, such as instances where one utterance does not fit into any of the given categories. However, in general principle, this framework works best to meet these kinds of discourse data, serving as reliable apparatus for shedding light on oppression, suppression, racism, and other issues that are of immediate concern, analysis and interpretation within CDA.

A LOOK AT PREVIOUS RESEARCH

News stories and newspaper headlines have been the focus of many discourse analysts (Bell, 1991; Van Dijk, 1983). Yaghoobi's (2009) analysis of Iranian and American newspapers explained how the choice of passive voice over active voice can eliminate agency for particular actions. Similarly, Atai and Mozaheb's (2013) investigation of lexical choices in British mass media revealed that Iran was consistently associated with negative themes such as threat, secrecy, boastfulness, defiance, and jeopardy, while the US and its allies were depicted in a positive manner.

In the realm of representing and politicizing health issues, Bilic and Georgaca (2007) analysed the media depiction of mental illnesses. Their research pointed to the general public belief that the issue of mental illnesses has been depicted as a very negative thing since the media has tied it to numerous problems including violence, dangerous situations, and criminality. Recently, analysing discourses on what has recently been shaking the long-progressing long-thriving roots of the modern world, i.e. Covid-19, has assumed increasing importance. Using Van Dijk's news schemata framework, Abbas (2020) analysed the representation of Covid-19 in an American and a Chinese newspaper and concluded that the news of the pandemic has been politicized to serve ideological interests. With the aim of throwing more light on hidden discourses this pandemic has produced, the present research focused on the discourses of an Iranian and an American newspaper using Van Dijk's *ideological square* and Halliday's SFL.

After Covid-19 strike, a huge number of discourse analysts and experts became actively involved in identifying discursive forces and operations of the media with regards to Covid-19 and this bulk of research led to many more research projects illustrating that this area of research needs to be investigated more comprehensively (Al-Mwzaiji, 2021).

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data, taken from two major English newspapers in Iran and the US, namely *Tehran Times* and *The New York Times*, were obtained using a systematic and purposive sampling of news reports on Covid-19, published from January 2020 to January 2021. The specific focus of all the analysed news reports was on how the virus spread in different nations and how they managed to control it. The first criterion for choosing this one-year period was that it took health organisations about a year to come up with an effective vaccine. After that, the newspapers shifted their attention from the virus to the vaccines developed to stop its spread. The second good reason for choosing these two newspapers was that both newspapers are written in English, so the target audience of both are English readers. In the case of *Tehran Times*, the target audience is mostly either Iranians in Iran or Iranians living outside Iran. On the other hand, *The New York Times*, which has been chosen for its range of readership which ranges from academics to workers, is written for Americans and a large majority of people whose second or foreign language is English. Finally, these newspapers were chosen because of their vast readership. About 1.6 million people who read *The New York Times* live outside the US; in 2020, 1.6 million new readers were added to the readership, in which sense it is considered an international newspaper with readers in different parts of the world. As to *Tehran Times*, it has been officially announced that it is the most widely read English newspaper published in Iran. Both of these newspapers are available online so that they can be accessed from around the world.

The corpus from both newspapers, which included a total number of 56 news reports, has been summarised in Table 2. In order to augment the validity of this research, the process

of selection of the news reports was based on topics related to the spread and management of Covid-19, from both news outlets on specific days. This added to the reliability of the findings.

TABLE 2 Corpus of the study in *Tehran Times* and *The New York Times*

	<i>Tehran Times</i>	<i>The New York Times</i>	Total
Total number of news reports	36	20	56
Total number of clauses	1,481	1,496	2,977

Owing to the fact that this research employed a qualitative mixed methods design, the data gathered for this research was put through both qualitative and quantitative analyses. Starting with quantitative analysis, and upon finishing the process of identifying Van Dijk's micro-strategies, all of the 27 micro-strategies were analysed in both newspapers and the top six frequent micro-strategies were chosen. Following the identification process, the frequencies of the six micro-strategies were calculated. Doing this enabled us to gain a more reliable view of the ideological stance of each newspaper. In the case of the qualitative analysis of the newspapers, examples have been used to represent and discuss each micro and macro-strategy in the discussion section.

Overall, the analysis of the discourse of the newspapers followed the following stages. First, the news reports were selected from both newspapers in terms of their topic. The unit of analysis for this study being clauses, with the immediate importance of balancing the number of clauses analysed in the case of each newspaper, and bearing in mind that the number of clauses in different news reports varies greatly, the number of news reports analysed for each newspaper was different, but the clauses analysed for each newspaper were almost identical in number. After that, and in order to find out about the reliability of the findings, a pilot study was run on 15% of the news texts. Not having a fixed size for a pilot study, the study relied on Connely (2008) who proposed that a sample size of 10% would count as adequate. The news reports were analysed by three different researchers. In order to calculate the inter-rater reliability between the three researchers, correlation analysis and contingency coefficient were used once and the final result was +0.945. Thus, the identification of clauses and micro-strategies in this study proved convincingly reliable. After two weeks, another identification process was carried out to account for intra-rater reliability. The result for the intra-rater reliability was +0.923. The time period chosen between the first and second analyses was to make sure that the findings were correct and accurate in terms of inter and intra-rater reliabilities. It should be noted that in line with the agreement reached between the researchers, in instances when more than one micro-strategy could be tagged for a particular clause, in such cases of inter-rater disagreements, both of these coding decisions were taken into account and calculated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3 presents the total number of micro-strategies found in *Tehran Times* and *The New York Times* news reports.

TABLE 3. Frequencies of micro-strategies in *Tehran Times* and *The New York Times*

	<i>Tehran Times</i>	<i>The New York Times</i>	Total
Evidentiality	252	231	483
Hyperbole	134	22	156
Metaphor	85	30	115
National Self-Glorification	40	108	148
Negative Lexicalisation	126	154	280
Number Game	63	46	109
Total	700	591	1,291

As Table 2 and Table 3 map out, the total number of clauses analysed in this research was 2,977. Overall, the findings of the present analysis revealed various strategies at clause level in *Tehran Times* and *The New York Times*. The strategies common in *Tehran Times* and *The New York Times* were *Evidentiality*, *Hyperbole*, *Metaphor*, *National Self-Glorification*, *Negative Lexicalisation*, and *Number Game*, with a total frequency of 1,291.

As indicated by Table 3, the most frequent strategy was *Evidentiality* while the least frequent ones were *Number Game* and *Metaphor*, respectively. As regards *Evidentiality*, both newspapers resorted to an authority figure or a reputable health or governmental organisation to provide evidence for their claims and to try to make the news reporting objective. Figure 1 compares the frequencies and percentages of Van Dijk's micro-strategies observed in samples from *Tehran Times* and *The New York Times*.

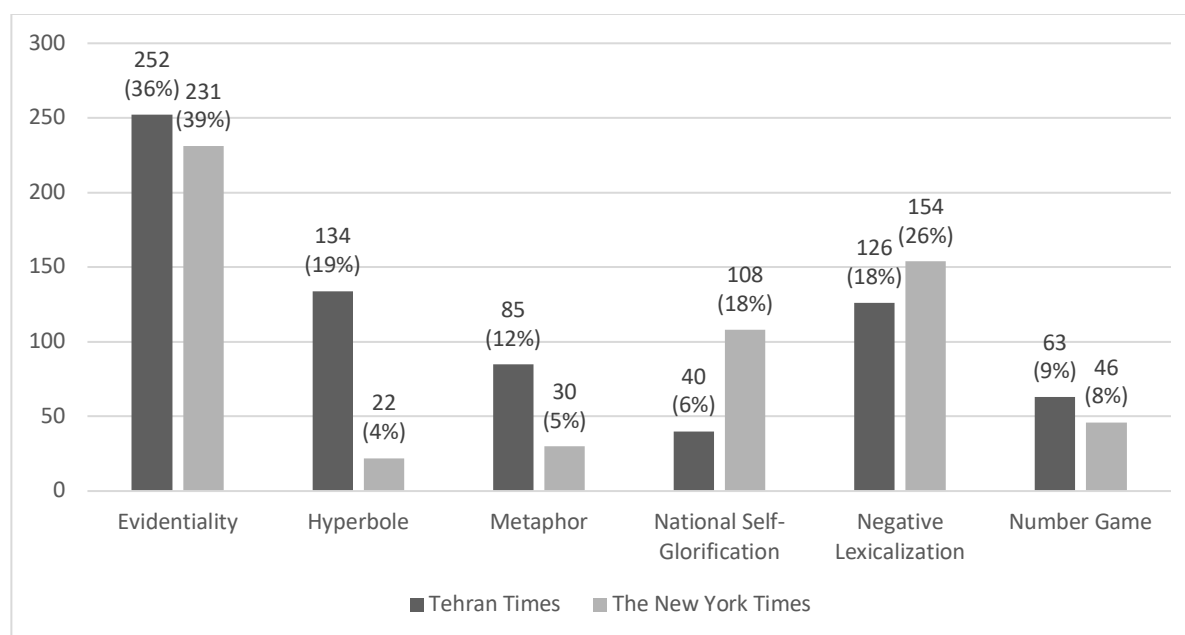


FIGURE 1. Micro-strategies of *Tehran Times* and *The New York Times*

As to the findings of *Tehran Times*, *Evidentiality* constitutes the biggest portion (36%). *Hyperbole* and *Negative Lexicalisation* account for a nearly similar share, 19% and 18%, respectively. *Metaphor*, as a crucial micro-strategy in Van Dijk's framework, accounts for only 12% of the analysed sample. This can partly be explained by the newspapers' heavy reliance on other micro-strategies such as *Evidentiality* and *Hyperbole*. Two least common strategies used in *Tehran Times* were *Number Game* and *National Self-Glorification*, constituting 9% and 6% of the whole passage, respectively.

In the case of *The New York Times*, it can be seen that the most common strategy was *Evidentiality* (39%), which was the most frequently deployed strategy in *Tehran Times* as well. Next in frequency was *Negative Lexicalisation*, making up 26% of the whole sample. *National Self-Glorification* was observed less frequently than these two strategies, comprising 18% of the analysed sample. The three strategies of *Number Game*, *Metaphor*, and *Hyperbole* were the least frequent strategies, with 8%, 5%, and 4%, respectively.

A quick comparison between the results of *Tehran Times* and *The New York Times* indicates that *Evidentiality* was the most common strategy found in both newspapers. Another interesting point is that although hyperbolic language was used to a great extent in *Tehran Times*, *Hyperbole* was the least frequent strategy employed in *The New York Times*. This seems to be the case due to a number of reasons. To start with, although using hyperbolic language attracts the attention of readers, it makes the news article less likely to be believed by its audience. Another reason for this is that these newspapers, due to the function of disguising, prefer to hide their underlying ideologies, and using hyperbolic expressions can decrease the level of disguise. *National Self-Glorification* was used by *The New York Times* more frequently than *Tehran Times*. In contrast, metaphorical language was favoured by *Tehran Times*.

The results have two important implications for the roles manifested by the strategies the analysis has revealed: (1) the function of disguising and, (2) the function of face-saving. In the following sections, various examples will be used to explain the micro-strategies and their relationship with the functions discussed in this part respecting *Tehran Times* and *The New York Times* news reports.

According to Bell (1991), in order to grasp the complex phenomenon of misreporting and misrepresentation, one should take into account the complex ideological dimensions of ideologies using SFL. Many news agencies use *Metaphor*, *Negative Lexicalisation*, and *Hyperbole* to manipulate the original story and build the argumentative position of newspapers.

Shokouhi and Moazed (2017, p. 145) stated that “ideologies in newspapers embedded in news reports are not obvious like those of other public discourses, such as editorial”. In the case of Iran, the mainstream ideology is heavily influenced by government authorities. Our results corroborated the findings of Rafizadeh and Alimardani (2013), who claimed that although the main ideological stance of all news agencies is the same ideological stance that their governments have, there might be a minor difference among the newspapers because each news agency supports a particular political group or party in Iran.

EVIDENTIALITY

Evidentiality was the most frequent strategy in both newspapers, comprising 39% and 36% of *The New York Times* and *Tehran Times* samples, respectively. Hsieh (2008) found that the predominance of *Evidentiality* in political and business news cannot be ignored since it adds to the objectivity of reporting such news. Therefore, while reporting news related to important topics such as a deadly virus like Covid-19, people would trust the newspaper if the news is reported through an authority. Below is an example for *Evidentiality*.

- (1) Now Iran is **battered** by coronavirus infections that have killed 77 people, among the most outside of China, **officials said** Tuesday. (*The New York Times*, March 3, 2020)

Example (1) uses *Evidentiality* to report the number of coronavirus deaths in Iran and to claim that this number is “among the most outside of China”. Using the phrase “officials said” attaches objectivity and credibility to the report and claim (Hsieh, 2008). The macro-strategy of *Negative Other-Representation* is more highlighted through the use of *Evidentiality*.

The example also uses the word “battered” metaphorically based on the conceptual metaphor INFECTING IS HITTING.

HYPERBOLE

Since *Tehran Times* relied heavily on using *Hyperbole*, this micro-strategy is of high importance for this research. In contrast, *The New York Times* used it only 22 times, compared with *Tehran Times* (134 times). The use of *Hyperbole* in these newspapers manipulates the original piece of news to achieve a political aim, through using the macro-strategies of Emphasizing Our good things or De-emphasizing Our bad things. An example is shown below.

- (2) “We’re very comfortable the patient is isolated and poses little risk to the staff or general public,” said **Dr. Chris Spitters**, health officer at the Snohomish Health District, adding that the strict isolation practices were implemented in **an abundance of caution**. (*The New York Times*, January 21, 2020)

In hyperbolic terms, the newspaper tried to depict a normal and controlled situation, by stating that the newly-recognized Covid-19 patient is treated with “an abundance of caution”. This is truly an exaggeration of the present situation considering the fact that nations, particularly the US, disregarded the seriousness of the virus at first. The number of deaths rose from 5 deaths on January 20th to 66 deaths on February 28th, which clearly shows a lack of control in this regard. The report of the “abundance of caution” was made more objective, and therefore more credible, by being stated by an authority figure, Dr. Chris Spitters. Subsequently the micro-strategy of *Evidentiality* was also employed. *Hyperbole* created a positive depiction of the US through emphasizing that the US has been extremely precocious in dealing with the virus.

METAPHOR

It is noteworthy to mention that a wide variety of different types of *Metaphor* were used in both newspapers. The frequency of using *Metaphor* in *Tehran Times* was almost three times higher than *The New York Times*, with 85 and 30 instances, respectively. However, both newspapers preferred using metaphors that are associated with physical difficulty when talking about Covid-19. This is the case due to the fact that Covid-19 causes physical problems and these metaphors indicate how dangerous Covid-19 is. Past studies revealed the persuasive role of using *Metaphor* in newspapers (Brugman, et al., 2019). Moreover, using metaphoric language can both make a text easier to follow and more enjoyable to read (Hadidi & Layegh, 2019; Layegh et al., 2020; Zohrabi & Layegh, 2020). Example (3) illustrates the use of *Metaphor* in *Tehran Times*.

- (3) **TEHRAN** – Imam Khomeini Airport City (IKAC), ... , **has tightened** precautionary measures to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19, since the past couple of weeks. (*Tehran Times*, March 2, 2020)

The word “tighten”, metaphorically refers to the process of reinforcing the measures taken at controlling the virus. The basic meaning of the word “tighten” is to “close or fasten something firmly by turning it” (Longman, n.d.). The contextual meaning of this word in this news report is to “reinforce regulations and improve procedures”. The main function of this metaphor in this example is to provide a positive representation of the measures Iran was taking to control the situation and prevent the spread of the virus, activating Van Dijk’s (2006) macro-

strategy of *Positive Self-Representation*. Associating the controlling measures with a physical activity, the determination and seriousness of Iranian officials in dealing with Covid-19 have been highlighted.

NATIONAL SELF-GLORIFICATION

National Self-Glorification refers to attempts at hiding inadequacies and inefficiencies of Iran and the US governments. *The New York Times* used this micro-strategy almost three times as frequently as *Tehran Times*, with 108 and 40 instances, respectively. One important point to keep in mind is that using *Metaphor* seems to be a more creative way to disguise the true, underlying ideology of each newspaper than using *National Self-Glorification* (Rezapour & Aghagolzadeh, 2012). In the example below, *National Self-Glorification* was conveyed using a metaphor, to disguise the true ideology.

- (4) According to IRIB news agency, **Namaki said** in a video conference on the sidelines of a joint meeting with the World Health Organization on Thursday that **“Iran is one of the leading countries in West Asia for dealing with the pandemic”**. As a representative of the Eastern Mediterranean region, **Iran has good experience in the fight against coronavirus to transfer to other countries**. (*Tehran Times*, April 24, 2020)

Example (4) represents three micro-strategies. “Iran is one of the leading countries in West Asia for dealing with the pandemic” glorifies Iran for its success in controlling the virus. The strategy of *Evidentiality* in the form of a quote from Saeed Namaki, the Health Minister, added more objectivity to this claim. Another strategy at play in this example is that of *Metaphor*. The “fight against coronavirus” refers to the measures taken for controlling the virus. Therefore, the conceptual metaphor A DISEASE IS A WAR has been used to add intensity to the adversity of the situation and highlight Iran’s success in controlling the virus. All these three micro-strategies realize the macro-strategy of *Positive Self-Representation*.

NEGATIVE LEXICALISATION

Much like *Positive Self-Representation*, both newspapers made use of *Lexicalisation* to their advantage. *Lexicalisation* is one of the micro-strategies that can be related to SFL in the sense that language users can choose a particular word over other words to convey the ideological perspective they advocate (Van Dijk, 1995). *Lexicalisation* is deliberate, systemic focus on word as the level of choice. Therefore, *Lexicalisation* is the systemic network of choices as manifested in choices of words only. As to this research, both newspapers had used *Negative Lexicalisation*, with 154 instances in *The New York Times* and 126 instances in *Tehran Times*. These numbers suggest that both newspapers relied heavily on using this specific micro-strategy to discuss and depict their ideological and political stance in reporting the news related to Covid-19. The points discussed in this portion of the paper confirmed the findings of Thetela (2001). Some examples have been provided below.

- (5) ... **officials confirmed** on Monday that he was infected with the **Wuhan coronavirus**, also called 2019-nCoV. (*The New York Times*, January 21, 2020)
(6) HONG KONG — ... if the **mysterious coronavirus** spreads or worsens. (*The New York Times*, January 23, 2020)

We observed a range of various names to refer to Coronavirus in both newspapers. *The New York Times* normally used expressions such as “Wuhan coronavirus” and “mysterious

coronavirus” mainly to highlight the agency of China in creating and spreading the virus. Another point of interest was that despite the fact that this newspaper made an attempt to associate this virus with China, it did not use the term “Chinese coronavirus” more than once, which was favoured by President Donald J. Trump. This is mainly owing to the fact that *The New York Times* and Donald Trump could not get along well during Trump’s presidency due to their different positions on hot topics such as immigration and domestic policies. As discussed by Halliday, using the term “Wuhan virus” instead of “Chinese virus” is meaningful and has discursive consequences. On the other hand, *Tehran Times* simply called the virus “coronavirus” or “the virus”, which involved no use of the strategy of *Negative Lexicalisation*. This might partly explain the lower frequency of this strategy in *Tehran Times*.

NUMBER GAME

Number Game was the least favourite micro-strategy in the newspapers, with 63 occurrences in *Tehran Times* and 46 instances in *The New York Times*. This suggests that *Tehran Times* seemed more objective in the eyes of its readers by backing its allegations with numbers. An important point to keep in mind would be the use of some verbs, adverbs, and prepositions like *suggested*, *presumably*, and *about*, which show uncertainty. Such wording precludes the formation of the idea that the numbers presented are absolute, and slightly distances the news agency from a given number so that the news agencies can repudiate what they had said before.

- (7) *Instead, Iran on Tuesday acknowledged as many as 77 deaths from the virus and at least 2,300 cases of infection. But medical experts say the 77 deaths suggested that, based on the expected death rate, about 4,000 people are presumably infected. (The New York Times, March 3, 2020)*

Both newspapers made use of *Number Game* to realize Van Dijk’s (2006) two macro-strategies and to add objectivity and credibility to their arguments. In example (7), numbers and statistics have been used to undermine the credibility of what Iran has argued and to imply that Iran is lying about the true number of infected people in the country. The use of this strategy in this context realizes the macro-strategy of *Negative Other-Representation*. Furthermore, by using words like “suggested”, *The New York Times* is trying to distance itself from taking a strong stance in relation to this news report.

Overall, both newspapers seemed to go about the virus-related news by using the same micro-strategies. However, the number of these strategies differed greatly from one newspaper to another. According to the discussions above, it seems that the function of disguising was done very well in *Tehran Times* and *The New York Times*. *Tehran Times*, however, made a better use of the micro-strategies of *Metaphor*, *Hyperbole*, and *Evidentiality* to manipulate the original news and also to make these micro-strategies serve its underlying ideology. *The New York Times*, on the other hand, had primarily focused on other micro-strategies to build on its premise. It made use of *National Self-Glorification* and *Negative Lexicalisation* to save face. It is worth noting that both functions of disguising and face-saving could be found in either newspaper, but the main function in each newspaper was as discussed. The findings also suggest that *The New York Times* made use of the two macro-strategies of *Positive Self-Representation* and *Negative Other-Representation* and also relied on the micro-strategies discussed. In the case of the *Tehran Times*, the most prominent macro-strategy was *Positive Self-Representation*. The use of the micro-strategy of *Evidentiality* seems to be mostly at the service of the aforementioned macro-strategy and by doing so, *Tehran Times* seems to distance Iran and its preventive measures from the rest of the world and create a positive mental image of the actions of the Iranian government in dealing with this pandemic.

CONCLUSION

This study was an attempt to offer some further insight into the inefficacies of the news reports in *The New York Times* and *Tehran Times*, which showed that often, political and ideological stances of governments and news agencies are prioritised and issues related to people's health are mostly ignored. It seems that the main forces driving the writing of Covid-19-related news reports are not geared to saving people's lives but, instead, are tailored to backing a particular government or political party in national and international political feuds and rivalries. In the same spirit, the main significance of this study would lie in pinpointing the micro and macro-strategies that newspapers employ to promote particular ideologies and attack others of an essence opposed to their own multi-faceted gain. Another insightful contribution of undertaking studies such as this would be the benefit for the general public and raising the general awareness of the masses by enabling them to see what kind of manipulative language they might face in their everyday lives. Future research can focus specifically on the use of one specific micro-strategy in a number of news agencies and analysing the outcomes of using that micro-strategy. Along similar lines, there are rewards and favourable outcomes to be had in using newspapers as agencies that have the power of forcing powerful organisations to improve a particular situation or solve a problem, be it health-related or political.

REFERENCES

- Abbas, A. H. (2020). Politicizing the pandemic: A schemata analysis of Covid-19 news in two selected newspapers. *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law-Revue internationale de Sémiotique juridique*, 1-20.
- Al-Mwzaiji, K. N. A. (2021). The political spin of conviction: A critical discourse analysis of the origin of Covid-19. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*, 21(1), 239-252.
- Atai, M. R., & Mozaheb, M. A. (2013). The representation of Iran's nuclear program in British newspaper editorials: A critical discourse analytic perspective. *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language*, 1(2), 15–33. http://www.ijscel.net/article_2586.html
- Bell, A. (1991). *The Language of News Media*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Bilić, B., & Georgaca, E. (2007). Representations of “Mental Illness” in Serbian newspapers: A critical discourse analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 4(1–2), 167–186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780880701473573>
- Brugman, B. C., Burgers, C., & Vis, B. (2019). Metaphorical framing in political discourse through words vs. concepts: A meta-analysis. *Language and Cognition*, 11(1), 41-65.
- Connelly, L. M. (2008). Pilot studies. *Medsurg Nursing*, 17(6), 411.
- Gee, J. P. (2004). Discourse analysis: What makes it critical? In R. Rogers (Ed.), *Critical Discourse Analysis in Education* (pp. 19–50). New Jersey/London: Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Hadidi, Y. & Layegh, N. (2019, November). *A Comparative Study on Emotion Metaphors in English and Persian Prose Fiction*. Paper presented at The 17th International TELLSI Conference: New Horizons in Language Studies. Tabriz, Iran.
- Hadidi, Y., Kohneh Poushi, M., & Dezhkameh, A. (2019, November). A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Content or Form Retention in the Reading Comprehension of Intermediate to Advanced Students: The Effects of Text Length on Subsequent Form/Meaning Retention. Paper presented at The 17th International TELLSI Conference: New Horizons in Language Studies. Tabriz, Iran.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. (2014). *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Routledge.
- Hodge, R., & Kress, G. R. (1993). *Language as Ideology*. London: Routledge.

- Hsieh, C. L. (2008). Evidentiality in Chinese newspaper reports: Subjectivity/objectivity as a factor. *Discourse Studies*, 10(2), 205–229. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445607087009>
- Johnson, M., & McLean, E. (2020). International Encyclopedia of Human Geography (2nd ed.). Elsevier.
- Kolsto, P. (2009). *Media Discourse and the Yugoslav Conflicts: Representations of Self and Other*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Kövecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: A practical Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Layegh, N., Hadidi, Y., & Zohrabi, M. (2020). Revisiting common source and target domains in conceptual metaphors in a sample of English fiction: Implications for literacy practices and advanced EFL pedagogy. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 8(3), 116-128.
- Longman. (n.d.). Tighten. In *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. Retrieved January 12, 2021, from <https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/tighten>
- Mohammadpanah, H., & Hamzehei, S. (2020). Interrelation of character-generated implicature and inter-character sentimentality: A comparison of Stephenie Meyer's 'Twilight' and Veronica Roth's 'Divergent'. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 11(4), 37-47.
- Mohammadpanah, H., Hamzehei, S., & Massiha, L. (2018). Towards non-spontaneity in interpretation of implicature serving implicit characterization: The case of subsidiary trait precipitation in Arthur C. Doyle's 'A Study in Scarlet'. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 7(7), 209-221.
- Rafizadeh, S. & Alimardani, M. (2013). The political affiliations of Iranian newspapers. *Iran Media Program*. Retrieved from <https://repository.upenn.edu/iranmediaprogram/5>
- Rezapour, E., & Aghagolzadeh, F. (2012). The role of metaphor in glorification and marginalization of ideology in local newspapers. *ZABANPAZHUHI (Journal of Language Research)*, 4(7), 67-94. doi: 10.22051/jlr.2012.4440
- Rheindorf, M., & Wodak, R. (2019). 'Austria First' revisited: A diachronic cross-sectional analysis of the gender and body politics of the extreme right. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 53(3), 302-320.
- Shokouhi, H., & Moazed, R. (2017). Linguistic representation of ideological strategies in two Iranian newspapers written in English. *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, 37(2), 127-155.
- Taiwo, R. (2007). Language, ideology and power relations in Nigerian newspaper headlines. *Nebula*, 4(1), 34-45. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-61520-827-2.ch010>
- Tehran Times official website. Retrieved 5 November, 2020 from <https://www.tehrantimes.com/>
- The New York Times official website. Retrieved 6 November, 2020 from <https://www.nytimes.com/>
- Thetela, P. (2001). Critique discourses and ideology in newspaper reports: A discourse analysis of the South African press reports on the 1998 SADC's military intervention in Lesotho. *Discourse & Society*, 12(3), 347-370.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1983). Discourse analysis: Its development and application to the structure of news. *Journal of Communication*, 33(2), 20–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1983.tb02386.x>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1995). Discourse analysis as ideology analysis. *Language and peace*, 10(47), 142.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Politics, ideology and discourse. In K. Brown (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*. Vol. 9, (pp. 728-740). Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2018) Discourse and Migration. In R. Zapata-Barrero & E. Yalaz (Eds.), *Qualitative Research in European Migration Studies* (pp. 227-245). Springer, Cham.

- Wadi, S. I., & Ahmed, A. A. (2015). Language manipulation in media. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, 7(3), 16-26.
- Wodak, R. (2006). Mediation between discourse and society: Assessing cognitive approaches in CDA. *Discourse Studies*, 8(1), 179–190. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445606059566>
- Yaghoobi, M. (2009). A critical discourse analysis of the selected Iranian and American printed media on the representations of Hizbullah-Israel war. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 21, 124-15.
- Zohrabi, M., & Layegh, N. (2020). Bidirectionality of metaphor in fiction: A study of English novels. *Applied Linguistics Research Journal*, 4(4), 88-99.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ali Dezhkameh received his MA in Applied Linguistics from The University of Tabriz. His research interests include Pragmatics, (Im)politeness, (Critical) Discourse Analysis, Semantics, and Systemic Functional Linguistics. Address for correspondence: The English Department, University of Tabriz, Jam-e-Jam Street, 5166616471, Tabriz, Iran. Email: dezhkameh6@gmail.com

Nasim Layegh received her MA in Applied Linguistics from The University of Tabriz. Her research interests include (Critical) Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics, Language Education, and Sociocultural Studies. Her most recent publication is “Revisiting Common Source and Target Domains in Conceptual Metaphors in a Sample of English Fiction: Implications for Literacy Practices and Advanced EFL Pedagogy” (2020, *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*). Address for correspondence: The English Department, University of Tabriz, Jam-e-Jam Street, 5166616471, Tabriz, Iran. Email: nasimlayegh@yahoo.com

Yaser Hadidi received his PhD in Applied Linguistics, more specifically in Grammatical Metaphor as evidenced in Prose Fiction and scientific texts from the University of Tehran, Iran, and is currently Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics and English at the University of Tabriz, Iran, and a visiting professor to Khazar University, Baku, Azerbaijan. His research interests include Cross-linguistic probing of Conceptual Metaphors, Discourse Analysis, Literary Linguistics of Prose Fiction and Literature in Language Education. He also is working on a book-length publication on areas of syntactic challenge in prose fiction texts for the advanced learner, building on his elliptical adverbial grammar and insights from the pragmatic manifestations of informational structure. Address for correspondence: The English Department, University of Tabriz, Jam-e-Jam Street, Tabriz, Iran. Email: hadidiy@hotmail.com