

**CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF HUMAN  
RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE WASHINGTON  
POST AND NEW YORK TIMES ONLINE  
NEWSPAPERS: POST ISIS IRAQ ERA**

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**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**

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RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE WASHINGTON  
POST AND NEW YORK TIMES ONLINE  
NEWSPAPERS: POST ISIS IRAQ ERA**

by

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**ANALISIS WACANA KRITIKAL PELANGGARAN HAK ASASI MANUSIA  
DALAM AKHBAR DALAM TALIAN WASHINGTON POST DAN NEW  
YORK TIMES: ERA IRAQ PASCA ISIS**

**ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini menyiasat gambaran pencabulan hak asasi manusia di Iraq selepas era ISIS di akhbar dalam talian Amerika, terutamanya pelanggaran hak untuk berhimpun secara aman melalui demonstrasi yang berlaku pada 2019. Kajian ini memberi tumpuan kepada kajian struktur makro dan mikro- semantik artikel berita dan perwakilan ideologi melalui penggunaan pendekatan Van Dijk's (1980) terhadap struktur makro semantik dan teori ideologi Van Dijk's (1998). Tambahan pula, maklumat latar belakang sejarah dan kritikan politik telah dibentangkan melalui penggunaan teori wacana sejarah Wodak's (2001) untuk memudahkan tafsiran wacana dan mengekalkan objektiviti dalam proses analisis. Data dikumpulkan daripada enam artikel berita yang diterbitkan pada 2019 untuk setiap akhbar dalam talian Amerika, iaitu Washington Post dan New York Times. Secara analitik, peringkat makro mendedahkan persamaan antara kedua-dua akhbar mengenai struktur tematik mengenai HRV di Iraq, iaitu protes di Iraq untuk menuntut hak asasi, telah ditangani dengan ganas oleh kerajaan, yang membawa kepada kejatuhan kerajaan. Analisis peringkat mikro (struktur sintaksis, leksikal dan retorik) menyatakan majoriti ayat yang digunakan dalam artikel berita adalah kompleks dan padat dengan banyak maklumat tentang isu yang dikaji, serta penggunaan perbendaharaan kata dan daftar keganasan, sebagai tambahan kepada penggunaan perang, ketenteraan, dan metafora keganasan untuk menekankan makna metafora. Secara ideologi, akhbar dalam talian Washington Post dan New York Times menggambarkan penunjuk perasaan Iraq (dan

penyokong mereka) sebagai "Diri" yang positif, dan kerajaan Iraq (dan pasukannya) dan ahli politik sebagai "Lain-lain" negatif". Tambahan pula, akhbar-akhbar tersebut, kebanyakannya menekankan mangsa penunjuk perasaan (dalam kumpulan), sambil mengeneralisasi kerajaan, parti politik, dan pasukan keselamatan (luar kumpulan) dengan reaksi negatif terhadap protes dan penunjuk perasaan. Secara keseluruhan, analisis kedua-dua akhbar menyokong gambaran ideologi mereka tentang "Diri" positif (dalam kumpulan) dan negatif "Lain-lain" (luar kumpulan).

**CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN  
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**ABSTRACT**

The present study investigated the depiction of human rights violations in Iraq post-ISIS era in the American online newspapers, particularly violating the right to peaceful assembly through the demonstrations that occurred in 2019. This study focused on examining the macro- and micro- semantic structures of the news articles and ideological representations through employing Van Dijk's (1980) approach to semantic macrostructure and Van Dijk's (1998) theory of ideology. Furthermore, the historical background information and political critique were presented through applying Wodak's (2001) discourse historical theory to facilitate discourse interpretation and maintain objectivity in the analytical process. The data was collected from 6 articles in each of the two American online newspapers, namely, the Washington Post and New York Times news in 2019. Analytically, the macro-level revealed an agreement between both newspapers on the thematic structure about HRVs in Iraq, stating that the protests in Iraq on demanding basic rights, were dealt with violently by the government, leading to the government's fall. Concerning the micro-level (the syntactic, lexical, and rhetorical structures), the majority of sentences used in the news articles were complex and packed with a lot of information about the issue studied, as well as the use of violence vocabulary and registers, in addition to the use of war, military, and violence metaphors to emphasise the metaphorical meanings. Ideologically, the Washington Post and New York Times online newspapers portrayed the Iraqi protesters (and their supporters) as a positive "Self", and the Iraqi



government (and its forces) and the politicians as a negative "Other". Moreover, the newspapers emphasise mostly on the victims of protesters (in-group), while generalising the government's, political parties', and security forces' (out-group) negative reactions toward protests and protesters. Overall, the analysis of both newspapers supports their ideological portrayal of positive "Self" (in-group) and negative "Other" (out-group).

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

Media is one of the most influential institutions in society since it addresses different political, social, economic, and cultural issues (Lambertus, 2004). The newspaper as a media type is considered as a preferred readable source of information in the world, from which people receive adequate updates on current events and issues in the world (Lamichhane, 2017). A newspaper is regarded as a medium of “shaping public opinion and policy” (Haque & Sheikh, 1993, p. 1). Due to the nature of news discourse as being ideologically loaded and manipulative, its discourse attracts the attention of researchers in the critical discourse analysis (henceforth, CDA) field, (Elyas et al., 2020; Ahmadian & Farahani, 2014).

Researchers and analysts are interested in the language used in newspapers to convey news events and issues as newspapers represent acts in a way that influences the reader's view of the issue at hand (Ahmadian & Farahani, 2014; Reah, 2002). According to Jorgensen and Phillips (2002), language is more than merely a means of communicating information; it also generates and shapes the social world. Fairclough (1995) offers a different viewpoint, considering language as the primary means for persuading people to accept specific representations of news events. In this sense, the representations of issues (such as human rights violations (henceforth, HRVs), immigration, trafficking) or groups such as (Muslims, immigrants, Middle East people) in the newspapers through effective use of language are described based on the news producers' ideology (Algamde, 2019; Dodantenna, 2020; Gulati, 2011; Hansen, 2020; Sobel, 2014; Yin, 2007). Therefore, in newspapers, news articles

(discourse) can be analysed to identify the ideology of representation, as well as the underlying intentions concealed behind their discursive construction.

Moreover, when media outlets and organizations employ language, it has the potential to be more effective (Hanan, 2017), as in the American newspapers. In this regard, "Washington Post" and "New York Times" are American online newspapers that the readers worldwide prefer, trust, and frequent while reading news (Kalsi, 2017; Suzor et al., 2019). They are within the elite or high quality news media sources in the United States and around the world, as evidenced by their renowned international publishing (Abed, 2015; Al-Gamde & Tenbrink, 2020; Cushion et al., 2018; Li, 2009). To summarise, it is critical to understand how journalists use language to construct news discourse in order to convey particular viewpoints and ideologies, as well as how language may be used to manipulate and influence the audience's feelings, thoughts, and actions (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1988). According to Van Dijk (1977, 1980), the structure of news discourse comprises both macrostructure (thematic) and microstructure (semantic, syntax, and rhetoric).

Macrostructure is concerned with the thematic structure of news articles. It refers to the theme contained in the subjects, headlines, and lead paragraphs that contain the main meaning or convey the news topics. The theme can be deduced from the entire news content (Van Dijk, 1980, 1988). The microstructure, on the other hand, focuses on evaluating the journalists' selections of words when using sentences in their communications, such as sentence patterns, pronouns, and coherence. In general, the macrostructure and microstructure of news discourse reflect readers' interests in a variety of events and concerns, including social, political, economic, and cultural themes (AL-Shaibani, 2010; Ali, 2017; Hanan, 2017). Hence, the representation of

such events and issues at both the macro and microstructure may imply socio-political notions, such as those relating to the topic of human rights violations (HRVs).

Recently, academics in different fields like media and politics such as Algamde (2019); Ali (2018); Brandle (2018); Hopewell (2017) become more interested and focused on studying socio-political events, exploring the ways in which the cases or groups (human rights/ Middle East) are represented in newspaper discourse. These studies showed that the newspaper discourse has a significant role in the representation process and its ideological concepts concerning socio-political issues. This can be done through effective use of language with employing discursive strategies such as description of actor, generalization, and victimization (Van Dijk, 1980). According to Van Dijk (1980, 1985, 1995, 2000), these strategies are used to simplify the meaning of the text. Using these strategies, the subjects and core meanings of a specific text can be defined and recognized, as well as the polarization of positive Us and negative Them can be applied to newspaper discourse depending on the ideology of the discourse provider (Al-Ghamdi, 2021; Katea, 2018; Khan et al., 2021; Listiani & Widhiyanto 2019; Shaban, 2020). A good example for this point is the representation of HRVs in the Iraq context in American newspapers especially the post-ISIS period.

Following the fall of ISIS in Iraq, the country experienced challenging and volatile conditions such as demonstrations, HRVs, and government replacement (Georgis, 2017). The government used force to suppress the demonstrations, infringing the right to peaceful assembly and expressing thoughts and attitudes by killing, kidnapping, and injuring numerous protesters (Dodge, 2018). The use of force by Iraqi forces prepared the way for further conflicts between the protesters and the army and police. The announcement of the HRVs sparked an international outcry

against the Iraqi government's practises on protest repression (Eriksson & Khaleel, 2019).

The right to freedom of peaceful assembly is among the fundamental human rights stipulated by international law and national constitutions. This right reflects the importance of individual freedom to express their views in diverse ways (including peaceful demonstrations) that is permitted by law (Jarman & Hamilton, 2009). Therefore, in the context of this study, human rights can be viewed in terms of freedom rights, which define the individual's free space in which the state should safeguard or should not intervene (Al-Baldawi, 2021). HRVs are thus defined as any actions that violate a person's personal freedom and rights (Douzinas, 2007).

HRVs are also defined by Banerjee (2021) as violations of basic personal rights of individuals by the state or its representatives. Such basic human rights include the right to freedom of speech and expression, as well as the right to be safe from being killed, kidnapped, and imprisoned. In Iraq after ISIS, there have been multiple examples of violations of the right to peaceful assembly, including free expression violations, abductions, unlawful killings, and forced disappearances. These infractions occurred primarily during the 2019 demonstration.

Depicting specific political issues of any society in the newspaper, for instance the HRVs in the post-ISIS Iraq, may reflect the attitude, policy and ideology towards this society based on the linguistic structures used in such depiction (Ali, 2017). Moreover, depiction of HRVs in media discourse is conceptualised and presented as “Positive Us vs. Negative Them” polarization because it is reported mostly as foreign affairs (Brandle, 2018; Van Dijk, 1993; Shaw & Selvarajah, 2019; Sowińska, 2013; Yin, 2007). Van Dijk's (1998) theory of Self-positive and Negative-other representations is more prevalent in such socio-political issues (Algamde, 2019; El-

nashar & Nayef, 2019; Hanan, 2017). In this theory Van Dijk (1998) maintains the ideologies of many groups involving "Us" as favourable group, and "Them" as unfavourable group, while emphasizing their bad properties and actions. Therefore, this study employs this theory, as it can be applied to the structure of various discourses in the Washington Post and New York Timesonline newspapers representing HRVs in Iraq post-ISIS.

To summarise, the use of CDA in such research (HRVs) is necessary (Van Dijk, 1998) to analyse newspaper discourse linguistically and ideologically. The reasons are to create and increase awareness, as well as to gain a thorough grasp of the linguistic choices and strategies that are mostly utilised to construct "Self-positive" and "Other-negative" ideological representations in different discourses. As a result, the current study focuses on the language used in the description of HRVs in Iraq to explore its representation in terms of "Self-positive" and "Other-negative" polarities in the online newspapers of the Washington Post and New York Times. This study focuses primarily on two American online publications, the Washington Post and the New York Times. These newspapers have a long history of reporting on human rights concerns in many countries in the world (Iqbal et al., 2020; Kalsi, 2017; Le, 2002; Yin, 2007). This study is concerned with the ideology of these newspapers regarding HRVs in the post-ISIS Iraq era in order to investigate the underlying motives behind their statements. The following sections provide more information about the study's context and the issue under investigation.

## **1.2 Iraqi Context**

This section highlights the social and political context of Iraq by providing information on the Iraqi ethnic, sects and religious groups. It is crucial to provide the related historical socio-political background of the context of the study (Al-Shaibani,

2010). Fairclough (1992) stated that discourse analysis requires having knowledge about other perspectives, such as politics, sociology, or psychology, based on the study type.

First of all, the majority of the Iraqi community are Arabs, constituting about 75-80% of the population, followed by Kurds, who make up 15-20% of the total population (Ali, 2018). Turkmen, Shabakis, Assyrians, Armenians and Mandeans, are ethnic groups representing the remaining 5%. The vast majority of Iraqis speak Arabic, while the Kurds speak Kurdish. Secondly, the Iraqi society includes many ethnics and sects. Regarding the religious sects, there are Arab Shiite Muslims, Arab Sunni Muslims and Christians representing the majority in the society, while Yezidis and Sabian Mandeans as minorities in Iraq. Ali (2018) states that these religious sects play a crucial role in Iraqi society and should not be underestimated. These religious divisions have led to internal sectarian conflicts, particularly after the 2003 invasion. Hassan (2020) argues that, although the Shia are the minorities in the Arab world, they are the majority in some countries, such as Iraq, Iran, and Bahrain. According to him, Sunnis represent 36% of the population in Iraq, while Shia is the majority among Arabs in Iraq represented by 60-65% of the population.

However, the political history of Iraq is defined as an unstable political system in the region, particularly after the US-led war that brought Saddam Hussein's administration down in 2003 (Georgis, 2017; Krieg, 2017). Iraq is ruled by new Iraqi political parties, which are divided into ethnic groups and religious parties. To create sectarian differences in Iraqi society, the US has classified these political groups based on ethnic sects and religious backgrounds--the Shia Arabs, the Sunni Arabs, and the Kurds (Georgis, 2017). Georgis (2017) believes that the US occupation is a direct cause of postwar political sectarianism in Iraq.

The political context in the post-ISIS Iraq era became more complex due to the struggles of political parties to control the power. With the poor government services and corruption, as well as lack of peoples' rights (the right to life, freedom of peaceful assembly, liberty, and the security of person), thousands of people in Baghdad and many cities in southern Iraq were demonstrating in the streets (Eriksson, 2020). These demonstrations led to the violation of one of the fundamental human rights, which is the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, and caused physical violations, such as the killing, abductions, and injury of many protesters. As stated by Krieg (2017), "after ISIS, Iraq has failed to develop a collective, inclusive counter narrative based on a public sociopolitical order that arguably has never existed in Iraq in modern times."

### **1.3 Human Rights Violations in Iraq**

Human rights are regarded as the most important cases of contemporary international law, implying the importance of enforcing these rights within specific communities and countries (Saeed & Shafiee, 2017). Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and in their contemporary manifestation, a set of individual and collective rights has been explicitly promoted and protected through international and local legislation (Landman, 2005). The right to freedom of peaceful assembly is one of the fundamental rights of every person in collective expression, as is the ability to meet and express their opinions or tendencies opposing authorities or a particular governmental approach (Jarman & Hamilton, 2009). This right stems from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which includes the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in article 20 (United Nations, 2022).

It is a fundamental right of every human being that must be respected and promoted. This right is consistent with Article 3's rights to liberty and security of persons: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person". In this regard,



governments have a commitment to protect the lives, liberty, and security of people exercising their rights to free expression and association, while not infringing on these rights. The state should ensure that demonstrators' rights are protected from violations such as killing, forced incarceration, and kidnapping (Alsamee, 2022). Due to the several wars and conflicts that this country has witnessed, HRVs in Iraq are one of the most widely discussed issues worldwide (Saeed & Shafiee, 2017).

The most notable occurrence among these wars and conflicts is the 2014 seizure of the Iraqi city of Mosul by terror fighters calling themselves the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or “ISIS” (Boyle & Mower, 2018; Trygged, 2019). After three years, the Iraqi forces and the international alliance defeated ISIS fighters in Iraq. The post-ISIS era in Iraq witnessed widespread political and financial corruption, HRVs, and terrorist attacks (Georgis, 2017; Alaaldin, 2018). The right to freedom of peaceful assembly is a fundamental right that allows individuals to express their collective opinion, which includes protesting governmental deviation and corruption (Maxime Agator, 2013). The right to freedom of peaceful assembly takes different forms through which people can express their opinions and demand various rights, such as demonstrations.

Among the most common of these peaceful demonstrations in Iraq were the demonstrations of 2019. As thousands of Iraqis have participated in these peaceful demonstrations in various cities, mainly in Baghdad, the governmental authorities' reactions were very harsh in most cases, violating this constitutional right. The government security forces' handling of these peaceful demonstrations was violent, as security forces' bullets killed many Iraqis during this demonstration, and the police used severe beatings (Eriksson, 2020). These demonstrations lasted for months to express the participants' discontent with the deteriorating economic, political, and

service conditions and the failure of several governments that arose after 2003 (Al-Baldawi, 2021). Governmental authorities dealt with these peaceful demonstrations violently from the beginning by committing violations of the right to the peaceful assembly of protesters, physical integrity, and freedom of expression. Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights revealed that excessive force against demonstrators in 2019 was used, resulting in 504 demonstrators being killed and the injury of 19286 persons, including women and youths (Al-Baldawi, 2021; Arif, 2021).

The government's violations of this right violate the principle of the rule of law. Therefore, the arbitrary practice by security forces in dealing with demonstrators in a regime that claims to have a democratic manner is undermining the constitutional rights, including the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in Iraq. These actions violate the fundamental aim of the rule of law, which centres on protecting and promoting human rights guaranteed by the constitution and international covenants (Arif, 2021). That is, the Iraqi authorities' violent dealing with peaceful protesters and the use of excessive force without relying on an explicit law is a violation of the core concept of the rule of law.

However, the HRVs in Iraq in different periods; the invasion of Iraq in 2003, sectarian conflict, ISIS control period and post-ISIS are the subject and interesting of many studies worldwide (Cushman, 2005; Pace, 2008; Saeed & Shafiee, 2017; Nacos & Bloch-elkon, 2018; Goold & Lazarus, 2019; Rothenberg, 2019; Halpern, 2020). However, these studies mostly are media or political studies, little attention is paid to language studies. According to the researcher knowledge, there is no linguistic study about HRVs in Iraq (especially post ISIS). Thus, this study focuses on HRVs in post-ISIS Iraq to understand and interpret the language structure of HRVs in the Washington Post and New York Times newspapers online discourse.

#### **1.4 Statement of the Problem**

In newspaper discourse, language can be employed to persuade people to accept specific representations, opinions and ideologies (Fairclough, 1995). Language is a source of power in the discourse of newspaper based on the way it is utilized to support or influences a news event's message (Ali, 2017). In this vein, Van Dijk (1989) argues that power may be implied in the newspaper discourse, formed as an expression, depiction, or legitimation of powerful actors or their actions and ideologies. Accordingly, this representation includes coherent explanation of news event with regard to macro and micro levels of discourse. Van Dijk (1980, 1988) adds that the linguistic and ideological analysis of news discourse at both macro and micro levels can reveal how themes are organised and how the linguistic choices, syntactic, lexical and rhetorical structures are employed.

When studying HRVs in media, Siddique (2020) asserts that media represents and fabricates the actions, in order to mold and influence the public discourse during times of conflict. Hence, American media frequently portrays human rights in the Middle Eastern countries negatively, through the effective use of language, in order to justify the intervention in these countries' affairs (Brandle 2018; Brooten, 2004, 2015; Cheng & Lam, 2010). It additionally aims to influence and shape the audience opinions and attitudes toward such issue by ideologically employing particular vocabulary and sentence structures (Cheng & Lam, 2010). This shows the effective representation of news events through ideologically loaded linguistic choices. Such representation requires the use of CDA to identify the relationship between linguistic structures and ideology. Van Dijk (2015) argues that a critical analysis is required when studying such terms as legitimacy, violation of human rights... as CDA works on revealing the discursive abuse of power.

This in turn highlights the importance the critical analysis in studying the linguistic and ideological representation of news events related to different socio-political issues, like HRVs. It is a fact that CDA is contributing to the examination of HRVs in media and politics (Belajeva, 2018; Cheng & Lam, 2010, Iqba et al., 2020; Iskandar et al., 2018 Le, 2002; and Yin, 2007); however, more studies are required to better understand how HRVs are represented linguistically and ideologically in discourse, particularly newspaper discourse.

Therefore, this motivates researchers to examine the issue of HRVs in their studies. In this regard, Arif (2021) discusses the pro-government militias violation; Bali and Cere (2018) highlight the sectarian violence; Davis et al. (2018) and Sarac (2019) focus on the women's rights violations; Eriksson and Khaleel (2019) mention the HRVs against the protesters as one of the challenges of post-war recovery; Lovotti and Proserpio (2021) highlight the violations of the right to peaceful assembly. All of these researchers examined the HRVs in Iraq, the Iraqis' post-ISIS conditions in terms of their hopes and needs, and the media coverage of these violations. Despite exposing HRVs coverage in Iraq and the influence of political practices on media production, these researchers did not address the linguistic and ideological depiction of this influence. In other words, these researchers investigated HRVs in post-ISIS Iraq in the context of media and politics, without specifying how their ideology representation is carried out through language in media discourse.

This demonstrates the gap in the literature on HRVs concerning their linguistic and ideological representations in newspaper discourse. To address this gap, this study intends to employ CDA to explore the linguistic and ideological representations HRVs in post-ISIS Iraq in news articles published in two American online newspapers, namely, the Washington Post and New York Times. This is to comprehend the

significant and crucial relationship between socio-political concerns and this particular media discourse. This entails a discursive and critical analysis of macro and micro structures employed in such representation.

### **1.5 Research Objectives**

This study aims:

1. To define the macrostructure (themes) in selected online news reports of Washington Post and New York Times that pertain to post-ISIS human rights violations in Iraq.
2. To identify the microstructure (lexical, syntactic and rhetoric choices) in selected online news reports of Washington Post and New York Times that pertain to post-ISIS human rights violations in Iraq.
3. Investigating human rights violations post-ISIS Iraq ideologies of the Washington Post and New York Times online newspapers through semantic macrostructures and microstructures.

### **1.6 Research Questions**

The main question of the present study is: How violations to the Iraqi human rights in post-ISIS period are depicted linguistically and ideologically in the Washington Post and New York Times online newspapers? From this question, the following (sub- questions) are derived:

1. What are the macrostructures (themes) in selected online news reports of Washington Post and New York Times that pertain to post-ISIS human rights violations in Iraq?
2. What are the microstructures (syntactic, lexical, and rhetoric choices) in selected online news reports of Washington Post and New York Times that pertain to post-ISIS human rights violations in Iraq?

3. How the human rights violations in post-ISIS Iraq depiction ideologies are reflected in the Washington Post and New York Times through semantic macrostructures and microstructures?

### **1.7 Significance of the Study**

The current study is intended to contribute to the CDA literature in the discourse of media in general, and newspaper discourse in particular. It is envisaged that this study will provide insights into understanding political concepts and ideologies based on an evaluation of socio-political activities portrayed in newspaper discourse. According to Yin (2007), the effectiveness of news discourse relies on its ability to articulate certain practices and meanings, as well as to provide intertextual experiences that enable the audience to engage with new discourses. That is, the reader must first comprehend the referential and connotative/evaluative features of the significant meaning (of HRVs discourse), in order to engage with the discourse using an alternative frame of reference.

Most importantly, this study examines the textual elements (linguistically and ideologically) used in depicting the issue under study in the newspaper discourse. The present study investigates into how the Washington Post and New York Times online media describe HRVs. HRVs are the most pressing sociopolitical issues in Iraq, since the country's recapture from ISIS. Hence, the aim of this study is to shed more light on HRVs by revealing how they have been portrayed, linguistically and politically, in the Washington Post and New York Times online publications. Consequently, it is necessary for readers to think critically about media content (language), in order to identify the underlying objective of the writer and producer.

Furthermore, this study helps to draw attention to the significance of the language employed by news media producers, when discussing socio-political

concerns, as it serves an essential role in disclosing the producers' socio-cultural identities and beliefs (Fairclough, 2001). Language can influence thoughts, attitudes, and ideologies (Van Dijk, 2008). Therefore, critical language awareness can aid in the deconstruction of HRV texts, while also making readers aware of the HRV's vocabulary selections in the discourse. Thus, people concerned with media discourse and HRV concerns must understand the kind of messages deployed by discourse producers, and recognize the ways in which language use might affect their addressees.

Such comprehension will provide valuable insights to human rights discourse analysts seeking to resist language use and the effect of foreign media ideologies. As a result, it is envisaged that this research, through linguistic and ideological analysis, will raise readers' social consciousness regarding the representation of HRV concerns in newspaper discourse. Furthermore, it is critical to comprehend how news outlets, such as American online newspapers, present their positive "Self" (in-group) and negative "Other" (out-group) in selected stories. To summarize, the current study will play a role in determining the effect of sociopolitical practices on emphasizing or manipulating the sociopolitical issue, in order to persuade and influence the audience's sentiments toward certain events, such as HRVs.

### **1.8 Scope and Limitation of the study**

The study is limited to the linguistic representation of HRVs (violations of the freedom of peaceful assembly right) in the post-ISIS Iraq as reported in the Washington Post and New York Times online media. The rationale for selecting these American newspapers is based on numerous factors, including the fact that they are among the elite or high quality media in the United States and around the world, with major international publishing (Abed, 2015; Kalsi, 2017; Wu & Xiao, 2020). These

newspapers are among the most trusted news media by readers worldwide, in addition to their interest in reporting on human rights issues in various nations (Kalsi, 2017; Suzor et al., 2019). According to Suzor et al. (2019), these newspapers have ethical, social, and humanitarian responsibilities to their readers. The current study does not seek to compare these newspapers by identifying which one is right or wrong, in terms of their particular ideological viewpoints, but rather to explain how discourse meanings are reaffirmed and what socio-political impacts they may have on the audience.

Thus, the present study is limited to the Washington Post and New York Times online newspapers, with no interest in other newspapers or other American media genres published in English around the world.

The present study will examine the language employed in published articles from the Washington Post and New York Times online newspapers. Its goal is to investigate and determine the linguistic and ideological structures of depicting sociopolitical concerns in newspaper discourse. The study specifically tries to explore the function of linguistic structures in conveying socio-political themes in articles. This objective can be achieved by analyzing the macro and micro components of American newspaper discourse, which represent the main two levels of discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1980). The macrostructure is concerned with assigning the primary themes of the article or discourse, whereas the microstructure (linguistic choices: syntactic, lexical, and rhetoric) is concerned with accounting for the linguistic structure of the discourse. In terms of ideological analysis, the study will focus on the representation of "positive US" and "negative Others".

Among the several CDA approaches, Van Dijk's models (Macrostructure approach) (1980) and Ideological Square (1988) are used to reveal the ideological



stance of discourse by the Washington Post and New York Times online newspapers at the micro and macro levels. Wodak's approach (Discourse Historical Approach) is also adopted in the present study to capture any historical diachronic changes in discourse during the selected period of the study (2019), as this period is the peak coverage of HRVs in Iraq by the American newspapers.

### **1.9 Definitions of Terms**

This section deals with the definition of key terms that are pertinent and essential to this study.

**Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):** is a form of analytical discourse that studies how social power violence, dominance, and injustice are enacted, reproduced, and resisted in the social and political domains, through text and language. It is a theoretical and methodological approach to studying language and language use, with the goal of producing explicit units of language use systematic descriptions [...], known as discourse. With such dissident studies, critical discourse analysts take explicit condition, and therefore want to consider, reveal, and ultimately resist social inequality (Van Dijk, 1988, p. 24). The researcher in the present study will adopt Van Dijk's definition within its linguistic and ideological analysis to reveal the ideological presentations of HRVs embedded within the Washington Post and New York Times online newspaper discourse concerning post-ISIS Iraq era.

**Macrostructure:** Macrostructures are higher-level semantic or conceptual structures that organize the 'local' microstructures of discourse, interaction, and their cognitive processing, it defines the overall meaning of the text and account for important intuitive notions such as topic, theme, gist, upshot, and summary (Van Dijk, 1980). That is the present study is used this definition to determine the themes of the news

article about HRVs in post-ISIS Iraq era in the Washing Post and New York Times online newspapers.

**Microstructure:** is the local meaning of the text that consisting of the meanings of words, word groups, clauses, sentences, and sentence connections (Van Dijk, 2013). There are different structures at this level, among them are syntactic, lexical and rhetoric, these structures are used in this study to investigate the ideological use of language choices by the Washing ton Post and New York Times in reporting HRVs in post-ISIS Iraq era.

**Human Rights Violations (HRVs):** Anthonissen and Blommaert (2007, p.102) HRVs as harms inflicted on people by others or the state's regime, including severe torture, injuries, and death. Banerjee (2021) defines HRVs as violations of individuals' basic rights committed by the state or its representatives. The main human rights include, but are not limited to, the right to peaceful assembly, the right to free speech and expression, and the right to security. In this study, HRVs are violations of the right to peaceful assembly and free expression committed by the state or its representatives. Thus, present study will adopt Banerjee's definition to reveal the depiction of HRVs and the ideological presentations of positive "Self" and negative "Other" embedded within the the Washington Post and New York Times online newspaper discourse concerning human rights violation in post-ISIS Iraq era.

**Ideology:** shapes the social representations of a group's shared beliefs, thereby allowing new social opinions to be acquired, and at the same time transmitted in society, as its members experience new events and situations (Yaghoobi, 2009). In this regard, ideology usually refers to power, Van Dijk (2000, p. 25) "if there is one notion often related to ideology it is that of power".

**ISIS:** refer to an extreme jihadist group that declared itself to control parts of Iraq and Syria in June 2014. The group's goal is to "extend the (unrecognized) state's political power to all traditionally Muslim-inhabited regions of the world" (Declerck & Boone, 2016).

**Newspaper:** Academic American Encyclopedia (1989) defined it as a serial periodical distributed on a regular basis to inform, analyze, affect, and entertain citizens. Its classification depends on the time and frequency of its publication, its aims, circulation, edition process, and target audience (cited in Ali, 2017). This study concentrates on American newspapers, namely Washington Post and New York Times, in order to examine their representation of the human rights issues in post-ISIS Iraq in their discourse.

**Online Newspaper:** refer primarily to the websites produced by traditional print news organisations (Mitchelstein et al., 2015). Ağın et al., (2019) provide the same definition for the online newspaper as the online version of a newspaper, either as a stand-alone publication or as the online version of a printed periodical. That is, the online newspapers selected in this study are the online versions of the printed newspapers of the same news organisations of the Washington Post and the New York Times.

### **1.10 Outline of the Thesis**

The present thesis is divided into five chapters. **Chapter One** provides an overview of this study, and presents the statement of the problem, research objectives, and research questions. Then, it pinpoints the significance and the scope of the study. Alongside, some key terms are defined to ensure lucidity. **Chapter Two** provides literature on the relevant topics in this thesis including news media and its discourse, as well as language use in news discourse. It gives an overview, in terms of human

rights, freedom of peaceful assembly and association rights, as well as the human rights violations. Chapter Two also presents an explication of the theoretical framework adopted in this study. CDA and the main approaches, as well as ideology will be reviewed. Furthermore, there is a conclusion for the whole chapter at its end.

**Chapter Three** presents a complete explanation of the methodology followed to carry out the analytical part in this study. This chapter provides illustration for research design, the sample, data collection and analysis, issues of reliability and validity, and the ethical considerations. **Chapter Four** deals with the analysis of the Washington Post and New York Times news articles selected for the study, as well as the discussion of the findings, with reference to the Research Questions of this study. Conclusions reached in the current study will be presented, while recommendations and suggestions for further studies will be included in **Chapter Five**.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the theoretical basis of the present study, as well as the methodology used. It examines the news media, newspaper discourse, and its role in representing the powerful elite through media institutions. In addition, it provides an overview of CDA to illustrate the development of discourse analysis. Moreover, it addresses the methodologies employed by CDA, emphasizing their relevance and effectiveness in answering its queries. This chapter discusses the study's context (Iraq), including the sociopolitical background in Iraq, wars and conflicts in Iraq, and human rights in Iraq, as well as how the media reports on these issues.

#### **2.2 News Media**

The news media play a significant role in any society, since they reflect its political, social, and economic challenges. As a result, various research are carried out to evaluate their function and impact, particularly on public issues, such as human rights (Ali, 2018; Brandle, 2018; Maier, 2019; Nacos1 & Bloch-Elkon, 2018; Svensson & Gallo, 2020; Rudolph, 2019; Suzor et al., 2019; Wu & Xiao, 2020; Yin, 2007).

Since the 1960s, the term "news media" has been used to describe a variety of different media devices (Marvin, 1988). Initially associated with newspapers and periodicals, media grew as other media platforms were developed, such as television, radio, and the Internet. Van Dijk (1988) indicated that the news media is defined through three concepts: they present new information on entities, provide a visual or audio news program, and convey news reports on recent events in any media device. Today's news media, however, are communication technologies that enable or

facilitate user-to-user and user-to-information engagement (Enli, 2017). According to Enli (2017), the key element of the concept is that the one-to-many paradigm of traditional mass communication is being challenged by the prospect of many-to-many communication via the Internet.

According to Ali (2017), news media cover numerous social, political, economic, and religious events in any community because they are necessary in modern life. The reasoning behind this theory is that our understanding of significant public events is enhanced, mostly due to the fact that they are depicted in a more complex and dramatic manner, which influences people's perceptions and opinions. As a result, the news media is regarded as a source of knowledge about the world in which we live. People can learn about events occurring around them, through this window (Tsfati & Cohen, 2013). Others, however, define news media as an effective instrument for shaping public opinion and political behavior (Ophir et al., 2021; Leeper & Slothuus, 2018; Guardino, 2019).

In general, the media influences society through raising awareness of and gathering public opinion on subjects that are being discussed (Alireza & Samuel, 2012). Salgado (2018) concurred, adding that establishing a well-informed public with a shared sense of reality and agreement on the basic public interest becomes more difficult when facts are considered arbitrary. That is, media is the most effective and versatile vehicle of communication.

Chyi and McCombs (2004, p. 22) indicated that the function of news media is to “reframe the event by emphasizing different attributes of the event, consciously or unconsciously. The reason is to keep the story alive and fresh”. As a result, the function of the news media is to emphasize and draw attention to the event. In consequence, media sources necessitate a collaborative effort from those

responsible for reporting news, such as publishers, editors, journalists, and producers, during the communication process (Boykoff & Yulsman, 2013; Ophir et al., 2021). This supports the concept that not only facts, but also organizational and professional practices, are conveyed in the news (Ali, 2017).

### **2.3 Newspaper Discourse**

Although newspapers are considered old-fashioned news media, they continue to be one of the most important categories of news coverage and the most preferred media forms (Ali, 2017). Newspapers play a significant part in modern culture, due to the broad spectrum of topics they cover. Newspaper discourse has recently piqued the interest of critical analysis researchers, because articles in newspapers can be examined in order to reveal the underlying motives concealed beneath its discursive structure (Ali, 2017; Dezhkameh et al., 2021; Elyas & Al-Zahrani, 2019; Sadeghi et al., 2014).

The study of newspaper discourse has a rich history, with early research focusing on the development of news discourse in Early Modern Britain (Jucker, 2009). The emergence of 'newspaper studies' as an academic discipline began in 1930s Japan, which was influenced by the state's strategic use of information (Yoshimi, 2002). The evolution of discourse presentation in newspapers, particularly *The Times*, was then explored, revealing a shift towards more selective and direct forms of speech presentation (Jucker, 2014).

The language of the newspaper does more than simply relay the information that it expresses explicitly. According to Wodak (2001), language is an instrument of dominance and social power. Therefore, the language of newspaper discourse is an appropriate medium for revealing hidden ideologies that determine societal norms and values (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2001). Newspaper discourse is composed of an

array of structures, which editors and authors apply to profoundly entrench their beliefs, values, and attitudes in the minds of their readers (Van Dijk, 1988). As a result, CDA practitioners were compelled to study the relationship between text structures and implicit ideologies.

Newspapers were the main subject of investigation by many CDA researchers in different fields of social sciences, especially in relation to sociopolitical issues (Afzal, 2019; Salahshour, 2017; Roy, 2018), socio-economic issues (Dagtas, 2019; Kort, 2017; Moufahim, 2008; Stork, 2011), and politics (El-Nashar & Nayef, 2019; Hayes, 2016; Jamie & Gruffydd-Jones, 2019; Svensson & Gallo, 2020). Many other studies show the important role of newspapers in stating various political issues, such as human rights concerns (Davis, 2016; Kalsi, 2017; Maier, 2019; Nacos1 & Bloch-Elkon, 2018; Sobel, 2014).

Fowler (1991) stated that the media has a unique role in mediating ideology for the individual. Depending on economic and political conditions, newspapers play a prominent role in the dissemination of ideas. On the other hand, its function and expression are the formulation of a worldview. As diverse language choices is used in news discourses to reflect certain world realities, the function of newspaper discourse in shaping the representations and ideologies of certain groups exposes it to the process of critique (He & Zhou, 2015). According to Richardson (2007, p.1), journalistic discourse has certain distinctive textual qualities, as well as some very specific methods of text production and consumption. It is characterized by a specific set of interactions between itself and other symbolic and material power agencies.

The three sets of characteristics, as Richardson (2007) revealed, include the language of journalism, its production and consumption, and the relationship of journalism to societal ideas and institutions. These features are obviously



interconnected and can be difficult to separate at times. That is, distinguishing linguistic and semiotic characteristics of newspaper discourse are likely to be employed to promote the beliefs of the powerful group, while ignoring or downplaying those of the minorities (Richardson, 2007). Therefore, CDA has been applied when conducting media discourse analysis, in addition to other approaches. Based on Van Dijk's view (1998, p. 352), critical discourse analysis is a type of discourse-analytic study that examines how "social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted via speech and text in the social and political context."

The significance of newspaper discourse as a genre of text is related to its role in distributional power of the press to control what is featured and how, which Fowler (1996) refers to as 'selection' and 'transformation' respectively. In consequent, Richardson (2007) contended that the research on the complicated process of news production and selection in newspapers remain underdeveloped, in comparison to what is done in newspaper output. Due to this, it is difficult to achieve a thorough study of the topics, contents, and relations that govern the process of text production and transformation in newspaper discourse. This is one of the variables that makes the level of interpretation challenging (Richardson, 2007).

In summary, since various ideologies are integrated in news discourse, it is highly improbable that readers will notice the connotation hidden beneath the superficial language. Thus, critically analyzing newspaper discourse is an effective way for exploring the relationship between language and ideology (He & Zhou, 2015).

## **2.4 Language of Newspaper Discourse**

Newspaper articles are a typical type of written communication. Newspapers are one of the most commonly read types of printed texts due to its public nature and