

**THE REPRESENTATION OF SYRIAN
REFUGEES IN THE ONLINE MEDIA NEWS
REPORTS OF HOST AND NON-HOST
COUNTRIES: A CORPUS-BASED CRITICAL
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2015

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by

RAITH ZEHER ABID

**Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

OCTOBER 2015

DEDICATION

To my parents, without whom I am but a valueless void in the timeline of life

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writing of this thesis could not have been possible without guidance and assistance. First and most of all, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my supervisor Professor Dr.Shakila Abdul Manan, under whose supervision the present work has been conducted. Words cannot convey my gratitude to her because it is only through her suggestions, comments, support, and patience, this goal of mine became possible.

I would also like to express my thanks to the staff of the school of humanities, whose help and kindness will forever remain in my memory.

Finally, I am most deeply obliged to my father, Dr. Zuhair Abdul Amir, and mother, Jumhuria Nasir, for their prayers, support, unwavering love, and encouragement. My deepest appreciation also goes to my sister, brothers, and sister in law for their help, reassurance, and valuable ideas.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
ABSTRAK	xii
ABSTRACT	xiv
 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	
1.0 Overview	1
1.1 The Arab spring.....	4
1.1.1 The Syrian revolution and its phases.....	6
1.1.2 Syrian refugees	8
1.2 Statement of problem	10
1.3 Research objectives	14
1.4 Research questions	14
1.5 Significance of study	14
1.6 Scope and limitations of the study	17
1.7 Definition of terms	18
1.8 Thesis organisation	22
 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.0 Introduction	23
2.1 Review of related literature	23
2.1.1 Studies that investigated minority groups including refugees	24
2.1.2 Studies that used media discourse of two or more regions	31
2.1.3 The present study	32
2.2 Theories and concepts	33
2.2.1 The media	34
2.2.1.1 Mass media and new media	35
2.2.2 Critical discourse analysis (CDA)	38
2.2.2.1 Language and representation	42
2.2.2.2 The pillars of CDA: Discourse, ideology, and power ...	44
2.2.2.2.1 Discourse	44

2.2.2.2.2	Ideology	47
2.2.2.2.3	Power	49
2.2.2.3	Critique of CDA	51
2.2.2.4	The diverse approaches of CDA	53
2.2.2.4.1	Comparing the four approaches	58
2.2.2.5	Van Leeuwen's (2008) framework	60
2.2.2.5.1	Sociological categories of discourse	62
2.2.3	Conceptual metaphors	70
2.2.3.1	Metaphorical mapping	74
2.2.3.2	Conceptual metaphors and CDA	76
2.2.4	Corpus linguistics	78
2.2.4.1	Integrating corpus linguistics in CDA	79
2.3	Theoretical framework	81
2.4	Summary	83
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY		
3.0	Introduction	85
3.1	Research design	85
3.2	The corpora	87
3.3	Corpus linguistics tools	90
3.3.1	Concordance	91
3.3.2	Collocation	92
3.3.3	Word list	93
3.3.4	Clusters	94
3.4	Corpus analysis	94
3.4.1	Van Leeuwen's sociological categories of discourse	95
3.4.2	Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphors	101
3.4.3	Calculating the statistical significance	103
3.5	Data analysis procedure	105
3.6	Summary	106
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS OF THE ONLINE MEDIA NEWS REPORTS OF THE HOST COUNTRIES		
4.1	Introduction	107
4.2	Van Leeuwen's sociological categories of discourse.....	107

4.2.1	Role allocation	107
4.2.1.1	Activation	108
4.2.1.1.1	Material processes	109
4.2.1.1.2	Mental processes	112
4.2.1.1.3	Verbal processes	114
4.2.1.1.4	Relational processes	116
4.2.1.2	Subjection	117
4.2.1.3	Beneficialisation	133
4.2.2	Genericisation and specification	139
4.2.3	Assimilation	141
4.2.4	Association	143
4.2.5	Indetermination	146
4.2.6	Identification	149
4.3	Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor	152
4.4	Summary	160
CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS OF THE ONLINE MEDIA NEWS		
REPORTS OF THE NON-HOST COUNTRIES		
5.1	Introduction	162
5.2	Van Leeuwen's sociological categories of discourse	162
5.2.1	Role allocation	162
5.2.1.1	Activation	163
5.2.1.1.1	Material processes	164
5.2.1.1.2	Mental processes	167
5.2.1.1.3	Verbal processes	169
5.2.1.1.4	Relational processes	170
5.2.1.2	Subjection	171
5.2.1.3	Beneficialisation	193
5.2.2	Genericisation and specification	199
5.2.3	Assimilation	201
5.2.4	Association	203
5.2.5	Indetermination	207
5.2.6	Identification	211
5.3	Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor	215

5.4	Summary	224
CHAPTER 6: COMPARING THE CORPORA OF THE ONLINE MEDIA NEWS REPORTS OF THE HOST AND NON-HOST COUNTRIES		
6.0	Introduction	226
6.1	Van Leeuwen's sociological categories of discourse	226
6.1.1	Role allocation	226
6.1.1.1	Activation	227
6.1.1.2	Subjection	230
6.1.1.3	Beneficialisation	231
6.1.2	Genericisation and specification	232
6.1.3	Assimilation	234
6.1.4	Association	236
6.1.5	Indetermination	238
6.1.6	Identification	240
6.2	Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphors	243
6.3	Summary	248
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS		
7.0	Introduction	249
7.1	Outline of the research	249
7.2	Discussion of findings	250
7.2.1	Research question 1	250
7.2.2	Research question 2	252
7.2.3	Research question 3	254
7.3	Contributions of the study	258
7.4	Recommendations of the study	260
7.5	Summary	261

REFERENCES

APPENDICES

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 2.1 The mapping for the LOVE IS A JOURNEY conceptual metaphor	74
Table 3.1 The data of the host countries news reports of this research	88
Table 3.2 The data of the non-host countries news reports of this research	89
Table 3.3 Criteria of identifying Van Leeuwen's sociological categories of discourse used in the study	97
Table 3.4 The analysis procedures for the Van Leeuwen's sociological categories of discourse used in the study	98
Table 3.5 Steps and procedures of Praggeljaz Group's metaphor identification process	101
Table 4.1 Role allocation in the online media news reports of the host countries	107
Table 4.2 The analysis of activation in the corpus of the online media news reports of the host countries	108
Table 4.3 The aid Syrian refugees are receiving	117
Table 4.4 The substantial numbers of refugees	123
Table 4.5 The issues refugees face from the conflict	124
Table 4.6 The troubles that Syrian refugees face from the host communities governments, and environment	126
Table 4.7 The attention Syrian refugees are receiving	128
Table 4.8 The estimation of the Syrian refugees' numbers	130
Table 4.9 The sufferance of host countries with regard to the Syrian refugees	130
Table 4.10 The manner in which Syrian refugees are viewed by various individuals and entities	131
Table 4.11 Subjection cases that represent Syrian refugees diversely in the corpus	132
Table 4.12 The aid Syrian refugees are receiving from the host countries	134
Table 4.13 The difficulties Syrian refugees are facing	137
Table 4.14 Speech production and reception in relation to Syrian refugees	138
Table 4.15 The statistics of generic references in the corpus	139

Table 4.16	Circumstances of accompaniment in the online media news reports of the host countries	143
Table 4.17	The use of ‘they’ to refer to Syrian refugees	146
Table 4.18	The use of ‘they’ to refer to host countries	148
Table 4.19	The water metaphors that represent the exodus of Syrian refugees	153
Table 4.20	The conceptual metaphors that represent the rising number of refugees	156
Table 4.21	The conceptual metaphors that represent the pressure Syrian refugees are imposing on the host countries	157
Table 4.22	The conceptual metaphor that represents the entry of Syrian refugees	158
Table 4.23	The conceptual metaphor that emphasizes the importance of aid to Syrians and host countries	159
Table 4.24	The conceptual metaphor that represents the termination of aid	160
Table 5.1	Role allocation in the online media news reports of the non-host countries	162
Table 5.2	The analysis of activation in the corpus of the online media news reports of the non-host countries	163
Table 5.3	The aid Syrian refugees are receiving	171
Table 5.4	The issues refugees face from the conflict	177
Table 5.5	The substantial numbers of refugees	181
Table 5.6	The attention Syrian refugees are receiving	182
Table 5.7	The troubles that Syrian refugees face from the host communities governments, and environment	184
Table 5.8	The endurance of host countries with regard to the presence of refugees in their land	188
Table 5.9	The negative effect that Syrian refugees have over the host countries	189
Table 5.10	The estimation of the Syrian refugees’ numbers	190
Table 5.11	The subjection that represents Syrian refugees diversely in the corpus	191
Table 5.12	The aid Syrian refugees are receiving from the host countries	193

Table 5.13	The difficulties Syrian refugees are facing	197
Table 5.14	The statistics of generic and non-generic references in the corpus	199
Table 5.15	Circumstances of accompaniment in the online media news reports of the host countries	203
Table 5.16	The implementation of ‘they’ to refer to Syrian refugees	208
Table 5.17	The implementation of ‘they’ to refer to host countries	210
Table 5.18	The water metaphors that represent the exodus of Syrian refugees	215
Table 5.19	The conceptual metaphors that represent the rising number of refugees	219
Table 5.20	The conceptual metaphors that represent the massive arrival of refugees	220
Table 5.21	The conceptual metaphor that represents the entry of Syrian refugees	220
Table 5.22	The conceptual metaphors that represent the pressure Syrian refugees are imposing on the host countries	221
Table 5.23	The conceptual metaphor that emphasizes the importance of aid to Syrians and host countries	222
Table 5.24	The conceptual metaphor that represents the termination of aid or influx	223
Table 5.25	The ramifications of the civil war on Syrian refugees	223
Table 5.26	The overwhelming crisis the Syrian refugees undergoing in the host countries	224
Table 6.1	The comparison of material processes in the corpora of the online media news reports of host and non-host countries	227
Table 6.2	The comparison of mental processes in the corpora of the online media news reports of host and non-host countries	228
Table 6.3	The comparison of verbal processes in the corpora of the online media news reports of host and non-host countries	229
Table 6.4	The comparison of relational processes in the corpora of the online media news reports of host and non-host countries	230
Table 6.5	The comparison of the subjection topics in both the host and non-host countries corpora	230

Table 6.6	The comparison of the beneficialisation topics in both the host and non-host countries corpora	231
Table 6.7	The comparison of genericisation in both the host and non-host countries corpora	232
Table 6.8	The comparison of the usage of Abu and Um in both corpora	234
Table 6.9	The comparison of indefinite quantifiers in both the host and non-host countries corpora	234
Table 6.10	The comparison of these numeratives in both the host and non-host countries corpora	235
Table 6.11	The comparison of circumstances of accompaniment in both the host and non-host countries corpora	236
Table 6.12	The comparison of coordination in both the host and non-host countries corpora	237
Table 6.13	The comparison of indetermination topics that depict Syrian refugees in both the host and non-host countries corpora	238
Table 6.14	The comparison of indetermination that depicts the host countries in both the host and non-host countries corpora	239
Table 6.15	The comparison of classification of gender and age in both the host and non-host countries corpora	240
Table 6.16	The comparison of the use of expressions that signify the water metaphor in both the host and non-host countries corpora	244
Table 6.17	The comparison of the expressions that signify the pressure of Syrian refugees in the corpora of both the host and non-host countries	245
Table 7.1	Fisher's exact test results for the sociological categories of discourse and metaphors	256

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1.1 The growing number of Syrian refugees from 2011 to 2013 (retrieved from the United Nations' Syria Regional Refugee Response, 2013)	9
Figure 2.1 Mass media's quasi-interaction	37
Figure 2.2 New media's two-way interaction	38
Figure 2.3 The assessment of the four major theories in CDA	59
Figure 2.4 The theoretical framework of this research	82
Figure 3.1 Geographical distances between the Syrian refugees' host and non-host countries	90
Figure 3.2 The analysis procedure of this research	105
Figure 6.1 The number of metaphors in both the host and non-host countries corpora	243
Figure 6.2 The percentage of the entry metaphor in both the host and non- host countries corpora	246
Figure 6.3 The percentage of the aid metaphor in both the host and non- host countries corpora	247

**PEMAPARAN ORANG PELARIAN SYRIA DALAM LAPORAN BERITA
MEDIA DALAM TALIAN DI NEGARA TUAN RUMAH DAN NEGARA
BUKAN TUAN RUMAH: SATU ANALISIS WACANA KRITIS
BERASASKAN KORPUS**

ABSTRAK

Terdapat banyak kajian yang telah meneliti pemaparan media tentang pelarian di negara tuan rumah. Namun begitu, tidak banyak kajian yang memberikan perhatian kepada pemaparan ini di negara bukan tuan rumah. Kajian ini memanfaatkan teori kategori sosial wacana oleh Van Leeuwen (2008) khasnya “role allocation”, “genericisation dan specification”, “assimilation”, “association”, “indetermination”, dan “identification” serta metafora konsepsi saranan Lakoff dan Johnson (2003) untuk mengkaji pemaparan media tentang pelarian Syria di negara tuan rumah dan di negara bukan tuan rumah. Linguistik korpus diguna pakai untuk memastikan hasil kajian ini menyeluruh, sah dan saksama. Korpora kajian ini mengandungi 3082130 perkataan. Program Anthony AntConc (versi 3.2.4) digunakan untuk menganalisis korpora ini. Untuk menghitung signifikan statistik pula, Ujian Ketepatan Fisher (Fisher Exact Test) dimanfaatkan. Analisis kategori sosial wacana Van Leeuwen’s (2008) menunjukkan bahawa pelarian Syria diwakili secara saksama dalam semua kategori wacana yang diteliti kecuali kategori penghunian, perincian, dan penyelarasan kumpulan namaan. Dalam analisis terhadap penghunian, negara tuan rumah cenderung untuk menekankan peranannya sebagai penjaga kepada pelarian, manakala negara tuan rumah pula cenderung untuk menegaskan masalah yang dihadapi oleh pelarian ini. Analisis perincian pula menunjukkan pelarian wanita muncul paling kerap dalam korpus negara tuan rumah. Dalam analisis penyelarasan kumpulan namaan, negara tuan rumah cenderung untuk

mengaitkan pelarian Syria ini dengan komuniti tuan rumah berbanding dengan negara bukan tuan rumah dalam usaha untuk menonjolkan masalah yang dihadapi oleh pelarian dengan tuan rumah, ketegangan antara mereka, dan bantuan yang diperlukan dan diterima daripada komuniti antarabangsa. Teori metafora konsepsi Lakoff dan Johnson (2003) menunjukkan bahawa pemaparan pelarian Syria ini sebanding di kedua-dua negara kerana dalam kedua-dua korpora, metafora yang lebih banyak digunakan ialah air dan tekanan untuk menghuraikan pelarian ini. Kategori metafora ini digunakan dalam kedua-dua korpora untuk menyerlahkan isu ekonomi dan sosial yang dicetuskan oleh pelarian terhadap komuniti tuan rumah. Hasil keseluruhan kajian menunjukkan bahawa laporan berita media dalam talian di negara tuan rumah dan di negara bukan tuan rumah menggunakan ciri wacana yang sebanding untuk menggambarkan pelarian Syria sebagai tetamu yang tidak diundang dan beban yang secara negatifnya mempengaruhi ekonomi, persekitaran, dan masyarakat negara tuan rumah.

THE REPRESENTATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN THE ONLINE MEDIA NEWS REPORTS OF HOST AND NON-HOST COUNTRIES: A CORPUS-BASED CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

ABSTRACT

There is a substantial body of research that has examined the media representation of refugees in their host countries. However, scant attention has been paid to their depiction in the media discourse of non-host countries. This study uses Van Leeuwen's (2008) sociological categories of discourse, namely role allocation, genericisation and specification, assimilation, association, indetermination, and identification, as well as Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) conceptual metaphor theory to examine the representation of Syrian refugees in the online media news reports of both their host and non-host countries. Corpus linguistics is used to ensure that the results are generalizable, valid, and impartial. The two corpora of this research consist of 3082130 words. Anthony's AntConc programme (version 3.2.4) was used to analyse the corpora. To calculate the statistical significance in comparing both corpora, Fisher's exact test is used. The results of Van Leeuwen's (2008) sociological categories of discourse indicate that Syrian refugees are comparably represented in all of the examined categories of discourse except for the categories of beneficialisation, specification, and coordinated nominal groups. In the analysis of beneficialisation, host countries tend to emphasize their role as carers of refugees while non-host countries tend to stress the troubles Syrian refugees are facing. The analysis of specification shows that female refugees are more frequent in the corpus of the host countries. In the analysis of the coordinated nominal groups, host countries tend to associate Syrian refugees with host communities more than non-host countries to signify the troubles that refugees and host communities face, the tension between them, and the aid they need or receive from the international

community. The analysis of the results based on Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) conceptual metaphor theory shows that the representation of Syrian refugees is comparable as both corpora implement predominantly water and pressure metaphors to describe Syrian refugees. These categories of metaphors are used in both corpora to highlight the economic and social issues refugees are causing to the host communities. The overall results of the research indicate that the online media news reports of the host and non-host countries use virtually similar discoursal features that depict Syrian refugees undesirably as a burden that is negatively affecting the economy, environment, and society of the host countries.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

Media are one of the most influential institutions in society (Lambertus, 2004). Media's authority is gradually replacing other central establishments which even include the church (Talbot, 2007). The discourse of media is produced not in a vacuum whereby it has no ramifications over the recipients' frame of thought, rather media are integrated constantly in society and they can ultimately alter the frame of thought of the public. This notion is emphasised by Tator et al. (1998: p.31) who stress that media are a fundamental resource of "beliefs and values" via which people perceive the social world. Media, however, are typically non-objective. This lack of objectivity is the result of the control of powerful groups in society over particular media outlets. Consequently, Hackett and Zhao (1998: p.178) stress that "more and more what passes for news is, in effect, commercial and institutional propaganda". Therefore, media, in other words, are tools used to control and manipulate public conception. This overwhelming dominance of media in today's multi-cultural societies is utilised to "generate images that reinforce cultural racism" via expanding the boundaries between "Us", typically represented as superior, and "Them", usually depicted as inferior (Tator et al., 1998: p.32).

As a result, there is a substantial body of research that investigated the manner in which minority groups, including refugees, are depicted in the media discourse of the host country or the dominant majority groups. In virtually all of these studies, critical discourse analysis (CDA) was utilised to critically examine media's depiction of these minority groups because CDA "aims to investigate critically social inequality

as it is expressed, signalled, constituted, legitimised and so on by language use” (Wodak, 2001: p.2). Furthermore, critical analysis of discourse is essential to deconstruct texts because every choice writers make in their discourse “foregrounds what was selected and hides, silences or backgrounds what was not selected” (Janks, 2000: p.176). The results of the CDA analysis of past research indicate that these minority groups are systematically discriminated upon by media and deemed as a security, economic, and hygienic threat to the majority groups. For instance, Avraham (2002) emphasises that the social-political environment directly affects the way news are constructed to a level where every negative story that revolves around, for example, crimes, accidents, social issues, and government issues, is interrelated to the minority communities in Israel. Baker et al. (2008) emphasise that most of the media articles in the corpus used negative portrayals of refugees to differentiate between the in-groups (British citizens) and the out-groups (refugees). Furthermore, Cartner (2009) stresses the notion that *The West Australian* and *The Australian* media outlets encouraged “efforts to marginalize the refugee Other based on the threat to Australian culture they allegedly posed” (p.99). The threat of this perseverant misrepresentation of minority groups, including refugees, is represented in creating and reinforcing xenophobic inclinations in the majority groups and, thus, transforming such erroneous information into facts (O’Sullivan, 2011). This is emphasised by Van Dijk (1993a: p.268) who states that media discourse utilises negative representations of minorities that will ultimately be persuasively justified and legitimated to media recipients.

One current massive exodus of refugees in the world is the mass departure of Syrian refugees who are endeavouring to escape persecution by either government forces or the multi-national rebels. The number of Syrian refugees is rapidly

expanding as it increased from 515,016 in 12 December 2012 to 1,061,098 in 23 April 2013 (Syria regional refugee response, 2013). The camps of the Syrian refugees are situated in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, and Egypt. This significant phenomenon is reported by diverse media organisations from around the world, especially the Western and Arab media.

In the substantial body of research that examined the depiction of minority groups in media discourse, the majority of studies focused on the analysis of these groups in the media of their host countries (countries that receive refugees from a particular region) while few studies examined the representation of minority groups by the media of non-host countries (countries that are not internationally recognised to receive refugees from a particular region). For instance, KhosraviNik (2009) indicates that the depiction of the Kosovar refugees in Britain's media is generally non-discriminatory and it is to some extent sympathetic. However, KhosraviNik (2008) shows that minority groups that migrate to Britain are generally discriminated and presented negatively in Britain's media. Furthermore, it is deemed that the infrastructure of media in general is affected by the recent technological advances which, according to Santoro (2012) and Papathanassopoulos (2011), prompted media to undergo a drastic paradigm shift that may possibly change media's perception of social actors and social phenomenon. Therefore, this research will critically analyse how Syrian refugees are being represented in the media of both the host countries and non-host countries and to examine whether these minority groups are perceived as a threat in order to raise awareness about their plight and the need to eradicate such misrepresentations. The research gap that is relevant to the representation of refugees in media discourse will be raised in depth in the problem statement in this chapter and the literature review chapter.

1.1 The Arab Spring:

The Arab world was notoriously known three years ago as a context where dictatorships thrive and endure all the changes that are occurring in the world. Such dictatorships include Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, Ben Ali in Tunisia, Bashar Al Assad in Syria, and so forth. The dictatorships in the Arab world were perceived to be able to continue their reign of control by being repressive toward their people and via constructing societies that are impenetrable to outside influences. This notion is indicated by the Arab Human Development Report (2002: p.20), that was established by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which stated that the main hindrances for the Arab world which prevented it from rising from this state of oppression are the lack of freedom, knowledge, and gender equality. These qualities, however, were heightened and emphasised in the recent technological advances that allowed people to post observations, videos, articles, and opinions via the internet with their mobile phones, laptops, tablets, and so on. According to Yadlin (2012: p.12), the recent years in the Arab world

brought about a dramatic change in terms of technology: the internet, satellite stations, and the social networks brought the middle class the knowledge that there are other ways to live, and that they deserve more – more freedom, more democracy, more human rights, progress for women, employment, and release from the grip of tyrants.

These sets of new ideologies in the Arab world needed a trigger to convert them to actions, and that is when the Tunisian Muhammad Bouazizi came into the picture. Muhammad Bouazizi was an unlicensed fruit vender who killed himself publicly by setting himself on fire to express his anger after the government officials confiscated

his cart. In Tunisia, this act resulted in the overthrow of Bin Ali's government when protestors took to the streets to express their freedom and their longing for democracy. Muhammad Bouazizi's act of valour did not only contain itself in Tunisia, but it also spread throughout the Arab world in countries like Algeria, Jordan, Oman, Egypt, Yemen, Kuwait, Libya, Bahrain, Morocco, Syria, Iraq, and so on. The significant aspect of this phenomenon, according to Rosiny (2012: p. 2), is that the "regional mobilization is no longer directed primarily at external enemies such as the U.S. or Israel, but rather advocates for an authentic Arab concern: the overthrow or the reform of authoritarian systems of rule". The results of such mass revolution are diverse as there are governments that were toppled (e.g. Egypt and Libya), there are governments that made radical changes to their infrastructure and changed diverse political personnel according to the people's needs (e.g. Oman and Algeria), there are governments that suppressed protesters (e.g. Bahrain and Iraq), and there are extreme cases in which protests resulted in bringing the country into a civil war (e.g. Syria).

The Arab spring, however, left its goal of achieving a democratic society in some countries as these countries are not witnessing the "flowering of a revolution leading to a liberal, secular, West European-American model of democracy" (Yadlin, 2012: p.11) rather the year of the Arab spring has been now perceived as a year of Islamic revolution in certain countries. This is vividly depicted in Egypt when the Islamist Brotherhood received 75% of votes in the country's first elections. Furthermore, this phenomenon can also be witnessed in Syria whereby Iran and the Lebanese political party Hizbollah is helping the president of Syria because of his associations with Shia Islam while the revolutionary fighters are being aided by Sunni Islam states and also Western powers who are endeavouring to get rid of Bashar Al Assad.

The subsequent sections will explain the development of the Syrian revolution from peaceful protests to a civil war. Moreover, Syrian refugees and detailed statistics about their numbers and locations will also be illuminated in the following sections.

1.1.1 The Syrian revolution and its phases

The president of Syria, Bashar Al Assad, assumed control over the country in 2000. Syrians became frustrated when their optimism regarding Bashar's presidency gradually disintegrated as they began to notice that his promise of modernisation was to extend his family's totalitarianism. This is emphasised by Hinnebusch (2012: p.95) who states that turmoil engendered within the Syrian people when they realised that "Bashar al-Assad's project was to 'modernize authoritarianism'" which is perceived as a "movement from an originally populist form of authoritarianism to 'post-populist' or neo-liberal versions". Like all citizens in the Middle East, the Syrian people needed a cause to unleash their conviction and Muhammad Bouazizi's suicide served the perfect function.

The Syrian revolution, according to the *BBC* Syria profile, started in March 2011. Its initial phase was peaceful demonstrations that were held by people from all walks of life. Their main purpose was to voice their need for democracy through the removal of the totalitarian regime of Bashar Al Assad. Unlike some regimes that endeavoured to negotiate with the protestors, the Syrian army, in response, eliminated protests with their heavy armoury. The strategies that the Syrian army used, according to Abbas (2012: p.7), reached a "pitch of savagery unparalleled in the recent history of the Arab world and have led the country down a dark narrow tunnel, destined for the abyss". The main reason for the situation in Syria to be

perceived differently from that of Tunisia or Egypt, in which the army never interfered, was because “the armed forces have remained obedient to the regime, as have the security forces and the secret police, and any attempt to split from the regime and state authorities has been met with a heavy-handed response” (Abbas, 2012: p.7). This tragedy resulted in Syria being drawn into a civil war that is rapidly engulfing the country and the Middle East region in general.

The armed opposition’s first phase was characterised by a number of militias that orchestrated multiple attacks on the Syrian army. The government, nonetheless, continued its brutal technique of fighting protests. Subsequently, these militias, according to Abbas (2012: p.8), became organised into “a shadow force called the Syrian Free Army and have begun carrying out operations against military and security targets”. The Syrian Free Army consists of Syrians and personnel from all over the Arab world who wanted to fight Bashar Al Assad. At this point of the conflict, the aim of the demonstrators in having a democratic Syria was now forgotten as the main purpose of the Syrian Free Army was to eliminate Bashar al Assad because of his ties to Shia Islam. This notion is depicted by Cooke (2012) who emphasised that “Sunni extremists are enlisted in this fight because the Syrian government relies on Shia Muslim support domestically and also externally, since Iran's regime is largely Shia Muslim and is a key Syrian Ally”. When the attacks against the Syrian Army intensified, the army started using airplanes, tanks, and heavy artillery in every city that possessed rebels or show resistance to the army.

The next prominent phase in the Syrian revolution was the creation of the Syrian National Council (SNC) in 28 August 2011. The SNC consisted of “well-educated, Western-oriented elites, previously exiled by the regimes of Assad and his father during their repression of political activity beginning in the early 1980s” (O’Bagy,

2012: p.10). It consisted of seven coalition parties that represent different sections from the Syrian society, ranging from the Kurds bloc, Muslim brotherhood bloc, to the Assyrian bloc. However, SNC is notoriously known for its incapability to unify its diverse blocs. This notion is emphasised by O'Bagy (2012) who states that the SNC "are often at odds with one another, and they have failed to provide a unified vision. Council members publicly disagree over a number of key issues, in particular over whether and how to support Syria's armed opposition" (p.11-12). Moreover, their incapacity did not only stain their decisions regarding Syria but also they even became hostile to one another as each and every bloc wanted to take over. This resulted in SNC's failure to gain the respect of the Syrian Free Army who is doing all the dirty work while the SNC are challenging each other. In the midst of all this political and regional chaos, the Syrian people are the only innocent side in all these events and the only side that is being systematically killed and harassed by both government forces and rebels. This resulted in a massive and continuously expanding exodus from Syria to neighbouring countries.

1.1.2 Syrian refugees

One of the inevitable consequences in any civil war is the phenomenon of refugees whereby people who endeavour to escape destruction and murder in their own country migrate to other countries. A refugee, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2013), is "someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence" and has a "well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group". The growing number of Syrian refugees resulted in diverse organisations to act for the sake of addressing "the needs of both refugees already present in host countries and new arrivals who continue to

pour into Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey, at a rate of up to several thousand a day” (United Nations, Syria Regional Response Plan, 2013: p.4). The gravity of Syrian refugees can be further depicted in the data of the United Nations which vividly represent the continuously increasing number of Syrian refugees as in the following figure:

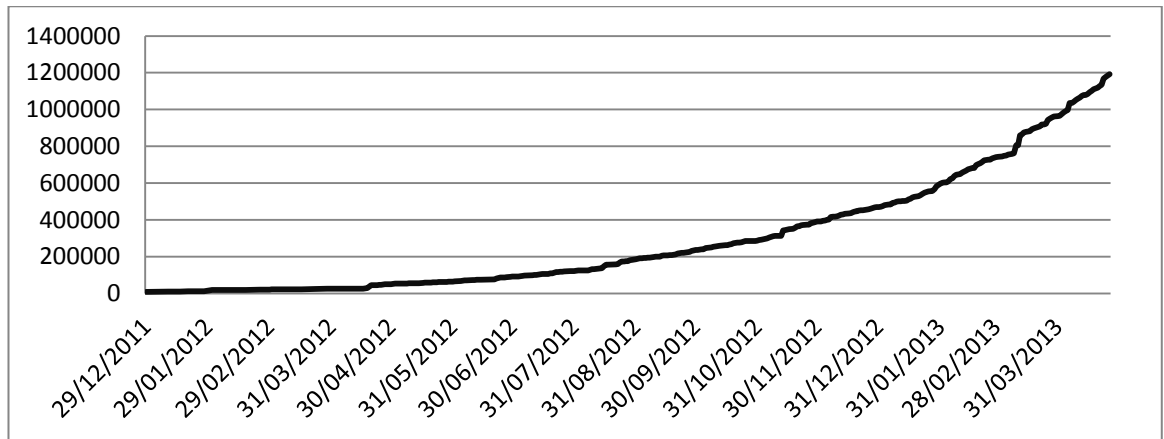


Figure 1.1: The growing number of Syrian refugees from 2011 to 2013 (retrieved from the United Nations’ Syria Regional Refugee Response, 2013)

The context, in which the Syrian refugees occupy, according to the United Nations’ Syria Regional Response Plan (2013), is appalling and riddled with past traumas of war. Their “dwindling cash reserves and high rental prices force families to stay with host families, rent spaces with other families, or live in informal camps”, they “struggle to purchase food and essential household items, take care of health needs, and adequately prepare for winter”, most refugees consist of families that are “comprised only of women and children, and there are many vulnerable individuals among refugee families, including unaccompanied minors, pregnant and lactating women, handicapped individuals, widows, and the elderly”, and the existence of “significant psychological trauma among the refugee community” (United Nations’ Syria Regional Response Plan, 2013: p.12).

Refugees, according to Stedman and Tanner (2003: p.4), in certain situations “experience enormous coercion and propaganda, to the point that they resemble hostages whose power to decide their fate hinges disproportionately on the acts of others”. This vividly represents the circumstances of Syrian refugees in a number of host countries. It is impossible for the Syrian refugees to return to their country as violence is ripping it apart, and it is difficult for the host countries and even the United Nations to continue funding the effort to aid the refugees. Consequently, the media all over the world are depicting the debilitating state of Syrian refugees to raise awareness and, most importantly, money for the United Nations and the host countries to continue funding their aid efforts. However, there are host countries that are taking advantage of Syrian refugees while blaming them for misbalancing their economy and security. According to Holmes (2013), Syrian refugees in Lebanon, for instance, are being treated appallingly and hired as cheap labour with longer working hours. Furthermore, even though Syrian refugees are benefiting businesses in Lebanon, they are, nonetheless, being blamed for the country’s economic mishaps. As difficult and complex the situation of Syrian refugees displaced in Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, and Egypt, it is inevitable that more Syrians will expatriate as the situation in Syria worsens every day.

1.2 Statement of problem

It is commonly stated in the ‘about’ page of virtually every news agency website that its news are constructed objectively without being biased to any particular institution. This stance is expressed diversely by different news agencies, for instance, *Ya Libnan* indicated in its website that its news are “free from the chains of propaganda, censorship and control” (About *Ya Libnan*, 2009) and *CNN* producers characterised their agency as advocates of “firsthand reporting, incisive analysis, no

bias, no agenda” (Huff, 2010). This idealistic stance of impartiality that the current media are adopting implies an alteration in media’s stance toward minority groups in society. Consequently, negative and racist views of minority groups should now be perceived as unacceptable by both the public and journalists. This marketed position of current media, however, is just a façade (Sloan, 2007). In making statements regarding journalistic impartiality, according to Sloan (2007: p.5), “journalists are the least qualified to comment”. Furthermore, because “of the journalistic tradition of objectivity, balance, and fairness, many journalists—even those whom readers and viewers might identify as the most biased—have convinced themselves that they are truly objective” (Sloan, 2007: p.5). This biasness is also emphasised in the large body of literature that examined the representation of minority groups, including refugees, and concluded that these minorities are systematically discriminated by the majority groups’ media in different parts of the world (Avraham, 2002; Baker et al. 2008; KhosraviNik, 2009; Rasinger, 2010; O’Sullivan, 2011; Donald, 2011; Joo, 2012; Wessels, 2012; Rosenkranz, 2013; Burroughs, 2015). However, the research on the depiction of minority groups by media discourse is divided into two; majority of research investigate the depiction of refugees in the host countries media while very few studies examined the depiction of refugees in the media of the non-host countries. Consequently, this research aims at contributing new findings regarding the current media representation of minority groups, specifically the existing matter of Syrian refugees. This will be achieved by not only examining their depiction in the online news media of the host countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt) but also their portrayal in non-host countries that include Arab and Western online news media which, to the best knowledge of the researcher, has never been accomplished by previous research.

The representation of refugees in media discourse has been the centre of attention for several scholars. The studies of these scholars indicated that refugees in media discourse are represented in an undesirable manner. Instances of such studies are Baker et al. (2008), Gabrielatos and Baker (2008), Saniotis and Sobhanian (2008), and Goodman (2010). However, technological advances in recent years have allowed resources to be uploaded and accessed with ease via the internet all over the world. This form of media is now perceived as new media whereby people can use their smartphones and tablets to create blogs so that they can express their attitudes and feelings, upload videos of an event, post stories and images of a situation, and so forth. This type of reporting “will not substitute professional journalism, but can correct it and support it” while also “filling the gaps left behind” by the journalists in their reportage (Santoro, 2012: p.16). Therefore, Santoro (2012) and Papathanassopoulos (2011) emphasise that those recent technological advances have created a drastic paradigm shift in media in general to the point that news agencies all over the world are now posting news reports online using an interactive interface that is primarily instigated by new media. Hence, the two writers emphasise that further research should be conducted to investigate whether this radical alteration in media is influencing and shifting the stance of the representation of social actors in media in general.

Rosenkranz (2013) stresses the notion that future research should examine the way refugees and asylum seekers from the same country are presented in the discourse of two or more different regions. There are several studies that compared the depiction of social actors and action in the media discourse of different regions, for instance Kandil (2009) who investigated the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in American, Arab, and British Media, and Hakam (2009) who examined the media

depiction of the Prophet Mohammad's cartoon controversy in 12 different countries in the Arab World. However, there has been no research that investigated the depiction of refugees from the same origin in the media discourse of different regions that include both host and non-host countries.

Furthermore, one of CDA's fundamental characteristics is its heterogeneous approaches that can be used by researchers to critically examine a certain phenomenon, in the case of this research the representation of refugees. Consequently, diverse approaches were utilised in the literature regarding the representation of minority groups, including refugees, for instance, Wodak's discourse historical approach (Baker et al. 2008; KhosraviNik, 2008; 2009), Fairclough's three-dimensional model (Rasinger, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2011; Joo, 2012), Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach (KhosraviNik, 2008; 2009; Wessels, 2012), and so on. Nonetheless, Van Leeuwen's framework of the representation of social actors has never been fully applied to investigate the representation of refugees as social actors in online news reports. Furthermore, to complement the multi-layered discursual analysis that Van Leeuwen's theory provides via its various sociological categories of discourse, Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor will be integrated in this research to provide a figurative dimension of discourse. This incorporation, the researcher believes, will provide a holistic picture of the manner Syrian refugees are represented in the online media news reports of host and non-host countries.

Consequently, this research will be carried out to fill the above research gap by examining the depiction of Syrian refugees in the online media news reports of the host and non-host countries to compare and contrast their portrayal. Van Leeuwen's theory of the representation of social actors and Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory will jointly be applied to reveal how ideology and power dictated

the representation of Syrian refugees in the online media news reports of the host and non-host countries.

1.3 Research objectives

This research aims to realise the following objectives:

- 1) To compare and contrast the sociological categories used in the depiction of Syrian refugees as social actors in the online media news reports of host and non-host countries.
- 2) To compare and contrast the metaphors that are used to represent the Syrian refugees in the online media news reports of host and non-host countries.
- 3) To reveal the workings of ideology and power in the host and non-host countries' representation of Syrian refugees.

1.4 Research questions

This research endeavours to answer the following questions:

- 1) How similar or different are the sociological categories used to represent Syrian refugees as social actors in the online media news reports of host and non-host countries?
- 2) How similar or different are the metaphors used to represent the Syrian refugees in the online media news reports of host and non-host countries?
- 3) What do the sociological categories and metaphors reveal about the ideology and power of the online media news reports of the host and non-host countries in their representation of Syrian refugees?

1.5 Significance of study

It is reported that thousands of people around the globe leave their home countries to other countries as migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers (Schuch, 2011).

This movement, according to Grenoble (2006), results in bringing “people from different cultures, speaking different languages, together in a variety of settings, from informal to official, including religious and educational settings” (p.247). These groups, however, are typically deemed by the media of the majority groups as a threat which results in them being represented as “out-groups”, those who are as “essentially different or deviant, if not threatening to Us, as is the case for such groups as communists, leftist radicals, terrorists, pacifists” (Van Dijk, 1993b: p.247). Since media are renowned for their overwhelming influence on the public’s frame of thought, the persistence of such negative depictions of these groups by the media threatens them to be relegated to a position of marginality. Currently, however, virtually all media agencies in this current age claim that they are objective and unbiased in their reporting. Consequently, this research will reveal the manner in which these minority groups, specifically Syrian refugees, are depicted by the media of the host countries and the media of the non-host countries. Furthermore, this study is important as it will use online news reports discourse, which is a manifestation of the recent technological advances, to examine whether Syrian refugees are represented negatively or positively in an age where media are believed to be experiencing a drastic transformation that is caused by various technological developments.

Van Leeuwen’s (2008) theory of the representation of social actors became popular among critical discourse analysts who are aiming at disclosing the ideology and power behind the representation of specific social actors in discourse. Therefore, Van Leeuwen’s framework with its unique linguistic tools can provide this research an interesting linguistic dimension of analysis on the way refugees in general are represented in media discourse. Lakoff and Johnson’s conceptual metaphor theory

will also be integrated to examine the figurative depiction of Syrian refugees in the online media news reports of host and non-host countries. This integration, the researcher believes, will complement the linguistically oriented dimension of discourse analysis that Van Leeuwen's theory provides which will, in turn, aid in formulating a holistic approach to the critical analysis of online media news reports.

The statistical significance for each compared category in the corpora will be examined to ensure that the comparison is not based on the description of the researcher. Hence, Fisher's exact test will be used to substantiate the results of the research.

The increasing magnitude of Syrian refugees, specifically in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt is gaining the attention of media from all over the globe. Consequently, it is crucial for readers to be critical about the media they consume in order to understand the hidden agenda of the writer and the producer (Irwin, 1996). This notion is emphasised by Janks (2000, p.176) who states that critical language awareness facilitates the deconstruction of texts and unpacking of ideas. This, in turn, will make readers conscious of the selections that writers make because every selection "foregrounds what was selected and hides, silences or backgrounds what was not selected". Consequently, it is hoped that this research, with its linguistic and figurative dimensions of discourse analysis, provides social awareness to readers regarding the manner in which certain social actors are rendered in the online media news reports and resist, if necessary, the discourse that depicts these social actors negatively.

1.6 Scope and limitations of the study

The study examines the representation of Syrian refugees in the online media news reports of the host and the non-host countries. Hence, only media outlets that publish online were included in this study. Furthermore, although most of the news articles have visual representations of events, this research will only focus its analysis on the textual aspect of the online news article.

Van Leeuwen's theory presents 10 sociological categories of discourse which are exclusion, role allocation, genericisation and specification, assimilation, association, indetermination and differentiation, nomination and categorisation, functionalization and identification, personalisation and impersonalisation, overdetermination. This study, however, selected role allocation, genericisation and specification, assimilation, association, indetermination, and identification from the ten sociological categories of discourse that Van Leeuwen's theory offers because these categories are the most relevant to this research. It is crucial to note that not examining the other linguistic features will not affect the outcome of Van Leeuwen's theory as many other researchers selected certain tools rather than all of them, for instance KhosraviNik (2008; 2009) selected only passivation and activation, personalization and impersonalization, individualization and assimilation, and functionalization while Don and Lee (2014) chose only passivation and activation, personalization, and individualization.

In the Reuters database, articles from the 15th of March 2011 to 30th of June 2011 were not able to be downloaded because of an issue in the website's database. Hence, Google Archives were used to retrieve some of the missing articles. Furthermore, although Iraq is deemed by the UNHCR to be a prominent host country

for Syrian refugees, this study cannot include it because Iraq has no media outlet that publishes its news online with a database that extends to March 2011 (the date in which the Syrian revolution started).

1.7 Definition of terms

- 1) **Media:** a general concept that “can refer to a totality of how reality is represented in broadcast and printed media from television to newspaper” (O’Keeffe, 2006: p.1). This study classifies media as mass media (print and broadcast) and new media as the type of reporting that uses “the Internet and the Web to communicate and carry content” (Ward, 2009: p.128). Since the corpora of this research are retrieved from online news websites, the focus of the study will be on new media.
- 2) **Critical discourse analysis (CDA):** A theory that emerged from critical linguistics, CDA, is defined as the analysis of “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak, 2001: p.2). Consequently, CDA unravels the interrelation between power and discourse via critically examining the social disparity that is justified, legitimised, indicated, and so forth by language use (Wodak, 2001).
- 3) **Representation:** An occurrence that takes place when X represents Y for Z, whereby X depicts the representation which is attained through the medium of language, Y describes the social actor or the phenomenon that is represented by X, and Z is a group of social actors or a social actor (Van Dijk, 2003). Representations, however, are typically biased. This impartiality is formulated because phenomena and thoughts are “not communicated neutrally, in their neutral structure, as it were”, but rather they are conveyed through a medium that

consists of its own essential characteristics. These characteristics are usually infused with societal principles that have the capacity to formulate a possible standpoint on events (Fowler, 1991: p.25).

- 4) **Discourse:** For CDA, discourse is not merely a text or a group of interconnected sentences, it is also a practice which refers to the features of language utilisation in a collection of texts or in the language of the community in general. For a corpus-based CDA research, a hybrid understanding of the term ‘discourse’ should be utilised whereby discourse is realised in the traditional sense that is found in “functional linguistics (language analysed across sentence boundaries), and the broader meanings of the term found in CDA (ways of talking and thinking about something)” (McEnery and Hardie, 2012: p.134).
- 5) **Ideology:** The conception of ideology is an abstract set of a person’s views and perceptions that are modelled by certain institutions or group members in society in which the person lives, and these dogmas are manifested to dominate and control the person’s frame of thought. To Van Dijk (2009), ideology has the capacity to control and organise the societal depiction of social groups and their members which is typically manifested in discourse.
- 6) **Power:** Power denotes the notion that in any social context, powerful social groups exercise their dominance and control on the less powerful members. Power is intertwined with language because language manifests power, conveys power, and is also used to defy power. Powerful discourse is able to reshape the way a public defines a phenomenon, or the way they comprehend society through their beliefs, understandings, and opinions (Weiss and Wodak, 2003). Power in discourse, however, is not absolute, rather it can be challenged and undermined

by the discourse of those critical enough to acknowledge its ramifications in society.

- 7) **Van Leeuwen's theory of the representation of social actors:** This framework bases its hypothesis on the inventory of sociosemantics. The conception of sociosemantics is perceived as the "inventory of the ways in which social actors can be represented" in discourse (Van Leeuwen, 2008: p. 23). The primary focus of this framework is on the sociological categories of discourse rather than focusing on the linguistic categories of discourse. This framework establishes its analysis on a wide variety of "linguistic and rhetorical phenomena" and finds "its unity in the concept of "social actor" rather than in a linguistic concept" (Van Leeuwen, 2008: p. 25).
- 8) **Conceptual metaphors:** The understanding of one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. Through applying a systematic mapping between the two domains, metaphors can be revealed (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). Metaphors are perceived as devices that are "pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action" because even "our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003: p.3).
- 9) **Corpus linguistics:** A "computer-aided analysis of very extensive collections of transcribed utterances or written texts" (McEnery and Hardie, 2012: p.i). Corpus linguistics has diverse tools of analysis including concordance, collocation, clusters, frequency lists, and so forth. The results obtained from the various corpus linguistics tools are derived from real language usage which, in the context of this research, is represented by online media news reports.

- 10) **Syrian refugees:** A refugee, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2013), is “someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence” and has a “well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group”. Thus, the concept of Syrian refugees refers to Syrians who are escaping the civil war and its various repercussions.
- 11) **Host country:** A host country, according to Senker (2008: p.44), is a nation that “receives migrants and refugees”. According to the Syria Regional Refugee Response Plan, which is organised by The United Nation Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt and Iraq are the recognised host countries for Syrian refugees. In the context of this research, the online media news reports will be retrieved from only Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt.
- 12) **Non-host country:** A nation that neither provides temporary settlement for refugees from a particular region nor aid and they are not recognised by international organizations, e.g. UNHCR, as countries that receive refugees from a particular nation. In the context of this research, the online media news reports will be retrieved from the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), United Arab Emirates (UAE) and The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The news website are *CNN* (USA), *BBC* (UK), *Reuters* (UK), *Al Bawaba* (UAE), and *Arab News* (KSA). The Western news websites were chosen because of their popularity as, according to the traffic estimator web tool, from 15th of July 2013 to 15th of August 2013, over 144,272,000 million individuals around the world entered these three media websites while the Arab news websites were chosen based on their reporting which is not restricted on the region in which they are situated but also includes the Arab world in general.

1.8 Thesis organisation

- i. **Chapter One** provides an overview of this research, the statement of problem, research objectives and questions that will guide this study's infrastructure, the significant contributions of this study to the field of CDA, and the definition of main concepts in this study.
- ii. **Chapter Two** provides a detailed review of related studies, concepts and theories, and the theoretical framework of this research.
- iii. **Chapter Three** presents this study's research design, the corpus, corpus linguistics tools, retrieving the linguistic features, and data analysis.
- iv. **Chapter Four** examines the sociological categories of discourse and the conceptual metaphors used to represent Syrian refugees in the online news reports of the host countries.
- v. **Chapter Five** examines the sociological categories of discourse and the conceptual metaphors used to represent Syrian refugees in the online news reports of the non-host countries.
- vi. **Chapter Six** compares the results obtained from Chapter 4 and 5 of this research through the use of Fisher's exact test.
- vii. **Chapter Seven** addresses the three research questions. General conclusions and implications will also be stated in this chapter along with this research contributions and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section highlights the gap in previous research, which will be addressed by this study. The second section addresses the various concepts and theories that are related to this research, including media, the differences between mass media and new media, the framework of CDA, the pillars of CDA, the critique of CDA, the theories that this research will use in the analysis of data, and corpus linguistics. The third section presents the theoretical framework of this study which will be applied to realise the objectives of this research.

2.1 Review of related literature

One of the prominent aims of CDA is to analyse the way discourse is formulated to dichotomise social groups. Such dichotomy is intended by discourse makers to reform the public's frame of thought to serve the interests of the powerful. Consequently, refugees and their depictions in media discourse and even political discourse is a vital interest to CDA analysts who are endeavouring to raise awareness of the methods discourse makers utilise to discriminate against refugees. It is essential to note that in the review of studies regarding minority groups, there are several researchers who have collectively studied refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers for the purpose of examining the representation of minority groups. These include, Baker et al. (2008), Gabrielatos and Baker (2008), KhosraviNik (2008, 2009) who used the acronym RASIM to collectively refer to these minority groups

which comprise refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and migrants. This study, however, will only examine refugees to inspect the way they are depicted in the online media news reports of host and non-host countries.

This section reviews studies that examine minority groups as well as studies that used the media discourse of two or more different regions in their analysis of discourse. The following are studies that are most beneficial to this research as they enlightened the researcher with regard to the manner in which the depiction of minority groups, including refugees, are analysed via using CDA and how ideology and power are revealed in the analysis. The reviewed studies will help the researcher to construct this study's methodology because most studies that dealt with refugees used corpus-based methods to analyse substantial data which the researcher will also utilise. Furthermore, the outcome of this research will be compared to the results of the reviewed studies to examine whether refugees are still being represented negatively in media discourse.

2.1.1 Studies that investigated minority groups including refugees

Rojo and Van Dijk (1997) used Van Leeuwen's (1995) grammar of legitimation approach to examine the discursive features of political legitimation. The study investigated the speech of the Spanish Secretary of the Interior, Mayor Oreja which discussed the military-style expulsion of a group of African 'illegal' migrants from Melilla. The results indicate that migrants are omitted as a group of people from Spain and its general discourse which emphasise the existence of ethnic inequality and racism.

Teo (2000) studied the depiction of Vietnamese immigrants in two Australian newspapers. The researcher utilised the CDA approaches of Fowler (1991), Van Dijk