

Depiction of Iran's Nuclear Activities through Argumentative Strategies: The Case of the New York Times

Nafiseh Hosseinpour

Department of English Language, Falavarjan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

Hossein Heidari Tabrizi

Department of English Language, Khorasgan (Isfahan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

Abstract—The present research aimed at investigating the ways in which the argumentative strategies of advantage, disadvantage, threat, reality, and history have been applied to portray the issue of Iran's nuclear program, actors, actions and events. To this end, a critical discourse analysis approach mainly based on Wodak's discourse-historical approach was applied to 55 editorials of the New York Times, all dealing exclusively with Iran's nuclear program. The results showed that the differential treatment given to the issue at hand was in line with the advocated policy of the paper to impose more sanctions on Iran to force the country to accept a comprehensive nuclear deal.

Index Terms—critical discourse analysis, discourse-historical approach, Iran's nuclear program, New York Times, argumentative strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

Inspired by critical discourse analysis, this study attempts to investigate the ideological portrayal of U.S. policies toward Iran's nuclear program in the editorial section of an American newspaper, the New York Times (hereafter the NYT). The study focuses on whether the argumentative strategies contribute to a biased representation of Iranian nuclear activities. Ideology is defined here as 'the mental frameworks, language, concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and systems of representations that different groups use to understand and explain the workings of society' (Hall, 1996, p.2). More significantly, ideologies are considered to function as 'the basis of dominant group's practices which justify, legitimate, or condone particular forms of power relations' (van Dijk, 1991, 2006, 2008).

Studying editorials is especially significant when analyzing the ideological role of news media because editorials are expressions of the broad ideological policies of the newspaper's owners and managers (Bilal et. al, 2012). Unlike news discourse, editorials are conversations among a society's economic and power elites' (Henry & Tator, 2002, p.93). Critical discourse analysis is considered to be a tool for analyzing the ideologies of mass media for identifying social, economic, and historical power relations between dominant and subordinate groups (van Dijk, 1991, 1992, 1993; Wodak, 2001; Henry & Tator, 2002; Caldas-Coulthard, 2003; van Leeuwen, 2009). According to Herman and Chomsky (2002), mass media forms people's norms and beliefs based on the social, political, and economic interests dominating the public. Thus, the media manages the public opinion to support the social interests of the leaders and society's dominant ideology. The dominant ideology also tends to compel the rival beliefs, values, and worldviews that challenge the society's worldview (Knight & Dean, 1982). According to Wodak (2001), politicians as specific, not homogeneous group of elites, are shapers of specific public opinions that not only reflect anticipation of changes in public opinions, but also articulation of changing interests of specific social groups. So, the relationships between media, politics, and people are very complex. As Wodak (2001) claims, only interdisciplinary research will be able to make such complex relationships more transparent including discourse-historical approach as one form of CDA.

One of the most remarkable issues of the last ten years or so has undeniably been Iran's nuclear program. Different media have given various reporting to and interpretation of it. Alongside the political struggle between Iran and the west, there has been a verbal contention over this concern with some voices trying to account for Iran's nuclear activities and others seeking to represent it as an act of disobedience. A few studies have focused on this issue so far (Izadi & Saghayie-Biria, 2007; Atai & Rezaie, 2009; Jones, 2010; Rasti & Sahragard, 2012; Rashidi & Rasti, 2012; Atai & Mozaheb, 2013). Inspired by discourse-historical approach, this study investigates the argumentative strategies through which the NYT, an American elite newspaper, tries to rationalize the bias against Iran's nuclear activities. "Within the argumentation theory, 'topoi' or 'loci' can be described as parts of argumentation that belong to the obligatory, either explicit or inferable, premises. According to Keimpointner (1992), they are content-related warrants or 'conclusion rules' that connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion, the claim. As such, they justify the transition from

the argument or arguments to the conclusion” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p.75). Inspired by Wodak’s discourse-historical approach and argumentation theory, the following questions are advanced:

- 1) How are the argumentative strategies (topoi) implemented to portray events, agents, and policies about the Iran’s nuclear program?
- 2) How do the political changes (i.e. American and Iranian presidential elections) influence the application of topoi in representing Iran’s nuke activities?

II. POLITICO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF IRAN’S NUCLEAR PROGRAM

Iran has had a nuclear program for nearly 50 years beginning with a research reactor purchased from the U.S. in 1959 (Squassoni, 2006, p.1). The country ratified the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1970. The treaty is an attempt to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and its technology, to promote the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and to advance the achievement of general and complete disarmament’ (International Atomic Energy Agency, 1970).

After the Iranian revolution in 1979, a West German company which had undertaken the accomplishment of Bushehr nuclear plant repudiated the contract, and Iran’s attempts to finish the project came to grief (Rasti & Sahragard, 2012, p.733). The eight-year war with Iraq (Iran’s western neighbour) just two years after the revolution halted the resumption of nuclear sites.

After the war, an opposition group (the National Council of Resistance of Iran) in August 2002 made known that Iran was practicing ‘undeclared nuclear activities’ (Squassoni, 2006). George W. Bush aligned Iran with an ‘axis of evil’ in his 2002 State of the Union address. Ever since Iran’s nuclear program has been in the foreground, with the West trying to restrict the country’s nuclear capabilities, and Iran insisting time and time again on the peaceful nature of its nuclear activities.

Since 2003, IAEA Board of Governors and the EU-3 (France, Germany and the United Kingdom) undertook diplomatic negotiations with Iran about its nuclear program. On the question of whether Iran had a hidden nuclear weapons program, the IAEA’s November (2003, p.10) report states that “it found no evidence that the previously undeclared activities were related to a nuclear weapons program, but also that it was unable to conclude that Iran’s nuclear program was exclusively peaceful”.

In Nov, 2004, based on ‘Paris Agreement’, Iran agreed to suspend uranium enrichment in exchange for renewed trade talks (Squassoni, 2006). In August 2005, after the June election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as Iran’s President, the country removed seals on its uranium enrichment equipment in Isfahan, which UK officials termed a violation of the Paris Agreement. Russia, China, and the U.S. joined the EU-3 and ‘P5+1’ formed in 2006. They intended to pursue Iran to suspend uranium enrichment through a combination of incentives and economic sanctions (Squassoni, 2006). Afterwards, a set of sanctions were imposed by U.N. Security Council including resolutions 1696, 1737, 1747, 1803, and 1835.

After inauguration of President Obama, the U.S. and its allies announced, in July 2009, the need for constructive proposals by Iran otherwise it would face ‘crippling sanctions’ (Squassoni, 2006). Afterwards, sanctions and sabotage were employed by international community to impede Iran’s nuclear program (Kerr, 2012). According to Katzman (2015), the U.S. has employed covert actions such as Stuxnet computer virus that damaged many Iranian centrifuges as well as the killings of some Iranian nuclear scientists in order to slow down Iran’s program.

In February 2010 the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced that Iran was a nuclear state. IAEA officials confirmed it has enriched uranium ‘up to 19.8%’ and issued a report scolding Iran “for failing to explain purchases of sensitive technology as well as secret tests of high-precision detonators and modified designs of missile cones to accommodate larger payloads” (IAEA, 2010, p.9). In April 2010, Tehran Declaration was signed by Iran, Brazil, and Turkey by which Iran agreed to send 2,600 pounds of uranium to Turkey in exchange for medically reprocessed uranium (Squassoni, 2006).

In June 2013, Hassan Rouhani won the Iranian presidential election. P5+1 leaders declared that his election improved the possibility for a nuclear settlement (Katzman, 2015). In Nov 2013, the Geneva interim agreement, officially titled the Joint Plan of Action, was signed between Iran and the P5+1 countries. It consisted of a temporary freeze of portions of Iran’s nuclear program in replace of decreased economic sanctions on Iran, as the countries were expected to achieve a long-term agreement. It represented the first formal agreement between the United States and Iran in 36 years. On Nov, 2014, the talks have been extended to finalize a comprehensive accord by June 30 (Katzman, 2015).

III. METHOD

The methodology of this research is critical discourse analysis. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses are carried out. The decision is justified by a more in-depth analysis of the relevant data. As such, excerpts of the data are provided with the purpose of thick analysis.

A. Sample

The data for the analysis in this study came from an American newspaper, the New York Times. It is an elite newspaper and among the largest media outlet in the U.S. Moreover, the NYT serves as intermedia for other news sources with regard to the coverage of international issues (Golan, 2006). A collection of 55 editorials published from

January 2010 to April 2015 was selected for the study. They were all on the subject of Iran's nuclear program. The data was accessed through the newspaper's website. The search key words were Iran's nuclear program. The search yielded a total of 259 articles. The focus then was narrowed down to the most relevant articles regarding the time period of 2010-2015 which resulted in a collection of 55 articles.

B. Data Analysis

The data was analyzed based on the argumentative strategies (topoi) of advantage, disadvantage, threat, reality, and history proposed by Reisigl and Wodak (2001). According to topos of advantage or usefulness, "if an action will be useful then one should perform it". This topos is categorized into three subtypes which include 1) to the advantage of all, 2) to the advantage of us, and 3) to the advantage of them (p.75). Based on the topos of uselessness or disadvantage, "if existing situation or rulings do not help to reach the declared aim, they have to be changed" (p.75). Topos of threat or danger states that "if there are specific dangers and threats, one should do something against them" (p.77). Topos of reality can be paraphrased as: "the necessity of an action because the reality is as it is" (p.79). According to topos of history, "one should perform or omit a specific action in specific situation comparable with the historical example referred to". In what follows some notable instances of each topos (i.e. argumentative strategy) are presented accompanied by the discussion of the purposes they serve. The discussion is enlightened by considering the effects of two important political events: 1) American presidential election in 2012 and 2) Iranian presidential election in 2013.

IV. RESULTS

A. Topos of Advantage or Usefulness

The application of topos of advantage (see table I) consisted of two subcategories: first, those that were advantageous to us (U.S. and its allies) representing different means through which U.S. and its allies had tried to achieve their goal, halting Iran nuclear activity. The following extracts are typical of many ways employed by the newspaper to show the decisions made by president Obama like imposing tough sanctions on Iran and his attempts to persuade other countries to cooperate in what was assumed to be useful to us. The main point was achieving the goal through any possible ways such as sanctions, oil embargo, assassination, bombing, and cyber attacks, with no respect to such things as human rights or justice.

Excerpt 1

If there is any good news in the I.A.E.A. report, it appears that Iran's enrichment program is not advancing as fast as many feared — the result of the Stuxnet computer virus and sanctions that make it harder for Tehran to import needed materials from overseas. (NYT, June, 12, 2011)

Second subcategory is the one advantageous to them (i.e. Iran) that is engaging in negotiations over its nuclear activities and accepting to stop enriching uranium in order to get free of the imposed sanctions. As it is shown in the excerpts, our advantage (i.e. U.S. and its allies) is supposed to be in direct opposition to their advantage (i.e. Iran) which creates an 'us' versus 'them' ideological dichotomy.

Excerpt 2

Negotiators offered fuel for a medical reactor and aircraft replacement parts if Iran agreed to stop enriching uranium to 20 percent purity — near bomb grade — send its stockpile out of the country for fabrication into fuel rods and shut the underground facility at Fordo where the 20 percent enrichment is taking place. (NYT, June, 21, 2012)

The 'us' vs. 'them' dichotomy was still observable but to a milder degree from 2012 to 2013, since both countries were busy dealing with their presidential elections. With the re-election of president Obama, the same story of imposing international sanctions continued. The key influential event seemed to be the Iranian prospective presidential election which caused mild modifications in American policies toward Iran with the purpose of helping opposition groups in Iran to get around the government to have a better contact with each other and the outside world including America. Although this was presented as an advantage to 'them' (i.e. Iran), it was in fact considered to be more beneficial to 'us'.

Excerpt 3

The talks ground to a halt last June, as the Iranian issue became mired in the American presidential campaign. But now that Mr. Obama has won a second term he seems more willing to join Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China in shaping a deal that is more likely to get Iran to curb its nuclear work. (NYT, March, 1, 2013)

Excerpt 4

The administration has kept up the pressure by tightening sanctions. Once the (Iran) election is over, it also needs to step up diplomatic efforts, testing through intermediaries if there is any willingness by the new president. (NYT, June, 13, 2013)

The dichotomy seemed paler from 2013 to 2014 and was replaced by the advantage to 'public' (i.e. both 'us' and 'them'), although the advantage of 'them' was explicitly shown to be dependent on the advantage of 'us' with the purpose of reaching a permanent agreement with Iran on its nuke activities. Moreover, it was believed that the interim agreement was the result of American imposed sanctions.

Excerpt 5

Layers of sanctions, imposed separately since 2006 by the United Nations Security Council, the United States and Europe, have been largely responsible for moving Iran to the point of serious negotiations..... the proposal on offer seems reasonable for each side. It would freeze major parts of Iran's program for six months and allow some relief on sanctions, including access to about \$10 billion in Iran's frozen assets, while a more permanent deal is discussed. (NYT, Nov, 15, 2013)

After the interim agreement of 2013 which was focused on from 2014 to 2015, other useful actions were introduced as well including a) suspending some of the sanctions on Iran, b) extending the diplomatic negotiations between Iran and P5+1, c) bilateral Iran-U.S. talks, and d) preliminary framework agreement. Furthermore, as it came closer to the deadline for negotiations, unity of American officials was regarded as the most useful policy.

Excerpt 6

The preliminary agreement between Iran and the major powers is a significant achievement that makes it more likely Iran will never be a nuclear threat. President Obama said it would "cut off every pathway that Iran could take to develop a nuclear weapon." (NYT, April, 2, 2015)

TABLE I.
DISTRIBUTION OF TOPOS OF ADVANTAGE

Topos of advantage	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
1. imposing tough sanctions on Iran	2 10.52%	4 21.05%	7 36.84%	5 26.31%	1 5.26%	0 0%	19 100%
2. military option against Iran	0 0%	0 0%	1 50%	1 50%	0 0%	0 0%	2 100%
3. cooperation of major powers and world nations with US	1 8.33%	2 16.66%	1 8.33%	2 16.66%	3 25%	3 25%	12 100%
4. campaign of assassination, bombing, and cyber attack	0 0%	0 0%	2 50%	1 25%	1 25%	0 0%	4 100%
5. diplomatic negotiations	0 0%	0 0%	3 7.89%	15 30.94%	10 26.31%	10 26.31%	38 100%
6. incentives proposal to Iran	1 3.70%	1 3.70%	5 19.23%	5 19.23%	6 23.07%	9 30.76%	27 100%
7. interim agreement	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	4 36.36%	7 63.63%	11 100%
8. suspending sanctions on Iran	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	6 50%	6 50%	12 100%
9. transparent nuclear activities of Iran	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	3 37.5%	2 25%	3 37.5%	8 100%
10. unity of American officials	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 25%	3 37.5%	3 37.5%	8 100%
11. extending talks	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	3 75%	1 25%	4 100%
12. comprehensive nuclear deal	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	8 44.44%	10 55.55%	18 100%
13. preliminary framework agreement	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	5 100%	5 100%

B. Topos of Disadvantage or Uselessness

As illustrated in table II, topos of disadvantage implemented from 2010 to 2012 revealed the ideological dichotomy of 'us' vs. 'them' but of a different nature. What considered to be useless to 'us' were a) the military option against Iran since it would produce anti-American reflections around the world and result in a delay in Iran nuke activities instead of finalizing it. Moreover, it was believed that military strike could rally Iranians around their government; b) the inadequacy of such countries as China, India, Turkey, and United Arab Emirates since they didn't stop their business affair with Iran, and c) participation of UN and 120 other countries in Nonaligned Movement meeting in Tehran since it gave Iran the propaganda opportunity to defend its nuclear program.

Excerpt 7

the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff told reporters on Sunday that while military "options would cause delay" to Iran's nuclear program, "that doesn't mean the problem is going to go away". (NYT, April, 9, 2010)

Excerpt 8

China has yet to sufficiently crack down on the Chinese firms that still do business with Iran's sanctioned entities. Turkey, India and the United Arab Emirates, a major hub for Iranian commerce, are still too cozy with Tehran. (NYT, June, 13, 2011)

TABLE II.
DISTRIBUTION OF PHOTOS OF DISADVANTAGE

Topos of disadvantage	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
1. imposing tougher sanctions on Iran	2 9.09%	2 9.09%	2 9.09%	8 36.36%	4 18.18%	4 18.18%	22 100%
2. no commitment of such countries as Brazil, Turkey, Russia, and China with sanctions	3 33.33%	4 44.44%	2 22.22%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	9 100%
3. Economic consequences of sanctions to Iran	1 5.88%	3 17.64%	3 17.64%	3 17.64%	3 17.64%	4 23.52%	17 100%
4. Iran foreign policies toward regional countries such as Syria	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 16.66%	7 58.33%	3 25%	12 100%
5. military options against Iran	1 4.76%	2 9.52%	6 28.57%	3 14.28%	4 19.04%	5 23.80%	21 100%
6. failure of negotiations	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	6 42.85%	4 28.57%	4 28.57%	14 100%
7. Congress opposition to president Obama	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	3 20%	3 20%	9 60%	15 100%
8. Prime minister Netanyahu's policies toward Iran	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	5 29.41%	6 35.29%	6 35.29%	17 100%
9. rejecting a permanent agreement	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	6 27.27%	8 36.36%	8 36.36%	22 100%

On the other hand, topos of disadvantage to 'them' consisted of a) imposing tougher sanctions on Iran and b) lengthening of the negotiation procedure, since it could damage Iran's economy drastically. However, with the beginning of a new round of talks after the re-election of President Obama (Nov, 2012) before the presidential election of Iran (June, 2013), it seemed useless to impose tougher sanctions on Iran as it could harm the probable negotiated deal.

After the election of President Rouhani, and with the emergence of crisis in Syria, what was mentioned as being unfavourable to 'us' consisted of such issues as a) imposing tougher sanction on Iran since it could send away Iran from negotiation and put America under international blame, and b) Iran policies toward Syria with its possible threat to Israel (i.e. America's ally). On the other hand, rejecting a permanent agreement with the West was assumed to be highly disadvantageous to Iran (i.e. them). It can be clearly inferred that our disadvantage (the west) considered to be superior to their disadvantage (Iran). So, the dichotomy was still observable. After the interim agreement, the disadvantages to both us and them were considered to be a) failure of diplomatic negotiations, b) Israel extremist policies toward Iran, c) congress opposition to president Obama's policies, and d) rejecting a permanent deal.

C. Topos of Danger or Threat

The argumentative strategy of threat (see table III) implemented in the 2010-2012 time duration fell into three subcategories. a) There was an attempt to display the threatening side of Iran's nuclear program which was expected to result in nuclear warhead production; although, none of them proved the existence of such nuclear weapons and just their possibility of production was discussed. b) Iran's threat to shut the strait of Hurmoz, and to retaliate the death of its nuclear scientists were represented as a danger to the West. c) The threat of Israel attack to Iran was mentioned as a sign of disagreement between Mr. Obama and Mr. Netanyahu just before the American presidential election. To cool it down, then it was claimed that Iran had not been on the verge of producing a weapon and that the United Nations inspectors would warn before it got to that point, which was in sharp contrast with what they had claimed before about the level of nuclear activities in Iran.

Excerpt 9

The latest report from the International Atomic Energy Agency is a chilling reminder of both the scale of Iran's nuclear ambitions and the lengths it will go to cover up the truth. The agency expressed strong concern about Iran's "past or current undisclosed nuclear related activities" with "possible military dimensions." (NYT, Sep, 16, 2011)

Excerpt 10

Tehran's nuclear ambitions are clearly dangerous to Israel and the region. But the administration argues that Iran is not on the verge of producing a weapon and that the United Nations inspectors will provide warning before it gets to that point. (NYT, Aug, 27, 2012)

Due to the re-election of president Obama and more emphasis on Iranian presidential election, a shift of focus occurred to emphasize other challenges and possible dangers of Iran to the west and specially Israel. Iran was regarded as a threat to Israel not only because of its nuke activities, but also because of its support of Hezbollah and president Bashar al-Assad of Syria. Moreover, the direction of threat had been changed to target Iran's interim agreement in an attempt to make Iran aware of the dangers of rejecting the permanent agreement with major powers on its nuclear activities.

Excerpt 11

No country feels more threatened by Iran than Israel, and its prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, is clearly unhappy with the American-Iranian thaw. In addition to having a nuclear program, Iran is the main backer of Hezbollah and has provided arms and fighters to President Bashar al-Assad of Syria. (NYT, Sep, 28, 2013)

Excerpt 12

After the interim agreement (2013), some other threats were added including the failure of diplomatic negotiations which would in turn lead to other dangers such as imposing tougher sanctions or military attacks. On the other hand, American congress policies were considered as another threatening source.

Excerpt 13

The best and only practical way to restrain Iran from developing a bomb is through negotiating a strict agreement with tough monitoring. In rejecting diplomacy, the Republicans make an Iranian bomb and military conflict more likely. (NYT, March, 11, 2015)

TABLE III.
DISTRIBUTION OF TOPOS OF DANGER

Topos of threat	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
1. Iran's production of nuclear warheads	1 4.54%	5 22.72%	3 13.63%	3 13.63%	5 22.72%	5 22.72%	22 100%
2. Iran's threat to the region specially Israel	1 4.16%	4 16.66%	6 25%	3 12.50%	4 16.66%	6 25%	24 100%
3. Israel's military attack to Iran	0 0%	1 5.88%	7 41.17%	2 11.76%	2 11.76%	6 35.29%	17 100%
4. imposing tougher economic sanctions in case of failure of agreement	0 0%	0 0%	1 10%	3 30%	3 30%	3 30%	10 100%
5. failure of negotiations	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	12 75%	2 12.5%	2 12.5%	16 100%
6. Congress political activities	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	3 16.66%	5 27.77%	10 55.55%	18 100%

D. Topos of Reality

Throughout the periods under the study, what has been expressed repeatedly as a matter of reality was Iran's decision to produce nuclear bombs and uranium enrichment to a near bomb grade. It was argued that the least dangerous way is to put Iran under economic pressure through different sorts of sanctions internationally. To this end, international agreement with imposing sanction on Iran made this decision a more reasonable one. Nevertheless, Russia and China were represented as Iranian partners separated from international community temporarily from 2010 to 2012.

Excerpt 14

While Russian and Chinese leaders told Mr. Obama that they will work seriously on new sanctions, diplomats say their representatives are already seeking ways to elude any resolutions. (NYT, April, 19, 2010)

Excerpt 15

The report is chillingly comprehensive. It says that Iran created computer models of nuclear explosions, conducted experiments on nuclear triggers and did advanced research on a warhead that could be delivered by a medium-range missile. (NYT, Nov, 9, 2011)

Table IV illustrates the strategies applied in this section. As it is shown, after Iranian presidential election (2013), a shift of focus emerged in the application of topos of reality. From then on, the changes in Iran's foreign diplomacy in addition to the inefficiency of the sanctions to slow down Iran's nuclear program were presented to persuade the public opinion to believe in the supremacy of diplomatic negotiations.

However, other political challenges with Iran, Israel's demand for complete dismantlement of nuclear activities, congress insistence on imposing tougher sanctions, and disagreement of Saudi Arabia with nuclear deal were presented as other matters of reality shackling the process of negotiations with Iran. Finally, it was concluded that sanctions and several round of negotiations had not produced positive results. Therefore, it conveyed to the readers' mind that since all possible diplomatic ways are tested, if Iran doesn't accept a nuclear deal, what remains might be the military option.

Excerpt 16

It is disappointing that recently toughened sanctions and several rounds of negotiations have not produced positive results. (NYT, Aug, 27, 2013)

Excerpt 17

America and its allies are right to be sceptical, but the only rational course is to test Iran's intentions through negotiations....Congress can always impose more sanctions then. (NYT, Nov, 15, 2013)

Excerpt 18

Mr. Netanyahu has two main objections. One is that an agreement would not force Iran to dismantle its nuclear facilities Two, that a deal to severely restrict Iran's ability to produce nuclear fuel for a decade or more is not long enough.... Despite his commitment to negotiations, President Obama has repeatedly said he would never let Iran obtain a nuclear weapon and if an agreement is not honored, he would take action to back up his warning. (NYT, March, 3, 2015)

Excerpt 19

Sunni Arab nations and Israel are deeply opposed to any deal, fearing that it would strengthen Iran's power in the region... Iran is widely seen as a threat; whether it can get beyond that will depend on whether its leaders choose to be less hostile to its neighbors, including Israel. (NYT, April, 2, 2015)

TABLE IV.
DISTRIBUTION OF TOPOS OF REALITY

Topos of reality	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
1. possibility of producing nuclear bombs by Iran	1 5.55%	4 22.22%	4 22.22%	3 16.66%	3 16.66%	3 16.66%	18 100%
2. uranium enrichment to a near-bomb grade	3 17.64%	3 17.64%	7 41.17%	2 11.76%	1 5.88%	1 5.88%	17 100%
3. effectiveness of sanctions	4 11.11%	2 5.55%	6 16.66%	8 22.22%	8 22.22%	8 22.22%	36 100%
4. agreement of other countries to impose sanctions on Iran	9 64.28%	2 14.28%	1 7.14%	0 0%	1 7.14%	1 7.14%	14 100%
5. cooperation of Russia and China with Iran	3 37.5%	4 50%	1 12.5%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	8 100%
6. Israel's military option against Iran	0 0%	0 0%	5 45.45%	2 18.18%	2 18.18%	2 18.18%	11 100%
7. exaggeration about Iran's nuclear power	0 0%	0 0%	5 62.5%	3 37.5%	0 0%	0 0%	8 100%
8. inadequacy of sanctions	0 0%	0 0%	2 33.33%	0 0%	2 33.33%	2 33.33%	6 100%
9. a change in Iran's diplomacy	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	3 33.33%	3 33.33%	3 33.33%	9 100%
10. modest sanction relief	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	6 42.85%	4 28.57%	4 28.57%	14 100%
11. superiority of diplomatic negotiation	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	3 21.42%	3 21.42%	8 57.14%	14 100%
12. tougher sanctions in case of failure of negotiations	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	3 37.5%	5 62.5%	8 100%
13. other political challenges with Iran	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	4 50%	4 50%	8 100%
14. political challenges between Netanyahu and Obama	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	3 33.33%	6 66.66%	9 100%
15. American's security commitment to Israel	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 40%	3 60%	5 100%
16. Israel's unrealistic demands	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 18.18%	4 36.36%	5 45.45%	11 100%
17. disagreement of Sunni Arab nations with nuclear deal	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	1 25%	1 25%	2 50%	4 100%

E. Topos of History

Historical argumentation, applied in the era of 2010-2012, targeted the inadequacy of U.N. inspectors, American intelligence agencies, and the Security Council sanctions to identify and control Iran's nuclear program. It criticized the efficiency of negotiation approach put forward by Russia and IAEA. Furthermore, it emphasized the effectiveness of president Obama's success in rallying the major powers to impose sanctions on Iran which pointed to the superiority of his policies toward Iran in comparison with what had been done previously by President Bush.

Excerpt 20

The critics neglect to mention that Iran's program grew significantly when George W. Bush was president and opportunities were lost to constrain it at a much lower level. No president has been as successful as Mr. Obama in rallying the major powers to impose sanctions with bite. These are the first serious nuclear talks in years, and there is still time to let them run. (NYT, June, 21, 2012)

The historical argumentation in 2013-2015 period was of a different nature. It concentrated on the hostile relationship and mistrust between Iran and America before the election of president Rouhani and praised the new opportunity of a direct contact between the two countries. On the other hand, the history of Iran nuke activities was reviewed to put more emphasis on a) the mistrust to Iran, b) recent achievements in controlling it through sanctions and c) the benefits of the interim agreement (see table V). After the preliminary framework agreement (April, 2, 2015), President Obama's diplomatic negotiation policy was compared to his previous counterparts, Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon, to increase its credibility and value.

Excerpt 21

There is good reason for skepticism about Iran's intentions. Although it pledged not to acquire nuclear weapons when it ratified the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 1970, it pursued a secret uranium enrichment program for two decades. By November 2013, when serious negotiations with the major powers began, Iran was enriching uranium at a level close to bomb-grade. (NYT, April, 2, 2015)

TABLE V.
DISTRIBUTION OF TOPOS OF HISTORY

Topos of history	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
1. inadequacy of UN Security Council	5 45.45%	6 54.54%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	11 100%
2. inadequacy of sanctions	3 27.27%	4 36.36%	1 9.09%	1 9.09%	1 9.09%	1 9.09%	11 100%
3. hostility between Iran and America	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	5 41.66%	3 25%	4 33.33%	12 100%
4. fragility of American credibility after Iraq war	0 0%	2 50%	0 0%	2 50%	0 0%	0 0%	4 100%
5. previous American military actions	0 0%	1 33.33%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 66.66%	3 100%
6. mistrust to Iran	0 0%	0 0%	4 22.22%	4 22.22%	4 22.22%	6 33.33%	18 100%
7. failure of previous American administration	2 25%	1 12.5%	1 12.5%	2 25%	1 12.5%	1 12.5%	8 100%
8. effectiveness of sanctions since 2006	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	3 17.64%	6 35.29%	8 47.05%	17 100%
9. review of Iran nuke activities	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	3 50%	3 50%	6 100%
10. effectiveness of interim agreement	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	3 33.33%	6 66.66%	9 100%
11. success of previous American presidents in other negotiations	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	2 100%	2 100%

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

With regard to the first research question, the results reveals that the NYT has given a systematic biased treatment to the participants involved in Iran's nuclear program, one which is supported by its ideology of applying more sanctions on Iran in order to force it to accept a permanent agreement. Iran has been given the image of a criminal who has tried to escape from international sanctions against its so-called illegal nuke activities. In this way, the findings are in line with those of Behnam and Zenouz (2008) where they maintain the misrepresentation of Iran nuke program and Persephobia were reflected in the British paper, the Economist. Iran is attributed as being uncooperative with IAEA inspectors, in the process of producing nuclear weapon, and a risk to the world peace. Dunmire (2005) calls this discourse manoeuvre a "projected event: a state of affairs that claims will occur at some point in the near future" (p.221). Iran is represented as a country besieged by political, social, and economic problems with no respect to human rights, which support the findings of the studies done by Rasti and Sahragard (2012), Atai and Mozaheb (2013), Sahragard and Rasti (2014), and Jones (2014).

Considering the second research question, before the American presidential election, the NYT focused on a) the threatening side of Iran to the region and world security, b) the inefficiency of UN and Security Council in controlling Iran's nuclear program, and c) the necessity of an international decision to impose tough sanctions on Iran. This way, it prepared the ground for the emergence of a saviour that is president Obama. After the re-election of Mr Obama, the paper emphasized on a) the success of president Obama in uniting the major powers against Iran and b) the effectiveness of sanctions against Iran. Meanwhile, another important political issue influenced the NYT's application of argumentative strategies and that was the Iranian presidential election (2013), before which a) Iran's nuclear activities and uranium enrichment, and b) threat of military attack to Iran were focused on repeatedly. The only recommended solution was Iran's decision to stop its nuclear programs and engage in negotiations over the issue. After the election of Mr Rouhani, the paper spotlighted a) the inefficiency of sanctions, b) disadvantage of military attack to Iran and d) the new opportunity for diplomatic negotiations. However, after the interim agreement between Iran and P5+1 countries, this success was attributed to president Obama's policy of imposing sanctions and diplomatic negotiations. On the other hand, it passed the buck to Iran for possible failure of reaching a permanent agreement by pointing to the history of hostile relationship with and mistrust to Iran.

The NYT has left nearly all discussions of other countries with nuclear weapons as unrelated to the issue at hand, this is in line with findings of Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007) in assuming that whereas Iran's violation of its NPT commitment is important and threatening to the world and regional stability, the failure of other countries such as America and Israel toward the eradication of actual nuclear weapons is out of discussion.

Furthermore, the issue of Iran's nuclear program is illustrated to be related to other irrelevant issues which mainly include Iran's domestic and international challenges such as presidential election and supporting the Syrian government and Hezbollah. Accordingly, the argumentative strategies are not used fairly in the political discourse of the paper. It can be concluded that the NYT has provided its readers as gloomy an image of Iran as it can to persuade the readers from around the world to advocate the policy of applying more pressure on Iran.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers and editors of TPLS journal for reading earlier drafts of this article and providing valuable comments and feedback.

REFERENCES

- [1] Atai, M.R. & M.A. Mozaheb. (2013). The representation of Iran's nuclear program in British newspaper editorials: A CDA approach. *International Journal of Society, Culture, and Language*, 1.2, 16-33.
- [2] Atai, M.R. & H. Rezaie. (2009). On the representation of Iran's post-revolution nuclear issues in American news editorials: a CDA perspective. *Iranian EFL Journal*, 5, 20-45.
- [3] Behnam, B. & R.M. Zenouz. (2008). A contrastive critical analysis of Iranian and British newspaper reports on the Iran nuclear power program. In N. Norgaard (ed.), *Systemic Functional Linguistics in Use*. Odense: University of Southern Denmark, Odense Working Papers in Language and Communication, 199–218.
- [4] Bilal, H.A., U. Razaqat, N. Hassan, H. Mansoor & Q. Zahra. (2012). Editorials of Pakistani English print media: Application of CDA. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 4.3, 744-754.
- [5] Caldas-Coulthard, C.R. (2003). Cross-cultural representation of 'otherness' in media discourse. In G. Weiss & R. Wodak (eds.), *Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory and Interdisciplinarity*. New York: Palgrave, 272–296.
- [6] Dunmire, P. (2005). Preempting the future: Rhetoric and ideology of the future in political discourse. *Discourse & Society*, 16.4, 481–513.
- [7] Golan, G. (2006). Inter-media agenda setting and global news coverage. *Journalism Studies*, 7.2, 323-333.
- [8] Hall, S. (1996). The problem of ideology: Marxism without guarantees. In D. Morely & K. Chen (Eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies*. London: Routledge, 25-46.
- [9] Henry, F. & C. Tator. (2002). *Discourse of domination: Racial bias in the Canadian English-language press*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- [10] Herman, E. S., & N. Chomsky. (2002). *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media* (2nd edn.). New York: Pantheon Books.
- [11] IAEA. (1970). Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Infocircs/Others/infocirc140.pdf> (accessed 19, 4, 2014).
- [12] IAEA Board Report. (2003). Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran. <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov2003-75.pdf> (accessed 19, 4, 2014).
- [13] IAEA Board Report. (2010). Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008) and 1835 (2008) in the Islamic Republic of Iran. <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov2010-10.pdf> (accessed 19, 4, 2014).
- [14] Izadi, F. & H. Saghaye-Biria. (2007). Discourse analysis of elite American newspaper editorials: The case of Iran's nuclear program. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 31.2, 140–165.
- [15] Jones, J. (2010). Controlling the discourse: interviews with secretary of state Condoleeza Rice. *Critical Discourse Studies* 7(2), 127-141.
- [16] Katzman, K. (2015). Iran, Gulf Security, and U.S. Policy. CRS Report for Congress. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL32048.pdf> (accessed 19, 4, 2014).
- [17] Kerr, P. K. (2012). Iran's Nuclear Program: Status. CRS Report for Congress. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/RL34544.pdf> (accessed 19, 4, 2014).
- [18] Knight, G. & T. Dean. (1982). Myth and the structure of the news. *Journal of Communication*, 32.2, 144-161.
- [19] Reisigl, M. & R. Wodak. (2001). *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*. London: Routledge.
- [20] Rasti, A. & R. Sahragard. (2012) Actor analysis and action delegitimation of the participants involved in Iran's nuclear power contention: A case study of The Economist. *Discourse and Society* 23.6, 729-748.
- [21] Sahragard, R. & A. Rasti. (2014). Metaphors we deligitimate by: Patterns of metaphor use in The Economist. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature* 3.3, 90-98.
- [22] Squassoni, S. (2006). Iran's nuclear program: Recent developments. CRS Report for Congress. www.fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/RS21592.pdf (accessed 19, 4, 2014).
- [23] van Dijk, T. A. (1991). *Racism and the Press*. London: Routledge.
- [24] van Dijk, T. A. (1992). Racism and argumentation: "Race riot" rhetoric in tabloid editorials. In F. H. van Eemeren (ed.), *Argumentation illuminated*. Dordrecht: Foris, 242-259.
- [25] van Dijk, T.A. (2006). Ideology and discourse analysis. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11.2, 115-140.
- [26] van Dijk, T. A. (2008). *Discourse & power*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- [27] van Dijk, T. A. (1993). *Elite Discourse and Racism*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.
- [28] van Leeuwen, T. (2009). Critical discourse analysis. In J.L. Mey (ed.) *Concise Encyclopedia of Pragmatics* (2nd edn.). Oxford: Elsevier, 166–169.
- [29] Wodak, R. (2001). The discourse-historical approach. In Wodak R and Meyer M (eds.) *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: SAGE, 63–95.

Nafiseh Hosseinpour was born in Isfahan, Iran. She got her BA in TEFL from Kashan University, Kashan, Iran in 2000. She got her MA in TEFL from Islamic Azad University, Khorasgan Branch, Isfahan, Iran in 2003. She is currently a PhD student in Islamic Azad University, Khorasgan Branch. She has been a faculty member of Islamic Azad University, Falavarjan Branch since 2005. Her

research interests are discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, teacher education, teaching and learning strategies, and teaching English as a foreign language.

Hossein Heidari Tabrizi is an assistant professor of TEFL at the English Department of Islamic Azad University, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Isfahan, Iran. He has published several articles both nationally and internationally. His research interests include testing, translation studies, discourse analysis, and sociolinguistics.