

# An Investigation into Rohani's Meeting Coverage in Two English Daily Newspapers with a Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective: Tehran Times vs. Los Angeles Times

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**Abstract**—This study was an attempt to investigate the ideological differences between the discourse of Los Angeles Times and Tehran Times in representing Iran's Rouhani meeting at the U.N. To this end, 4 reports in relation to the Iran's Rouhani meeting at the U.N. were collected from the websites of two newspapers of Los Angeles Times and Tehran Times. The reports were grouped and analyzed. The articles were analyzed in terms of the utilized discursive strategies. Hence, the similarities and differences between the two newspapers in representing Iran's Rouhani meeting at the U.N. were discussed. It was shown that the Los Angeles Times heavily relied on Authoritative, Explanation, Evidentiality and Counterfactual discursive strategies and Tehran Times on Actor Description, Hyperbole, Lexicalization, Repetition and Situation Description discursive strategies.

**Index Terms**—critical discourse analysis, discursive strategies, ideology, micro-strategies, macro-strategies

## I. INTRODUCTION

News reporting involves a choice of lexical items, semantic and syntactic structures through which complex social issues are reproduced or even directed (Van Dijk, 1998). In effect, newspapers as authentic sources of language manipulation are the places in which different social and cultural issues are depicted.

In making use of newspapers either as a teaching material or as a source of information, the issue should be considered that the different events or phenomena are not usually (re)presented as they are in reality, but they are represented as particular version of reality (Reah, 2002). It means that the events being focused in journalistic activities have undergone different, sometimes paradoxical, linguistic 're-contextualization' in language through which the events were shown and identified differently by different writers based on the ideology and perspectives of diverse newspapers. Hence, the writers play with words or structures in visualising the events in order to influence the readers' angels of the events. Fowler (1991) argues that "news is not just a value- free reflection of facts. Anything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a particular ideological position" (p.101). In effect, few people are aware that the news is the mirror of the events. For example,

very few people would agree with the statement that: Women are weak and can have only limited number of roles, but they encounter this view expressed in newspapers without even challenging it, because this view and the likes are not clearly expressed, but hidden in the words, grammatical constructions and argumentation lines that the writers may employ (Reah, 2002, p. 71).

The aforementioned issues are related to the concepts of: manipulation, hidden ideology, hidden meanings, bias, power of language, discursive structures, etc. which are the main concepts in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA, according to Gee (2004), refers to "an approach to language analysis that considers texts as parts of specific social practices that have political implications about issues of status, solidarity, and of distribution of social goods and power" (pp. 32-33 cited in Ahmadian and Farahani 2014).

Hence, CDA is primarily concerned with discourse in forming and being formed by social and political practices (Fairclough, 2001). In effect, CDA aims to raise the readers' consciousness of the power of language to change the events and influence the perspectives of the readers in a particular way.

Using van Dijk's (2000) Socio-cognitive model, this study tries to reveal how Iran's Rouhani meeting at the U.N are represented in *Los Angeles Times* and *Tehran Times* and to investigate whether there is any bias in the representation of this issue in these two newspapers. It should be noted here that Iran's Rouhani meeting at the U.N is selected just as a social and political event which among other events has received more media attention in Iran and America during days this article was written. It is worth mentioning that, this study is not concerned with political issues and official

relationships between the two countries. Rather, it focuses on the role of language, on the power of language, on how language and its structures are manipulatively used by some in the society who has more access and control over discourse, and, finally, on the need of being more alert when using and encountering language in our daily life.

## II. BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Discourse analysis (DA) is an umbrella which consists of a number of methodological approaches deal with the way language is used in different disciplines, e.g. psychology, sociology, linguistics, anthropology and communication studies (Wiggins, 2009). Wiggins considers discourse analysis as an interdisciplinary approach which has "developed from work within speech act theory, ethnomethodology and semiology as well as post-structuralism theorists such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, and the later works of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein" (p. 427). Wiggins states that

Discourse analysis approaches are crucial for understanding human relationships because they focus primarily on interaction: how we talk to each other and the discursive practices (talking, writing) through which relationships develop, fall apart and so on. This entry covers central features of discourse analysis, methodological issues and some of the most commonly used versions of discourse analysis (Wiggins, 2009, p. 427).

Effectively, discourse analysis involves a number of approaches which are formed based on a set of theoretical assumptions—e.g. conversation analysis, discursive psychology, critical discourse analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis. It is worth mentioning that different approaches are positioned based on the data, the way they are explored, as well as based on the whatness and howness of the method utilized (Widdowson, 1998).

In order to have a better understanding of the concept of discourse analysis, three main orientations of discourse analysis is discussed—i.e. *discursive psychology*, *critical discourse analysis (CDA)*, and *interactional sociolinguistics*.

*Discursive psychology*, in effect, studies the "psychological concepts (such as emotions, attitudes and beliefs) in everyday interaction" (Wiggins, 2009, p. 429). *Critical discourse analysis (CDA)* is another orientations of discourse analysis which refers to a paradigm based upon broadly Marxist principles. *Interactional sociolinguistics* and the *ethnography of speaking*, on the other hand, deals with the "groups or communities of people) and the notion of speech genres" (Wiggins, 2009, p. 430). Considering the fact that critical discourse analysis was the focus of the present study; some sentences were devoted to this orientation of discourse analysis.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) as one of the orientations of discourse analysis clarifies "the relationship between discourse and power" (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 363). Widdowson (1998) views CDA as an instrument to manifest the implicit ideologies or perspectives which are covered in the texts. Gee (2004) emphasizes that CDA is a model to language analysis in which texts are considered "as parts of specific social practices that have political implications about issues of status, solidarity, and of distribution of social goods and power" (pp. 32-33). Effectively, CDA explores the texts "within a specific ideological system" (Heros, 2009, p. 173).

Hence, CDA is a paradigm for revealing the ideological performances which are realized through discourse. It means that CDA fight against the inequalities which are apparently naturalized which have led to the privileges, power and access to goods and services in society for elites and dominant people. Generally, critical discourse analysis has taken two orientations, i.e. linguistic analysis and texture one (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Garro Joseph, 2005). In effect, CDA is based on *Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)*—a linguistic theory which was developed mainly by M.A.K. Halliday in the U.K. during the 1960s.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### A. Corpus of the Study

The sources of data for this study were two daily English newspapers of *Los Angeles Times* and *Tehran Times* from which the articles covered the news of Rohani's meeting at the UN were selected during one month.

### B. Procedures

The following steps were taken in conducting the present study:

- ▶ Gathering news articles from the two newspapers of *Tehran Times* and *Los Angeles Times* which covered Rohani's meeting in the UN;
- ▶ Analyzing them in both headlines and content;
- ▶ Classifying different paragraphs of the articles based on the both macro- and micro-strategies;
- ▶ Tabulating the gathered data;
- ▶ Answering the raised question

## IV. RESULTS

On May 7, 2013 Rouhani was selected as the president of Iran. After which, he attended in the UN meeting which was held in New York. Considering that the USA and Iran have had many political problems, attendance of an Iranian President was appeared to be a milestone in the relations between the two countries. Hence, this phenomenon was represented differently in the two English Daily newspapers based on the perspectives of the two countries.

*Tehran Times* selected two headlines with the similar themes as follow:

Topic one: *Rouhani and Obama talk on phone, express will to resolve nuclear issue*

Topic Two: *Rouhani-Obama phone call focused on sanctions, nuclear issue: official*

The first topic was published on September 28, 2013 and the second one on September, 29, 2013.

The lead paragraph for the first report was:

*President Barack Obama and new Iranian President Hassan Rouhani spoke by telephone on Friday, the highest-level contact between the two countries in three decades and a sign that they are serious about reaching a pact on Tehran's nuclear program, Reuters reported.*

And the lead paragraph for the second report was:

*Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and U.S. President Barack Obama discussed ways to lift the sanctions imposed on Iran and Iran's nuclear program during their telephone conversation in New York on Friday, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said on Saturday.*

The headlines and the lead paragraphs were presented in which an event was reported, however it apparently carried the message that this event was a turning point in the relations between Iran and US during the last 30 years. The rest of the report can be divided into four parts: The first part which consists of paragraphs 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9 provide some details of the speech between the two presidents. The second part deals with the ideological stances of the phenomenon (paragraphs 2, 4, 8, 11, and 12); the third part is contributed to the political consequences of such a phenomenon especially on the prices of oil and the fourth part deals with the background knowledge of the relation between the two countries which the writer reminds that this phenomenon is, in effect, a milestone for the world.

Effectively, the report has started with the lead paragraph which is ideological and followed by the supporting details as well as ideological background paragraphs. Put it scientifically, the report is dominated with the strategies of *Explanation* and *Situation description*, and *repetition*, which emphasize on the crucial role of this phenomenon.

In paragraphs 2, 4, 8, 11 and 12 of this report, as mentioned above, the phone call between the two presidents was described as phenomenal. To this end, the micro strategies of *Consensus*, *Authority*, *Actor Description* and *Evidentiality* were utilized in which the significance of such a phenomenon is discussed. Effectively, the aforementioned strategies are paving the road for the *positive self-presentation* which is a macro-strategy. For example in the second paragraph it was written:

*The 15-minute call is the culmination of a dramatic shift in tone between Iran and the United States, which cut diplomatic relations with Iran a year after the 1979 revolution that toppled U.S. ally Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and led to the U.S. Embassy hostage crisis in Tehran.*

*"the culmination of a dramatic shift in tone between"*, emphasizes on the ideological perspective regarding a call phone which took place between the two presidents. Effectively this paragraph has resorted to the *Hyperbole (Rhetoric)* micro-strategy to develop its ideological point of view.

The next paragraph, i.e. paragraph three deals with some detail of the call happened between the two presidents in which the U.S. president talked about the subject of the call as follow:

*The U.S. president had hoped to meet with Rouhani at the UN General Assembly in New York this week, but the Iranian side decided an encounter was too complicated.*

The paragraph has, in effect, utilized the *Evidentiality (meaning, argumentation)*, *Explanation (meaning, argumentation)* and *Implication (meaning)*. For example the paragraph which states *"The U.S. president had hoped to meet with Rouhani at the UN General Assembly"* has utilized *Evidentiality (meaning, argumentation)* and *Explanation (meaning, argumentation)* micro-strategies or *"an encounter was too complicated"* resorting to the Norm expression ideological micro-strategy.

Paragraphs 5, 6 and 7 are the paragraphs which dealt with the details of the call between the two presidents. For example, the expression *"speaking to reporters, Obama said"* is apparently utilizing the *Explanation (meaning, argumentation)* micro-strategy or the paragraphs 6 and 7 are direct quotation which is shedding light on the *Evidentiality (meaning, argumentation)*, *Explanation (meaning, argumentation)* and *Authority* micro-strategies. Suppose the following paragraphs, i.e. paragraphs 6 and 7:

*"While there will surely be important obstacles to moving forward and success is by no means guaranteed, I believe we can reach a comprehensive solution," Obama said at the White House.*

*"The test will be meaningful, transparent, and verifiable actions, which can also bring relief from the comprehensive international sanctions that are currently in place" against Iran, Obama said.*

As the above two paragraphs show, *Evidentiality (meaning, argumentation)*, *Explanation (meaning, argumentation)* and *Authority* are the dominant micro-strategies utilized in forming the two paragraphs.

The eighth paragraph has interestingly quoted two expressions which shed light on the phenomenal nature of such a negotiation call.

*Rouhani, in his Twitter account, said that in the conversation he told Obama "Have a Nice Day!" and Obama responded with "Thank you. Khodahafez (goodbye)."*

For example, it states that the presidents expressed their enthusiasm utilizing the language of the other president in which *Rouhani* said *"Have a Nice Day!"* and *Obama* said *"Thank you. Khodahafez"*. These two expressions highlight the *Interaction and context* as well as *Consensus (political strategy)* micro strategies.

The next paragraph fulfills the previous paragraph and states positive attitudes of the two presidents for resolving the challenges exist between the two countries. The paragraph, effectively, utilizes direct quotation of Iranian's president. In fact, this paragraph has utilized the *Consensus (political strategy)*, *Hyperbole (Rhetoric)*, and *Repetition (rhetoric)*.

In paragraph 10, the writer made use of the discursive strategy of *Situation description (meaning)* and *Explanation (meaning, argumentation)* when he says "the price of oil fell on Friday as tensions eased between the United States and Iran after the Obama-Rouhani talk". In fact, the paragraph illustrates the side effect of such a phenomenon.

In the next paragraphs (paragraphs 11 and 12) discursive strategies of *Repetition (rhetoric)* as well as *History as lesson (topos)* and *Situation description (meaning)* were used.

Paragraph thirteen, on the other hand, deals with the opposite counterpart, i.e. the president of US which has utilized the discursive strategies of *History as lesson (topos)* and *Situation description (meaning)* as well as *hyperbole*. The next paragraph, i.e. paragraph fourteen highlights the discursive strategy of *Consensus (political strategy)* when it states "Iran's Supreme Leader has issued a fatwa against the development of nuclear weapons. President Rouhani has indicated that Iran will never develop nuclear weapons," Obama said.

In supporting the previous paragraph, paragraph fifteen uses a direct quotation from the US counterpart and utilizes the *repetition discursive strategy* when says "I have made clear that we respect the right of the Iranian people to access peaceful nuclear energy in the context of Iran meeting its obligations". In paragraph sixteen, the role of Israel on the relations between Iran and the US is emphasized. Effectively, paragraph sixteen utilizing *implication* discursive strategy emphasizes that the US follows Israel' intentions.

Finally, the last five paragraphs summarize the aforementioned issues along with the issues on which Iran and the US have different points of view. In fact, the last five paragraphs heavily rely on *Distancing*, *Example/Illustration*, *explanation* and *implication* discursive strategies. This issue should be noted that negative macro-strategies were repeatedly utilized in the speeches of US counterpart when addressing Iran's nuclear program. Effectively, this issue was highlighted by emphasizing that it is the responsibility of Iran to resolve the program and the US speaks on the angles of power.

It is worth mentioning that the second articles of *Tehran Times* on the similar headline followed the same strategies and trend.

Los Angeles Times, in a similar vein, has selected a headline to cover the phone talk between the two presidents. The headline was:

Headline: *Obama speaks by phone with Iran's president*

This headline was published on 27, September, 2013. This headline started with the following lead paragraph

*Ending three decades of official estrangement, President Obama spoke by telephone with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Friday and said he is hopeful the two countries can reach a deal to resolve the long diplomatic standoff on Iran's disputed nuclear program.*

The lead paragraph was started with a topicalization to highlight the significance of such a phenomenon. Furthermore, the nuclear program of Iran is interpreted as challenging. The paragraph, in effect, utilizing *presupposition*, *lexicalization* and *implication* discursive strategies stresses on the nuclear program of Iran. In fact, the leading paragraph is designed in such a way that it is Iran's behavior that is challenging and problematic. Hence, the leading paragraph is utilizing the macro-strategies of *positive-self representation* in which the US is positively represented and *negative-other representation* in which Iran is described implicitly.

The second paragraph of this reading passage is a direct quotation from Obama, the US president. Effectively, the paragraph has utilized the micro strategy of *Situation description (meaning)* when uses the expression "Obama said in televised remarks at the White House". Furthermore, the paragraph has utilized *Counterfactuals (meaning, argumentation)* micro strategy when states "while there will surely be important obstacles to move forward, and success is by no means guaranteed, I believe we can reach a comprehensive solution".

The third paragraph which is a supporting paragraph for the previous ones has utilized *Explanation (meaning, argumentation)* discursive strategy with the *hyperbole* one when it states "It was the first direct communication between American and Iranian presidents since the 1979".

The next paragraph, i.e. paragraph four is in completing the phone call between the two foreign ministers besides the presidents and utilizes the *Explanation (meaning, argumentation)* discursive strategy as you see in the example:

*The call followed a 30-minute, one-on-one meeting Thursday between Secretary of State John F. Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to discuss the nuclear issue, and conciliatory remarks by Rouhani at the U.N. and with American audiences, including comments that repudiated his predecessor's denial of the Holocaust.*

The fifth paragraph is a direct quotation, too. This paragraph is a direct quotation from the US president. This paragraph heavily relied on the *Counterfactuals (meaning, argumentation)* micro strategy along with the *hyperbole* when it states "Rouhani, who was elected in June" indicates the prospect of moving beyond that difficult history.

The other paragraphs also deal with the statements of the President of US which heavily resorted to the *Counterfactuals (meaning, argumentation)* micro-strategy as well as *context and interaction* along with *implication*. It is worth mentioning that all the paragraphs tried to use *positive-self representation* about US and Obama and *negative-other representation* about Iran and Rohani. Hence, the report is in such a way that Iran has resorted to the USA to resolve its nuclear problem.

The next article which was analyzed in this paper was a report selected from *Tehran Times* which had the headline:

**Headline:** *Rouhani says Iran expects to hear a 'consistent voice' from Washington.*

The headline implicitly argues that it is the USA which has the flip-flop behavior and claims. Hence, the headline is utilizing the *Evidentiality (meaning, argumentation)* as well as *Authority (argumentation)*.

This article was published on September, 25, 2013 with the following lead paragraph:

*Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has said that Iran is prepared to engage immediately in time-bound and result-oriented nuclear talks to build mutual confidence and removal of mutual uncertainties about Tehran's nuclear program with full transparency, but it expects to hear a consistent voice from Washington. Rouhani made the remarks during an address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Tuesday.*

The paragraph is, in effect, deploying the *positive-self presentation* and *negative-other representation*. It denotes that it is the USA that expresses each time a new claim. In fact, the report is deploying the *Actor description (meaning)* discursive-strategy when it states "*Iranian President Hassan Rouhani*" or *Counterfactuals (meaning, argumentation)* discursive strategy when it mentions "*but it expects to hear a consistent voice from Washington*". Furthermore, the last part of the paragraph is, in effect, *Situation description (meaning)* discursive strategy when it says "*during an address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Tuesday*".

The rest of the report is devoted to the direct quotation of the speech of Rohani in the UN. Hence, the rest of the report is heavily relied on the *Positive self-presentation (Semantic macro-strategy)*, *National self-glorification (meaning)*, *Lexicalization (style)*, *Implication (meaning)* and *Dramatization (Rhetoric)* discursive strategies. Effectively, this report is solely a political lecture in which *exaggeration* and *lexicalization* are heavily utilized. For example, in this report, it is stated that

*The recent elections in Iran represent a clear, living example of the wise choice of hope, rationality and moderation by the great people of Iran.*

It is an example of the utilized *Categorization (meaning)*, *Hyperbole*, and *Example* discursive strategies. Also when it states

*The firm belief of our people and government in enduring peace, stability, tranquility, peaceful resolution of disputes and reliance on the ballot box as the basis of power, public acceptance and legitimacy, has indeed played a key role in creating such a safe environment.*

The *hyperbole* and *categorization (meaning)* discursive strategies are heavily deployed. Furthermore, the report is vastly utilizing *lexicalization* discursive strategy when it states "*this sensitive juncture in the history global relations, the age of zero-sum games is over*" or when it mentions "*this propagandistic discourse has assumed dangerous proportions through portrayal and inculcation of presumed imaginary threats*".

## V. DISCUSSION

This study was an attempt to answer the research question "how do the different ideological perspectives are depicted in the discourse of *Los Angeles Times* and *Tehran Times* dealing with Iran's president Rouhani meeting at the U.N.?"

To this end, four articles in relation to this subject were gathered from the websites of the two newspapers and were analyzed which resulted into some differences. Effectively, it was revealed that the two newspapers are representing the *Disclaimer (meaning)* strategy which refers to "the combination of the ideologically based strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation" (Van Dijk, 2000, p.67). In fact, the two newspapers try to represent their own perspective positively and others negatively. In other words, the *Los Angeles Times* depicted the politics and behaviors of the United States of America as well as Israel positively; whereas, this newspaper published its articles in such a way that Iran's intention is deceitful and dishonest. Furthermore, the *Tehran Times*, in a similar vein, depicts Iran's intention and politics as the honest one; whereas, this is the USA that shows flip-flop behaviors.

It was also revealed that the *Los Angeles Times* heavily relied on *Authoritative*, *Explanation*, *Evidentiality* and *Counterfactual* discursive strategies. Furthermore, it was found that *Tehran Times* has dominantly utilized *Actor Description*, *Hyperbole*, *Lexicalization*, *Repetition* and *Situation Description* discursive strategies. Hence, the results of the study are in harmony with Mahfouz (2013, p. 309) in which the reports are developed "with the beliefs held by the two newspaper's target audiences".

The findings of this study also support Ghannam's (2012) findings which emphasize that different newspapers have deployed diverse and opposing political ideologies through manipulating language. Hence, language is an instrument which is purposely manipulated to meet the hidden interpretation the newspapers expect. In addition, the results of the study highlight the significance of teaching news and newspapers' articles. Hence, the findings of the study are in harmony with Fowler's (1991, p. 10) argument that

Institutions of news reporting and presentation are socially, economically and politically situated, all news is always reported from some particular angle. The structure of the medium encodes significances which derive from the respective positions within society of the publishing or broadcasting organizations. Effectively, newspapers need to be considered purposeful sources of broadcasting in which different news and reports are presented and interpreted based on ideological perspective and biases of the newspapers. Van Dijk (2000, p. 34) points out that:

The ideology of news reporting is not only limited to content and style of news reports, but imbues all aspects of news gathering, attending to sources, interaction with other journalists as well as news actors, and the organization of

the professional activities of journalists (meetings, deadlines, etc.). Professional as well as other social (gender, ethnic, class, age, etc.) ideologies of journalists fundamentally control who will be searched for, who will be covered, listened to, interviewed, or cited.

Accordingly, it was revealed that the two newspapers have utilized different types of discursive strategies to represent Iran's Rouhani meeting at the U.N. and the relations between US and Iran with some traces of favoritism. Hence, the two newspapers "function to legitimate domination, articulate resistance in relationships of power" (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 115).

In fact, the two newspapers have deployed a vast variety of discursive strategies to represent different outlooks. Hence, the two newspapers are apparently representing Iran's Rouhani meeting at the U.N. with nearly significant divergence. Hence, the two newspapers have represented this issue differently based on their ideological perspective.

In effect, the two newspapers have utilized self-positive representation and negative-other representation based on their ideological perspectives. More generally, the findings of this study corroborate earlier findings of Koosha and Shams (2005), Ghiasian (2006), KhosraviNik (2008), Atai and Adriani (2009), and Yaghoobi (2009), among many other studies conducted in a CDA framework, about the biased representation of events and social groups in newspapers. The results of this study also lend supports to van Dijk's (2000) belief that "discourses express, confirm, instantiate or constitute ideologies" (p. 86 cited in Ahmadian and Farahani 2014) and to the fact that ideologies are injected in discourse by the use of different kinds of discursive strategies like the ones which are included in van Dijk's framework.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The results of the study showed that the two newspapers have utilized different types of discursive strategies to represent Iran's Rouhani meeting at the U.N. and the relations between the US and Iran with some traces of favoritism. Hence, the two newspapers have deployed a vast variety of discursive strategies to represent different outlooks. In effect, the two newspapers have utilized self-positive representation and negative-other representation based on their ideological perspectives.

More generally, the findings of this study are in harmony with the findings of Koosha and Shams (2005), Ghiasian (2006), KhosraviNik (2008), Atai and Adriani (2009 cited in Ahmadian and Farahani 2014), and Dowlatabadi (2014), among many other studies conducted in a CDA framework, about the biased representation of events and social groups in newspapers.

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