

## Language, Ideology, and Conflict Representation: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Arab News and Al-Ahram Weekly

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### Abstract

This study examines how two major English-language Arab media outlets, *Arab News* and *Al-Ahram Weekly*, reported on the May 2021 Gaza–Israel conflict. Using Fairclough’s (2003) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, supported by van Dijk’s (2003) ideological discourse strategies, the study analyzes one article from each outlet: Hazem Balousha’s “UN peace envoy warns of ‘all-out war’ as Israeli bombardment of Gaza continues” (*Arab News*, May 12, 2021) and Ahmed Eleiba’s “Gaza’s Race Against Time” (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, May 19, 2021). The analysis looks at the language, structure, and framing choices in each article to understand how they represent Palestinian civilians, Israeli military action, and Egyptian mediation. The findings show that *Arab News* uses emotional and descriptive language to highlight the human suffering of Palestinians, while *Al-Ahram Weekly* focuses on Egypt’s diplomatic efforts, using a more formal and institutional style. These differences reflect the editorial priorities and national contexts of each outlet, showing how Arab media can present the same conflict in different ways. The study adds to an understanding of how language shapes public views of conflict and how media discourse reflects broader political and cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** Critical discourse analysis; Fairclough; van Dijk; Arab News; Al-Ahram Weekly; Gaza–Israel conflict; ideology; representation

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Language in news reporting is never entirely neutral, especially when covering political conflicts. In such contexts, media discourse does more than describe events; it shapes how audiences understand them, influences public opinion, and can even affect diplomatic and political responses. The Gaza–Israel conflict is one of the most enduring and emotionally charged issues in the Middle East, with deep historical roots and ongoing political, humanitarian, and security implications. While much academic attention has been paid to how Western media represent this conflict, far less has been devoted to understanding the diversity within Arab media narratives.

Arab media are not a single voice; rather, they reflect the political priorities, cultural contexts, and editorial practices of their home countries. Even when two outlets share broad support for Palestinian rights, they may still present events through very different lenses. These differences can emerge in word choice, narrative focus, selection of sources, and the amount of emphasis placed on certain aspects of the story such as humanitarian suffering, political negotiations, or military actions.

This study compares how two prominent English-language Arab newspapers, *Arab News* (Saudi Arabia) and *Al-Ahram Weekly* (Egypt), reported on the May 2021 Gaza–Israel conflict. The analysis focuses on two specific articles published during the escalation: Hazem Balousha’s “UN peace envoy warns of ‘all-out war’ as Israeli bombardment of Gaza continues” (*Arab News*, May 12, 2021) and Ahmed Eleiba’s “Gaza’s Race Against Time” (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, May 19, 2021). Using Fairclough’s (2003) three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis model, supported by van Dijk’s (2003) ideological discourse strategies, this study examines how each article constructs its narrative, represents the main actors, and reflects broader social and political contexts.

## 1. Statement of the Problem

In times of conflict, the media play a key role in shaping how events are understood by local, regional, and international audiences. This is especially true for the Gaza–Israel conflict, where questions of legitimacy, morality, and responsibility are often contested in the media as much as on the ground. While Arab media generally adopt a stance supportive of Palestinian rights, they differ in how they communicate this stance. Said (1997) reminds us that media do not simply mirror reality but actively construct it, shaping how legitimacy, morality, and responsibility are understood in conflict coverage.

These differences are important because they reveal how national interests, political alliances, and editorial traditions influence the way information is presented. For example, a newspaper may choose to highlight civilian suffering, aiming to generate sympathy and humanitarian concern, or it may focus on diplomatic negotiations, presenting its country as a key regional mediator. Both approaches serve ideological purposes, but they do so through different strategies and with different potential effects on public perception.

Nevertheless, few studies have compared Arab media outlets to see how such differences operate in practice. Much of the research on the Gaza–Israel conflict has centered on Western media bias, leaving a gap in our understanding of how intra-Arab variations in coverage can also shape narratives. This study addresses that gap by analyzing and comparing *Arab News* and *Al-Ahram Weekly* articles from the May 2021 conflict. It examines the linguistic and structural choices each outlet makes, the voices it includes or excludes, and the ways these choices reflect the outlet's political and institutional context.

## 2. Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore how *Arab News* and *Al-Ahram Weekly* represent the May 2021 Gaza–Israel conflict through their language and narrative structure. By applying Fairclough's (2003)

three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis model, supported by van Dijk's (2003) ideological discourse strategies, the study investigates how each outlet frames events, assigns agency, and emphasizes certain perspectives over others.

The study also seeks to uncover how these representations are influenced by the broader political and institutional contexts in which each newspaper operates. While both outlets support Palestinian rights, they are embedded in different national media systems, *Arab News* in Saudi Arabia and *Al-Ahram Weekly* in Egypt, each with its own political priorities and editorial approaches. By comparing the two, this research sheds light on the diversity within Arab media discourse and how such diversity shapes the way conflict is presented to audiences.

### **3. Research Questions**

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do *Arab News* and *Al-Ahram Weekly* linguistically construct their representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
2. What discursive strategies do these newspapers use to shape the reader's understanding of key actors and events?
3. How do the ideological positions of each outlet reflect their broader sociopolitical and national contexts?

### **4. Review of Literature**

#### **4.1 Theoretical Framework**

A rigorous understanding of media discourse in conflict situations requires a solid grounding in communication and media theories. These frameworks explain not only how media content is produced and structured, but also how it shapes audience perceptions. In contexts such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, these theoretical perspectives reveal the strategic use of language and representation in the service of particular ideological positions. Before applying

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the selected articles, this section reviews key theoretical foundations: **Framing Theory, Agenda-Setting Theory, Representation Theory, Media Dependency Theory, and Critical Discourse Analysis**, including Fairclough's three-dimensional model and van Dijk's ideological discourse strategies.

#### **4.1.1 Framing Theory**

Framing Theory, as developed by Goffman (1974) and later refined by Entman (1993), explains how communicators select certain aspects of reality and make them more salient in a message, thereby promoting a particular interpretation. Frames are powerful because they influence how audiences define problems, attribute responsibility, and evaluate solutions. In conflict reporting, frames often determine whether events are seen primarily through a humanitarian, political, security, or economic lens. For example, *Arab News* often foregrounds humanitarian suffering in Gaza, with phrases such as "the terror and fear do not stop" and "the terrifying sounds are nonstop," drawing the reader's emotional focus to civilian experiences. In contrast, *Al-Ahram Weekly* frequently emphasizes diplomatic frames, centering Egypt's role in mediation and de-escalation with statements like "Egypt has intensified its efforts" and "the situation is extremely complicated."

Moreover, studies have shown that framing affects how audiences interpret information: a "humanitarian crisis" frame evokes sympathy and urgency for aid, while a "security threat" frame can legitimize military action (Entman, 2004). In the two selected articles, framing serves not only to narrate events but also to signal the outlet's editorial and national priorities.

#### **4.1.2 Agenda-Setting Theory**

Agenda-setting theory, proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), suggests that while the media may not dictate what audiences think, it significantly influences what they think about. By prioritizing some

issues over others, media outlets shape public discourse and attention. In the May 2021 coverage, Arab News repeatedly emphasizes the scale of destruction and civilian casualties, giving prominence to humanitarian concerns. This focus pushes other elements such as the details of ceasefire negotiations to the background. However, Al-Ahram Weekly assigns higher priority to mediation efforts, reporting in depth on Egypt's diplomatic outreach, meetings with international stakeholders, and strategic positioning in the peace process. The agenda-setting effect is especially significant in conflict contexts where audiences depend on news outlets for timely updates. By selecting which details to highlight, the media effectively constructs the hierarchy of issues that dominate public and political debate (McCombs, 2005).

#### **4.1.3 Representation Theory**

Stuart Hall's (2015) Representation Theory emphasizes that media do not merely reflect reality but actively construct it through language, imagery, and narrative structure. Representation involves the selection, ordering, and framing of signs and symbols to convey specific meanings, often influenced by cultural norms and ideological positions. In the context of these two outlets, Arab News represents Palestinians primarily as victims and civilians, mothers, children, families, which generates empathy and solidarity. By contrast, Al-Ahram Weekly represents Egypt as a proactive mediator, employing terms such as "urgent aid," "coordinating efforts," and "traditional role," reinforcing Egypt's diplomatic authority and responsibility. Such representational strategies are not neutral. They both reflect and shape audience attitudes toward the actors involved. Labeling groups as "militants," "extremists," or "freedom fighters" can significantly alter perceptions of legitimacy and morality (Hall, 1997). In both cases, representation is an exercise of discursive power, influencing which interpretations are considered valid.

#### **4.1.4 Media Dependency Theory**

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur's (1976) Media Dependency Theory explains that in times of uncertainty such as during wars or crises audiences become more dependent on media for information. This dependency amplifies the media's power to shape not only knowledge but also beliefs and attitudes. In the May 2021 conflict, Arab News readers may have relied on the outlet for on-the-ground humanitarian updates, including eyewitness accounts and civilian narratives. On the other hand, Al-Ahram Weekly readers may have depended on official diplomatic updates, especially given Egypt's central role in mediation. In both cases, the level of dependency heightened the influence of each outlet's editorial choices, making their framing and representation strategies more impactful.

#### **4.1.5 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

CDA is the primary methodological approach in this study. It views language as a form of social practice that both reflects and shapes power relations (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2003). Fairclough (1995) further emphasized that CDA is not only descriptive but also inherently critical, aiming to connect language with issues of power, inequality, and social change. Earlier foundational works also underline these concerns. Fairclough (1992), for instance, highlights how discourse both reflects and produces social change, situating language within larger historical transformations. Similarly, van Dijk (1998) provides a systematic account of the relationship between discourse and ideology, stressing how texts reproduce dominant worldviews. Wodak and Meyer (2001) further contribute by outlining methodological approaches to CDA, emphasizing the interplay between theory and empirical analysis. Together, these works provide a robust foundation for analyzing the ideological dimensions of media discourse.

#### 4.1.5.1 Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

Fairclough's (2003) model offers a systematic approach to analyzing texts through three interconnected levels:

1. **Textual Analysis:** Focuses on the linguistic features of the text, including vocabulary, grammar, transitivity, modality, and cohesion. For example, Arab News uses active verbs such as "pounded" and "targeted" to describe Israeli actions, while Al-Ahram Weekly often employs relational processes like "has intensified its efforts" to highlight Egypt's diplomatic initiatives.
2. **Discursive Practice:** Examines how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed. Arab News relies heavily on civilian testimonies, creating an emotional appeal, while Al-Ahram Weekly prioritizes official statements from Egyptian leaders and international actors, reinforcing its diplomatic narrative.
3. **Social Practice:** Considers the broader sociopolitical context influencing the discourse. Arab News, operating within a Saudi context, reflects pan-Arab solidarity but avoids direct political confrontation with global powers. Al-Ahram Weekly, as part of Egypt's state media, underscores Egypt's historic and strategic role as a regional peacemaker.

#### 4.1.5.2 van Dijk's Ideological Discourse Strategies

Van Dijk (2003) identifies specific strategies used to convey ideology in news discourse:

- **Authority Attribution:** Giving prominence to certain voices, such as UN officials or national leaders, to lend credibility to the narrative.
- **Polarization:** Dividing actors into in-groups and out-groups (e.g., victims vs. aggressors, mediators vs. obstructers).



- **Lexical Choice:** Selecting words with strong connotations “bombardment” vs. “operation,” “ceasefire” vs. “pause in hostilities.”
- **Presupposition and Implication:** Embedding assumptions in statements, such as “violence erupted again,” which implies inevitability without exploring underlying causes.
- **Exclusion:** Omitting certain perspectives, for example, excluding Israeli civilian experiences in Arab News or minimizing Palestinian militant perspectives in Al-Ahram Weekly.

By combining Fairclough’s structural framework with van Dijk’s ideological strategies, this study is able to reveal both the overt and subtle ways in which the two outlets shape their conflict narratives.

## 5. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, drawing on Fairclough’s (2003) three-dimensional model and van Dijk’s (2003) ideological discourse framework. These models provide complementary analytical lenses: Fairclough’s model enables a systematic examination of textual, discursive, and social practices, while van Dijk’s approach offers tools for unpacking the ideological strategies embedded in news discourse.

### 5.1 Data Selection

Two news articles were selected for comparative analysis, both reporting on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in May 2021. The first, “*UN peace envoy warns of ‘all-out war’ as Israeli bombardment of Gaza continues*” by Hazem Balousha, was published in *Arab News* on May 12, 2021. The second, “*Gaza’s Race Against Time*” by Ahmed Eleiba, appeared in *Al-Ahram Weekly* on May 19, 2021. The selection criteria were as follows:

1. **Thematic similarity:** Both articles report on the same conflict within a close time frame, ensuring contextual comparability.

2. **Length and scope:** The articles are similar in length, allowing for balanced analysis.
3. **Regional representation:** The texts originate from two different Arab media outlets with distinct editorial orientations, enabling examination of intra-regional variation in representation.

## 5.2 Analytical Framework

Following Fairclough's (2003) model, the analysis was conducted across three interrelated dimensions:

- **Textual Analysis:** Investigating lexical choice, grammatical structures (e.g., transitivity, passivization), modality, and cohesion. This dimension identifies how specific linguistic features contribute to meaning-making.
- **Discursive Practice:** Examining the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption, including the use of intertextuality and genre conventions.
- **Social Practice:** Situating the discourse within broader socio-political contexts, including national policy orientations and regional ideologies.

Van Dijk's (2003) ideological discourse framework was used to examine how the two newspapers represented the conflict. The analysis focused on strategies such as **authority attribution** (giving weight to certain voices or sources), **polarization** (presenting one side more positively and the other more negatively), **mitigation** (softening or downplaying certain actions), and **topical emphasis** (giving more space or attention to particular issues). Each strategy was studied to see how it shaped the way people, events, and responsibilities were portrayed in the articles. All interpretations were based on **direct evidence from the texts** and supported by relevant research (e.g., Amer, 2017; Bazzi, 2009; Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2003). Using a **comparative approach**, the study examined both the similarities and

the differences in the language and ideas used by the two newspapers, showing how they could share similar positions but express them in different ways.

## 6. Analysis

### 6.1 Textual Analysis

The linguistic construction of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in the two newspapers reflects distinct tones and priorities. Both outlets adopt a broadly pro-Palestinian orientation, yet they achieve this through different linguistic strategies that correspond to their institutional and national contexts.

In the selected *Arab News* article, the language is overtly emotive and descriptive, often designed to evoke the lived experience of conflict. For instance, it states that “*the terror and fear do not stop*” and “*terrifying sounds are nonstop*” (*Arab News*, 2021). Such lexical choices foreground the psychological strain of bombardment and correspond to CDA principles of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (van Dijk, 2003). As van Dijk (1995) notes, ideological positions are often embedded in these subtle textual features, which reveal underlying power relations and group biases. Here, Palestinians are constructed as innocent victims, while Israeli military action is portrayed as relentless. Similarly, the repeated use of material process verbs such as “*bombed*,” “*pounded*,” and “*destroyed*” intensifies the sense of aggression. When the article notes that “*residential towers were destroyed*” (*Arab News*, 2021), the passive voice omits the agent, thereby shifting focus to consequences rather than perpetrators. Elsewhere, however, the actor is explicit: “*Israel targeted Hamas positions*” (*Arab News*, 2021). As Fairclough (2003) explains, such grammatical variation reflects a discursive tension between emotional immediacy and journalistic convention.

By contrast, the analyzed *Al-Ahram Weekly* article adopts a more formal and restrained register, privileging relational processes that

highlight Egypt's diplomatic role over the violence itself. Statements such as "*Egypt has intensified its efforts*" and "*The situation is extremely complicated*" construct events in terms of states and negotiations rather than acts of destruction. The vocabulary "*urgent aid*," "*coordination*," and "*mediation*" aligns with institutional discourse, emphasizing procedure and responsibility. In van Dijk's (2003) terms, this represents the ideological square at work: positive self-presentation is evident in the repeated references to Egypt's stabilizing role, while potentially negative aspects of mediation, such as political limitations, are backgrounded. The article also states, "*Dozens have been killed since the fighting began*" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 2021), condensing violence into a brief factual report rather than a detailed human testimony.

Differences are also apparent in voice and sourcing. In the selected *Arab News* article, humanitarian perspectives are amplified through direct civilian testimony, as in "*My children cannot sleep because of the bombing*" (*Arab News*, 2021). Such quotations invite empathy and reinforce a humanitarian frame. *Al-Ahram Weekly*, in contrast, relies predominantly on official voices, such as statements from the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, thereby constructing a narrative centered on state-led action. CDA helps explain this contrast: while *Arab News* foregrounds individual suffering at the textual level, *Al-Ahram Weekly* reflects discursive practices that prioritize institutional authority. Finally, cohesion strategies further distinguish the two outlets. *Arab News* frequently refers to "*the people of Gaza*" and "*Palestinian civilians*," building a collective identity under siege. *Al-Ahram Weekly* repeatedly invokes "*Egypt's traditional role as a mediator*," linking national identity to regional stability. Such patterns show how selective lexical repetition channels interpretation toward humanitarian empathy in one case and toward diplomatic legitimacy in the other.

Overall, the analysis suggests that while the selected *Arab News* article frames the conflict through vivid description and human

testimony, the *Al-Ahram Weekly* article frames it through state-centered discourse that emphasizes diplomacy and order. Both approaches serve ideological ends: the former appeals to solidarity with Palestinian suffering, and the latter reinforces Egypt's image as a regional peace broker.

## 6.2 Discursive Practice

According to Fairclough's (2003) model, discursive practice involves the processes of production, distribution, and consumption of texts, and how these interact with broader ideological structures. When comparing *Arab News* and *Al-Ahram Weekly*, clear differences emerge in their sourcing, sequencing, and genre conventions, which in turn influence how readers interpret the conflict.

In the selected *Arab News* article, the narrative is shaped by the conventions of human-interest reporting, where the central aim is to evoke empathy. The article foregrounds the voices of civilians, such as the testimony: "*The bombing has not stopped for hours. We cannot leave our homes*" (*Arab News*, 2021). Such first-hand accounts situate the reader inside the experience of Palestinian victims and align with CDA observations that discourse often privileges in-group perspectives to build solidarity. Notably, the sequencing begins with vivid descriptions of destruction and fear in Gaza before introducing political or military context. This ordering primes readers to interpret subsequent information through a humanitarian lens.

By contrast, the analyzed *Al-Ahram Weekly* article follows a more formal, institutional pattern. It opens with references to Egypt's diplomatic initiatives "*Egypt has intensified its efforts*" before discussing casualties or violence. This sequencing constructs the conflict primarily as a problem requiring negotiation rather than an immediate humanitarian crisis. Source selection further reinforces this framing: official voices such as the Egyptian Foreign Ministry and regional analysts dominate, as in the statement, "*Egypt will continue to work with all parties to prevent further escalation*" (*Al-Ahram*

*Weekly*, 2021). This positions the newspaper as a conduit for state diplomacy, reflecting CDA's view that discursive practices often reproduce institutional priorities.

Intertextuality also plays a key role. *Arab News* connects the current attacks to a broader narrative of blockade and historical suffering, thereby reinforcing a mental model (van Dijk, 2003) that casts Palestinians as enduring victims across time. *Al-Ahram Weekly*, in turn, situates events within Egypt's "long-standing role" as a mediator, reinforcing a national self-image of stability and leadership. These contrasting intertextual strategies highlight how each outlet situates the present conflict within its broader ideological framework. Distribution and audience contexts further shape these practices. As an English-language Saudi publication, *Arab News* has been described in media scholarship as addressing both domestic elites and international readers (Boyd, 1999; Rugh, 2004). Scholars suggest that such positioning encourages the paper to foreground humanitarian stories that resonate globally while avoiding overtly political accusations that might complicate diplomatic alignments. In contrast, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, an English-language Egyptian state-affiliated outlet, has been characterized as targeting policymakers, diplomats, and educated audiences within Egypt and abroad (Boyd, 1999; Rugh, 2004). This helps explain its consistent emphasis on official Egyptian actions brokering ceasefires, coordinating aid, and engaging with international actors over extended accounts of civilian suffering. In doing so, the newspaper reinforces Egypt's national identity as a stabilizing regional actor, a process CDA scholars describe as the reproduction of power relations through discourse.

In summary, the selected *Arab News* article foregrounds civilian testimony and humanitarian framing, while the *Al-Ahram Weekly* article emphasizes official sources and diplomacy. These contrasting practices reflect each outlet's institutional orientation and national identity.

### 6.3 Social Practice

The social practice dimension examines how texts are embedded within broader social, political, and cultural contexts, and how these contexts both influence and are reinforced by media discourse (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2003). In the case of *Arab News* and *Al-Ahram Weekly*, both outlets operate within Arab media systems that broadly support Palestinian rights, yet the ways in which they express this support reflect distinct national priorities and geopolitical considerations.

For *Arab News*, the humanitarian framing of the conflict appears to reflect Saudi Arabia's cautious diplomatic posture in 2021. While the Kingdom maintained a public position of solidarity with Palestinians, scholars note that it simultaneously sought to preserve strategic relations with Western allies, particularly the United States (Rugh, 2004). This balancing act can be observed in the article's avoidance of explicit accusations against Israel or Western governments, even as it highlights vivid accounts of human suffering, destroyed homes, terrified families, and sleepless children (*Arab News*, 2021). Such framing sustains a moral position without provoking direct political confrontation. This aligns with van Dijk's (2003) observation that discourse can be strategically shaped to resonate with both in-group and out-group audiences. The Saudi media environment, often described as a semi-controlled system, also plays a role. While outlets like *Arab News* exercise some editorial flexibility, their narratives remain broadly consistent with state-aligned priorities. By foregrounding humanitarian testimony, the newspaper can express solidarity while avoiding narratives that might contradict foreign policy objectives.

In contrast, the *Al-Ahram Weekly* article is deeply connected to Egypt's longstanding geopolitical role as a mediator in Middle Eastern affairs. Its emphasis on Egypt's "traditional role" and "urgent mediation efforts" mirrors a foreign policy narrative that



consistently positions the country as an indispensable broker of peace (Boyd, 1999). Egypt is portrayed as coordinating with multiple parties to secure a ceasefire, reinforcing its self-image as a regional stabilizer. This alignment reflects the characteristics of Egypt's state-affiliated media system, which is closely tied to government policy (Rugh, 2004). In van Dijk's terms, such discourse reproduces elite ideologies by legitimizing the hegemonic position of the state both domestically and internationally.

At the cultural level, both outlets also reflect broader Arab narratives. In *Arab News*, the repeated emphasis on human suffering resonates with a pan-Arab humanitarian discourse that stresses shared bonds and moral responsibility across the Arab world. In *Al-Ahram Weekly*, the focus on diplomacy reflects a narrative of leadership and unity achieved through centralized state action. These choices demonstrate how media discourse operates simultaneously on humanitarian and political levels, each reinforcing different but complementary aspects of Arab identity.

In sum, the social practice analysis suggests that the selected *Arab News* article sustains a discourse of compassionate solidarity tempered by diplomatic caution, while the *Al-Ahram Weekly* article reinforces a narrative of Egypt's indispensable diplomatic authority. Both cases illustrate how language and representation are interwoven with broader sociopolitical realities, shaping public perception in ways that extend beyond the immediate news cycle.

## 7. Discussion

The detailed analysis in this study shows that the two articles *UN peace envoy warns of 'all-out war' as Israeli bombardment of Gaza continues* (*Arab News*, May 12, 2021) and *Gaza's Race Against Time* (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, May 19, 2021) do more than simply relay events. Through their use of language, structure, and source selection, both shape how readers interpret the 2021 Gaza-Israel conflict. Applying Fairclough's (2003) three-dimensional model alongside van Dijk's



(2003) ideological discourse framework demonstrates that word choices, sentence structures, and narrative patterns are not neutral; they function as ideological tools that privilege certain perspectives while backgrounding others.

At the textual level, the selected *Arab News* article employs vivid, emotive language to foreground the human cost of the conflict. Phrases such as “*the terror and fear do not stop*” evoke urgency and psychological strain, while dynamic verbs like “*pounded*” and “*destroyed*” present Israeli actions as forceful and ongoing. These choices illustrate van Dijk’s (2003) strategy of negative other-presentation, implicitly framing Israel as an aggressor. At the same time, Palestinian experiences are highlighted through direct testimony, as in “*My children cannot sleep because of the bombing*” (*Arab News*, 2021), which creates immediacy and empathy. By contrast, the *Al-Ahram Weekly* article adopts a more formal register, favoring institutional language such as “*Egypt has intensified its efforts.*” Violence is acknowledged but often condensed into factual statements, such as “*Dozens have been killed since the fighting began.*” Nominalizations like “*the escalation*” or “*the crisis*” further abstract violent acts into political processes. In Fairclough’s (2003) terms, these lexical and grammatical choices reflect institutional priorities: *Arab News* emphasizes suffering through emotive language, while *Al-Ahram Weekly* highlights state-led intervention.

At the level of discursive practice, the two outlets also differ in sourcing and sequencing. The *Arab News* article privileges humanitarian narratives by quoting Palestinian civilians and international officials such as the UN envoy, thereby amplifying voices that reinforce moral solidarity. Israeli perspectives are presented indirectly or in paraphrase, limiting their impact. As Bazzi (2009) notes, Arab media often foreground human-interest angles when covering the Palestinian cause, a pattern clearly evident here. In contrast, the *Al-Ahram Weekly* article privileges official Egyptian sources and analysts, reinforcing a policy-driven frame. Quotations

from Egyptian officials are extensive, projecting the state as a mediator of regional stability. Civilian voices, whether Israeli or Palestinian, are largely absent, replaced by references to political actors such as “*Palestinian leaders*” or “*Hamas representatives*.” As Khalil (2020) observes, such omission of lived experience can depersonalize conflict coverage, turning it into a matter of negotiation rather than humanitarian urgency. In *Arab News*, this exclusion is selective: it humanizes Palestinians but leaves Israelis abstract. In *Al-Ahram Weekly*, the omission is symmetrical, consistent with its institutional style and diplomatic focus.

At the social practice level, broader political and cultural contexts become more visible. *Arab News*, as an English-language Saudi outlet, appears to balance solidarity with Palestinians and sensitivity to Saudi foreign policy interests, which include maintaining ties with Western allies. This helps explain its reliance on humanitarian framing without direct political condemnation. Such an approach reflects van Dijk’s (2003) point that discourse can be strategically adapted to resonate with multiple audiences, in this case both regional and international. *Al-Ahram Weekly*, in turn, reflects Egypt’s longstanding geopolitical narrative of mediation. References to “*Egypt’s traditional role*” and “*urgent mediation efforts*” echo state discourse that positions Egypt as a stabilizing force in the Middle East (Boyd, 1999; Rugh, 2004). In Fairclough’s (2003) terms, the article exemplifies how media texts both shape and are shaped by institutional contexts, legitimizing the Egyptian state’s diplomatic agenda. Positive self-presentation operates at the national level, portraying Egypt as responsible and authoritative. Negative other-presentation, however, is diffused across vague entities like “*the escalation*” or “*the parties to the conflict*.” Culturally, both outlets reproduce wider Arab narratives. *Arab News* resonates with a pan-Arab humanitarian discourse that stresses compassion and shared responsibility across the Arab world. *Al-Ahram Weekly* reinforces a narrative of centralized leadership and regional unity through

diplomacy. These cultural discourses, while different in focus, complement one another by presenting Arab identity as simultaneously empathetic and authoritative.

These findings align with previous scholarship on Arab media framing (Amer, 2017; Bazzi, 2009), which shows that while Arab outlets broadly support Palestinian rights, their representational strategies vary according to national priorities and institutional constraints. *Arab News* frames the conflict through a humanitarian lens that encourages empathy, while *Al-Ahram Weekly* frames it as a matter of diplomacy and regional stability. Both illustrate van Dijk's ideological square in action: highlighting the positive roles of the in-group and backgrounding their limitations, while foregrounding negative depictions of the out-group.

In sum, the representation of the Gaza–Israel conflict in these two newspapers is shaped not only by journalistic convention but also by national and regional ideologies. Language, sourcing, and structural choices reinforce Saudi Arabia's preference for humanitarian solidarity tempered by diplomatic caution and Egypt's preference for projecting itself as a central mediator. These narratives, once repeated across reports, contribute to shaping public opinion and sustaining cultural and political worldviews. Silences and omissions, what is left unsaid, are as significant as what is explicitly stated in shaping systems of perception and belief. In conflict reporting, absence can be as powerful as presence.

## 8. Conclusion and Implications

This study examined how *Arab News* (May 12, 2021) and *Al-Ahram Weekly* (May 19, 2021) reported on the 2021 Gaza–Israel conflict by analyzing one key article from each outlet. Using Fairclough's (2003) three-dimensional framework and van Dijk's (2003) theory of ideological discourse, the analysis explored how the

two newspapers employed language to shape meaning, foreground certain perspectives, and background others.

The findings indicate that neither article simply reports facts. Each constructs a particular image of the conflict that reflects its institutional role and political context. In the *Arab News* article, vivid and emotive descriptions of Palestinian suffering dominate, with direct civilian testimonies adding urgency and moral weight; for example, “*My children cannot sleep because of the bombing.*” Israeli actions are described through active verbs such as “*pounded*” and “*destroyed*,” which convey relentless aggression. By contrast, the *Al-Ahram Weekly* article adopts a more formal and diplomatic tone, centering Egypt’s mediatory role. Violence is frequently abstracted through terms like “*the escalation*” or “*the crisis*,” while authority is reinforced through official voices such as the Egyptian Foreign Ministry’s statement: “*Egypt will continue to work with all parties to prevent further escalation.*” These choices illustrate how sourcing and phrasing distribute credibility differently: *Arab News* builds empathy for Palestinians through personal accounts, whereas *Al-Ahram Weekly* reinforces Egypt’s diplomatic leadership through institutional narratives.

A further finding is the omission of key historical and political context. Neither article discusses in detail the long-standing occupation, the blockade of Gaza, or the displacement of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem. Such silences risk presenting the conflict as a sudden exchange between equal parties, obscuring the underlying power imbalance. As van Dijk (2003) observes, omissions can be as ideologically powerful as explicit wording, subtly shaping readers’ understanding by leaving crucial background unstated. This study supports the argument that even professional news outlets influence public perception through selective language, sourcing, and framing. Narratives are shaped not only by what is emphasized but also by what is left unsaid. This influence is subtle yet far-reaching, affecting public sympathy, political debates, and potentially policy decisions.

For this reason, critical media literacy is essential: readers should be encouraged to recognize privileged perspectives, question absent voices, and relate discursive choices to wider structures of power and ideology.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that media discourse during conflict is never entirely neutral. Words, structures, and silences interact to construct particular realities. Examining these elements through CDA helps uncover the ideological work performed by texts and challenge representations that perpetuate imbalance. This is not only a scholarly task but also a civic responsibility: understanding media language is key to fostering informed and critical audiences.

The implications of this study are twofold. First, it shows how Fairclough's and van Dijk's frameworks can be combined to reveal ideological patterns in conflict reporting that may appear balanced on the surface. This combined approach provides a model for future research into media coverage in other geopolitical contexts. Second, it highlights the importance of greater media literacy education. As conflict reporting continues to shape global opinion, educators, policymakers, and the public should be equipped to critically assess news content, identify omissions, and recognize how media discourse can either reinforce or challenge dominant power structures

## 10. Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could extend the scope of this study in several directions. First, analyzing a larger set of articles from *Arab News*, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, and other regional or international outlets would help determine whether the patterns identified here are consistent or whether different contexts produce notable variations in framing. Second, incorporating visual and multimedia elements such as

photographs, captions, infographics, and online videos would provide a richer understanding of how written and visual modes interact to reinforce particular narratives or emotional appeals. Third, a comparative study between English-language Arab media and their Arabic-language counterparts could reveal whether the same events are framed differently for domestic and international audiences. Fourth, research that integrates perspectives from journalists and editors, alongside surveys of readers from diverse cultural and political backgrounds, could offer valuable insight into how production practices and audience expectations shape ideological positioning. Finally, a longitudinal study tracing coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict over several years would help illustrate whether and how framing strategies evolve, as well as the political, social, or institutional factors that drive these shifts (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2003).

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*Formatting notes:* Book and journal titles italicized; sentence case for article/book titles; Title Case for journal names; correct volume(issue), pages, DOIs; consistent publishers.

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## اللغة والأيديولوجيا وتمثيل الصراع: تحليل نقدي للخطاب في صحفيتي عرب نيوز

والأهرام ويكلي

### ملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في كيفية تناول وسيلتين بارزتين من وسائل الإعلام العربية الناطقة بالإنجليزية، عرب نيوز والأهرام ويكلي، لتغطية الصراع بين غزة وإسرائيل في أيار/مايو ٢٠٢١. اعتمدت الدراسة نموذج فيركلاف (٢٠٠٣) الثلاثي الأبعاد في التحليل النقدي للخطاب، مدعوماً باستراتيجيات فان دايك (٢٠٠٣) الأيديولوجية، لتحليل مقال واحد من كل صحيفة: مقال حازم بلوشة «مبعوث الأمم المتحدة يحذر من "حرب شاملة" مع استمرار القصف الإسرائيلي على غزة» «عرب نيوز، ١٢ أيار/مايو ٢٠٢١)، ومقال أحمد العليبة «غزة: سباق مع الزمن» «الأهرام ويكلي، ١٩ أيار/مايو ٢٠٢١). ركز التحليل على اللغة والبنية وخيارات التأطير لفهم كيفية تمثيل المدنيين الفلسطينيين، والعمليات العسكرية الإسرائيلية، وجهود الوساطة المصرية.

أظهرت النتائج أن عرب نيوز استخدمت لغة عاطفية ووصفية لتسليط الضوء على المعاناة الإنسانية للفلسطينيين، بينما ركزت الأهرام ويكلي على الجهود الدبلوماسية لمصر مستخدمة أسلوباً أكثر رسمية ومؤسسية. وتعكس هذه الاختلافات أولويات التحرير والسياقات الوطنية لكل من الصحفيين، بما يوضح كيف يمكن للإعلام العربي أن يقدم الصراع ذاته بطرائق متباينة. وتؤكد الدراسة أن اللغة تسهم في تشكيل التصورات العامة عن الصراعات، وأن الخطاب الإعلامي يعكس بدوره السياقات السياسية والثقافية الأوسع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحليل النقدي للخطاب؛ فيركلاف؛ فان دايك؛ عرب نيوز؛ الأهرام ويكلي؛ صراع غزة-إسرائيل؛ الأيديولوجيا؛ التمثيل.