

# The Discursive and Social Paradigm of Al-Jazeera English in Comparison and Parallel with the BBC

Leon Barkho

*This article links text analysis with social practices to provide an account of the discursive and social niche that Al-Jazeera English has carved out for itself when compared and paralleled with that of the BBC. It critically analyzes the broadcasters' hard news discourse in order to gain a proper understanding of how they employ language to transmit knowledge and communicative events. It relies on a detailed analysis of a variety of data and texts as they unfold below and above sentence level. The triangulated Critical Discourse Analysis throws new light on how Al-Jazeera English designs its discursive and social strategies, providing reasonable interpretation of how it distances itself from the "Anglo-Saxon" discourse of the BBC.*

*Keywords: Al-Jazeera English; Discourse Analysis; Social And Discursive Practices; The BBC*

This article is an inquiry into the discursive and social patterns of Al-Jazeera English (henceforth AJE). It adopts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach in its attempt to delve into the channel's social and discursive world. However, the investigation is less interested in what these patterns are than in how they come about. There is little in media-related CDA literature on how news discourse comes about. Most studies have been an inquiry into the "what it is" and rarely the "how it is" of the texts critical discourse analysts examine. CDA inquiries are rather philosophical

---

Leon Barkho is manager of Media Content Practices and Effects Project at Sweden's Jönköping University. He holds a master's degree in applied linguistics and a doctorate in media and communication science. Previously, he held positions at Reuters News Agency as bureau chief and the Associated Press as staff writer. Correspondence to: Leon Barkho, Media Management and Transformation Center, Jönköping University, Box 1026, 551 11, Jönköping, Sweden. E-mail: [leon.barkho@ihh.hj.se](mailto:leon.barkho@ihh.hj.se)

in nature than practical, resembling the approaches William James (1997) adopts in his examination of “acts of cognition.”

Social and discursive patterns can be described as acts and they have a direct bearing on the mind of those creating or holding them. But it is difficult to understand them in isolation from all other acts or all other relations influencing the production of a text. A pattern, whether discursive or social, will be nothing and will have no qualities if examined outside its relations. For this reason, critical analysts need to develop techniques and methods to help researchers gather more knowledge beyond the text they scrutinize. If we take the text as a “thing,” then it is easy to recognize the thing, but to know the “thing” properly one needs to gather as much information as possible about it. CDA attention has mostly been on texts and if contexts are discussed the findings are those of the analysts. We have no verifiable means to show how ideology and power are woven into the text. For instance, van Dijk (1988a), one of the most prominent CDA scholars, sees context solely in cognitive terms in the sense that people create it for the text they write and read. Little do we know how institutional power, for example, creates contexts for us as readers, viewers, and listeners regardless of our background knowledge, attitude, and even emotions.

Like any other discipline, CDA has its opponents who mainly charge that critical analysts read too much into the language of the texts they study. To arrive at the major features of power, they examine a limited array of linguistic structures and texts whose ideological power consequences appear to be the same in different texts (i.e., Simpson, 1993; Fish, 1981; Schelgloff, 1997; Widdowson, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2000; Toolan, 1997). Some criticism has come from within the discipline itself (c.f. Blommaert et al., 2003; Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Verschueren, 2001), particularly with regard to how ideological practices are gleaned from textual analysis. There is a lack of objectivity in interpreting ideological meanings of discourse that may turn out to be ambivalent. Ideology is enhanced and established through language, but CDA methods used to uncover it are normally ambiguous. Bhatia, Flowerdew, and Jones (2008) and Flowerdew (2008), for example, see CDA as of a controversial nature since analysts have so far failed to argue that their results and findings should be of some practical use so that they can be relayed to the objects of their analyses. There is more to be done for the CDA findings to be right, they say.

Most recent critique of CDA's text-based studies has come from Philo (2007). Philo argues that CDA's textual analyses of media accounts, though useful, cannot be taken seriously because they lack an investigation of “the social structures from which competing ideological explanations develop” (p. 179). Comparing his Glasgow University Media Group's methods with those pursued by two of the CDA's most prominent scholars—Norman Fairclough and Teun van Dijk—Philo says critical analysts still encounter a series of problems that their text-based investigations have yet to solve.

CDA scholars are aware of the criticism, but some prominent scholars like van Dijk (1988b, 1993) remain unperturbed. Since CDA is concerned with social problems, then it must be represented as “discourse analysis with attitude. . . . CDA does not deny, but explicitly defines and defends its own sociopolitical position. That is,

CDA is biased—and proud of it” (van Dijk, 2001, p. 19). Other CDA scholars agree (c.f. Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Meyer, 2001). They counter that since it is rather difficult to conduct research that is free from ideological assumptions and judgments, CDA has to start from a preordained ideological position. Rejecting the critique outright does no good for CDA. Addressing it, I believe, is the right answer. This is what this article attempts to do by linking the texts it examines with the institutions producing them, not cognitively but empirically, in order to analyze “the how” rather than “the what” of the discourse being scrutinized.

CDA does not isolate texts from their contexts. But the toolkits it has for the analysis of texts are much more developed and sophisticated than those for contexts. For example, the models developed by Fairclough (1989, 1992), Lee (1992), Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), and Fairclough and Wodak (1997), among others, emphasize the importance of the social conditions of how texts are produced—the “how it is,” but we still do not have a “toolkit” to unravel “the how it is” of the text we analyze. The call to work on “how it is” of the texts is clearly outlined in Fairclough and Wodak (1997):

Discourse is not produced without context and cannot be understood without taking the context into consideration . . . utterances are only meaningful if we consider their use in a specific situation, if we understand the underlying conventions and rules, if we recognize the embedding in a certain culture and ideology, and most importantly, we know what the discourse relates to in the past. (p. 276)

This article’s “toolkit” relies heavily on investigating the “how it is” of the texts I analyze. The “toolkit” cannot stand by itself. It supplements those prominent CDAs scholars have developed for their textual analyses. My own “toolkit” should simply be seen as one possibility among others that aims to uncover the context of a text and how it comes into being. Media texts, and especially the news genre, are usually seen as referential in nature in the sense that they refer to a specific context and readers interpret them with that context in mind (Weber, 1992). Their representational character is largely ignored.

AJE, like the BBC, broadcasts in English. Both broadcasters use the same language but provide two different versions of truth. The communicative event is packaged in different ways in order to represent the broadcasters’ views of the world. But little do we know about how the two broadcasters package their news. This article tries to unwrap this packaging and the ideology behind it.

### **Method and Data**

Social science now sees CDA as a method to scrutinize organizational reality. However, on its own, CDA has been found insufficient as a methodological tool. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) as well as Fairclough (1992) assert the discipline’s methodological weaknesses. They assert that the weaknesses could be remedied if CDA is situated within ethnography or within a wider panorama of concerns, approaches, and questions on the interrelationships between the text and its context.

Linguistic analyses usually dominate CDA studies in which the main focus is on Hallidayan linguistics (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Martin, 1993) or systemic functional linguistics (SFL). Halliday's model is not purely linguistic. It is a sociolinguistic study of language. Speech and writing are "socially embedded" and "socially constructive," says Martin (1992, p. 56). However, Martin is quick to note that CDA studies rely heavily on the lexico-grammar of texts and how they are related to their social world that makes the relation of power and ideological forces in the text to the social context self-evident. So far CDA, as outlined in the introduction, has not produced the right remedy to overcome these weaknesses.

This article situates CDA within interviews, policy documents, and corporate speeches in order to provide better and more solid links between the text and its social context. One essential gap in CDA analyses is the lack of studies and evidence on how the micro-macro links in language as a social phenomenon work. In other words, how links between the linguistics of the text and its extralinguistic domains are established. One important aim of this article is to offer a reasonable method that addresses the criticism lodged at CDA and empirically disentangles the "inextricable" link between the discursive and the social.

Thus, this article relies on numerous sources of data. Its textual evidence relies on AJE and BBC's 46 online stories (23 from AJE and 23 from the BBC) published during the war on Gaza (December 27, 2008–January 18, 2009), one story from each broadcaster for every day of the 23-day long war. The textual analysis is supplemented by two major corporate speeches, one by John Williams, BBC's World News Editor, and the other by Tony Burman, AJE's Managing Editor, both given at an international conference in Sweden in 2009. The critical analysis is also situated within interviews the author conducted with AJE and BBC's executives and editors both in London and Qatar where AJE is based. Finally, the CDA analysis is situated within policy documents, namely, the broadcasters' Middle East internal guidelines.

## **Analysis**

In this section, I shall confine my critical analysis to a few linguistic and social properties of the 46 stories selected for analysis, namely headlines, voicing and narrating, evaluative and attitudinal discursive stances, historic indexicals, the order and disorder of language, the named and the nameless, renaming and overnaming, and the international correspondent "complex." These properties are, in my opinion, most suitable to reveal the reality of the world of the texts analyzed. Selectivity always has some subjective element to it. However, I hope the triangulation of data and method will alleviate the impact of personal intrusion into the analysis and its findings.

### *Headlines*

Let us first examine the AJE headlines and have them compared whenever possible with those of the BBC. AJE avoids the use of scare quotes in its headlines. Scare

quoting is a characteristic of BBC headlines where there are seven scare-quoted structures in its 23 headlines. The use of punctuation marks, whether in headlines or in the body of the story, has both a discursive and social role. Their discursive role is quite clear. Orthographically, the headline writer's aim is to attract the readers' attention to the scare-quoted structures. Socially, they show that the broadcaster is rather skeptical or suspicious about the information between the single inverted commas. The words, phrases, and even sentences inserted within scare quotes are interjected to show a viewpoint and they could be compared to the effect parenthetical remarks have in discourse (Koven, 2002) and, in some instances, they even stress some spatial and temporal nuance (Goffman, 1979/1981) since they are set off from the rest of the text by punctuation, not because they are grammatically different but socially not the same.

One important discursive and social point to raise regarding BBC headlines is that the scare-quoting is mainly employed when reporting Palestinian casualties. It is rarely used when the coverage concerns the Israelis:

- A. 'More than 1,000 Killed in Gaza'
- B. Israelis 'Shot at Fleeing Gazans'
- C. Gaza Clashes Spark 'Major Crisis'
- D. Strike at Gaza School 'Kills 40'

Compare the above with the following AJE headlines where the broadcaster, unlike the BBC, reports on the same communicative event without resorting to scare quotes:

- A. Israeli Missiles Kill Hamas Leader
- B. Israel Resumes Deadly Gaza Attacks
- C. Israelis Shell Hospitals and UN HQ
- D. Israel Kills Dozens at Gaza School

The BBC, despite scholarly evidence, believes the choice of inverted commas has little to do with notions of power and the reality of the situation of those reported. Richard Porter, Head of News, BBC World Service, says: "I don't accept that our decision to use (or not use) quote marks, or our choice of tenses, can fairly be interpreted as the BBC accenting a particular point of view, or acting as an agency for those in power." AJE's discursive strategy hinges on distancing its news discourse from what it sees as the hegemonic discursive powers of the BBC and CNN. Gaven Morris, AJE's head of planning, says: "We need . . . to come up with alternative ways of covering the story that is of interest to people outside Britain and perhaps outside the Anglo-American sphere of thinking."

### *Voicing and Narrating*

Who speaks in a news story? It is common knowledge now that more than one hand is involved but we need to know who "these hands" are—the reporter, the editor, the bureau chief, the sources, etc. In this section, I will try to shed some light on how

different hands or voices are usually involved in the news narrative relying on a careful discursive analysis of the corpus.

Orthographically, it is easy to detect the voice, namely through quoting. Otherwise, the detection of voice becomes problematic even through paraphrasing where the storyteller can influence what the source says discursively through grammar and the use of one's own words. News discourse, particularly that of the BBC, CNN, and AJE, is mostly unattributed, and if it is attributed it is mostly indirectly (Barkho, 2007, 2008). In today's communication, there is a tendency to move from what is supposed to be the kind of neutral impersonal narrator to an involved interlocutor.

The way voices in news are represented is not wholly the work of the reporter in the field. Institutions have different ways of interfering in how linguistic formations are to be written and how to "tame" voices and to make them part of the institutional discursive practices and strategies. One example is the power internal guidelines<sup>1</sup> exercise on news discourse. Another is the role the stylebooks play. CDA dwells at length with news stylebooks that mainly advise journalists on how certain words are to be written, policies on confused spelling or transliterating (c.f. Richardson, 2008), things with little bearing on issues of ideology, power, dialogism, etc. And if the ideological effects of the internal guidelines are acknowledged (c.f. van Dijk, 1988b; Cameron, 1996), it is seldom backed by textual or ethnographic evidence. There is an apparent dearth of literature on the role internal guidelines play in structuring and patterning the news discourse. AJE and BBC reporters attend intensive courses on how to incorporate the discursive and social patterns of their internal guidelines into news discourse. The frequency through which these patterns occur and are repeated leads not only to standardization of linguistic and presentational styles but they can also lead to clichés that have pejoratively come to be known as "journalese" (Zabaleta, Xamardo, Gutierrez, Urrutiam, & Fernandez, 2008). Examine the following few samples from AJE internal guidelines and compare them with those of the BBC:

#### AJE

- **Extremist** – Avoid characterizing people.
- **Fundamentalist** – Do not use. The word has been hijacked.
- **IDF** – Do not refer to the IDF or Israeli Defense Force. Call it the Israeli army.
- **Martyr** – We will NOT use.
- **Militants** – Do not use unless the subject agrees with the description.
- **Resistance** – Do not use when talking about Iraq. Use armed groups, fighters, etc. instead.

#### BBC

- **BORDER** – Be careful with this word. Do you mean boundary? See **Green Line**.
- **EAST JERUSALEM** – Avoid saying East Jerusalem "is part" of Israel or suggesting anything like it. Avoid the phrase "Arab East Jerusalem," too, unless you also have space to explain that Israel has annexed the area and claims it as part of its capital.

- **GREEN LINE** – we can call the Green Line “the generally recognized boundary between Israel and the West Bank.”
- **Intifada** – So, for example, it is preferable to say that “Sharon’s visit and Palestinian frustration at the failure of the peace process sparked the (second) intifada or uprising” rather than it “led” to it or “started” it.
- **PALESTINE** – So be careful with the use of the word “Palestine” as its meaning can depend on the context.
- **TERRORISTS** – We should try to avoid the term, without attribution. We should let other people characterize while we report the facts as we know them. We should convey to our audience the full consequences of the act by describing what happened. We should use words that specifically describe the perpetrator such as “bomber,” “attacker,” “gunmen,” “kidnapper,” “insurgent,” or “militant.”

Let us examine how the discursive instructions above are woven into news discourse. It is important here to ask whose voice these instructions represent? Certainly, they are not the reporters in the field. They represent the institutional voices; voices of those holding the rein of discursive and social power in the news organization. They sometimes assume multiple voices because they almost dictate how the reported voices must be represented and how the reporting voices should handle them. The voices here alternate, assuming different positioning and perspectives in news discourse, exemplifying what Bakhtin calls double voicing (Bakhtin, 1981), shifting between the persona of narrator to the persona of interlocutor and then to the persona of the reported voices.

The multiple positioning and voicing appears discursively through linguistic features such as the imperative *avoid, do not* in AJE and *avoid, be careful* in the BBC and modal verbs such as *will NOT* in AJE and *should* in the BBC, indicating obligation. Both samples show that the authors of those guidelines speak from a position of power and strength and expect other organizational members to adhere to what they say. A discursive feature to note is the suggestion on how not only verbs and phrases are to be used but also how clauses or sentences are to be employed. Such discursive features are endowed with immense social power (Silverstein, 2004).

AJE guidelines, and the BBC’s for that matter, are representative of heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981) that results from the struggle between two forces: the centripetal and the centrifugal. But it is the centripetal forces that are at work in the discourse of both channels, particularly in their internal guidelines. These forces work to consolidate the structure of discourse on which the institutional hierarchy of power and values is based. The guideline writers work to produce authoritative postures with their distinctive social and discursive characteristics. But the struggle between the centripetal and centrifugal forces is not equal or fair. In media institutions, particularly those dealing with news and communication, struggle is normally “lopsided.” But a close examination of AJE’s discourse shows that the broadcaster tries hard to destabilize and disperse the centripetal forces, represented in the centers of influence and power like London, Washington, or even Tel Aviv (see below). At the same time, AJE editors

claim to be closer to the “marketplace,” to the people’s power. BBC’s strategy, as we shall see, seems to be the opposite.

Institutional voice is not hard to detect. It is discursively present in what amounts to statements that are more of a comment than news, as the following two examples demonstrate:

- One of Israel’s stated objectives is to stop the smuggling of weapons across the border to Palestinian fighters. The tunnels are also used to bring in basic supplies for the territory that has been suffering under an Israeli blockade. (AJE, January 15, 2009)
- Israel’s main objective in Operation Cast Lead is to end Gaza militants’ ability to fire rockets at Israel and to stop them smuggling through tunnels from Egypt. (BBC, January 17, 2009)

The voices are not equal. Note the way AJE explains the role of “tunnels” and compare and contrast with that of the BBC. For AJE, the tunnels are a “lifeline” for the Palestinians “suffering under an Israeli blockade.” For the BBC, they are for “smuggling,” the illicit and illegal shipment of goods. The same voices are categorized differently. Also compare AJE’s “One of Israel’s stated objectives” with BBC’s “Israel’s main objective.” AJE distances itself from the Israeli political and military discourse, by reporting what Israel states. AJE creates a discursual barrier between its own voices and that of Israel. For the BBC, this boundary is blurred. The broadcaster brings the Israeli discourse as close as possible to its own; a discursive privilege the Palestinians are often denied. One way to preserve the discursual barrier would be for the BBC to resort to paraphrasing:

Israel says its main objective in Operation Cast Lead, its code name for the offensive, is to end Gaza militants’ ability to fire rockets at Israel and to stop them smuggling through tunnels from Egypt. (Author’s rewrite)

The broadcasters’ voice is noticeable at other levels, particularly when they quote or paraphrase their own reporters on the ground. Here are a few examples of how the two broadcasters bounce, discursively and socially, from “outside” to “inside” the news discourse:

#### **BBC**

- But the BBC’s Laura Trevelyan, who is at the resort, says . . . (January 18, 2009)
- BBC Middle East editor Jeremy Bowen says . . . (January 19, 2009)
- The BBC’s Tim Franks in Jerusalem says . . . (January 18, 2009)

#### **AJE**

- Ayman Mohyeldin, Al Jazeera’s correspondent in Gaza, said: “A series of explosions were heard over Gaza City.” (January 14, 2009)
- Jacky Rowland, Al Jazeera’s correspondent in Jerusalem, said that . . . (January 16, 2009)
- Al Jazeera’s Zeina Awad, reporting from the Israel-Gaza border, said . . . . . (January 9, 2009)

### *Evaluative and Attitudinal Discursive Stances*

There are differences, or rather shifts in attitudes, of both AJE and the BBC vis-à-vis the Palestinians and Israelis. These shifts are not the work of the reporters in the field. The broadcasters introduce these shifts linguistically in their internal guidelines and ideologically through intensive training. They mark evaluative and attitudinal discursive and social stances imposing a specific cultural depiction of one voice and a different one for the others. This is more discernible at the level of lexis that indexes individuals, groups, and even nations (Fairclough, 1989; Fowler, 1991). It relates to “us” and “them” with the former enjoying favorable linguistic representation and the latter a negative one. Language can even categorize and index “internationally relevant concepts by words and expressions” and their repetition and frequent use turns them into something like “cultural concepts” (Silverstein, 2004, p. 63).

It is clear from the internal guideline samples how AJE, for instance, positions itself discursively, in relation to the evaluative and loaded lexical items such as *militant*, *fundamentalist*, *martyr*, and *extremist*. Compare with BBC’s internal guidelines where the broadcaster instructs reporters to resort to other attitudinal and loaded words to replace *terrorists*. The loaded word *martyr* is a discursive and social characteristic that AJE’s Arabic sister channel bestows on Palestinians killed by Israelis. AJE does not only distance itself from the BBC lexis but the distinctive discursive niche it carves for itself sets it also apart from Al Jazeera Arabic. AJE treats the Palestinians on equal footing with the Israelis discursively and socially. It shuns the use of the loaded term *militant* or *militants* to describe members of the Palestinian groups fighting Israel. It highlights the plight of the Palestinians and, according to its editors, it does not divide the protagonists into “victims and victimizers.”

Tony Burman, AJE’s managing director and a former Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) executive puts it succinctly:

We try hard to tell the full story. For example, we try harder to portray the Palestinians not as simply as victims, or an afterthought in the story of that region, but as a central player in the story of the Middle East—with a history, a story, a case and a cause that merits at least a hearing. Yes, Al Jazeera’s Middle East is different, and we’re proud of it.<sup>2</sup>

Note how the BBC contextualizes the firing of rockets by Palestinians at Israel and compare it with that of AJE (emphasis added):

#### **BBC**

- Palestinian doctors say 879 Palestinians have been killed since the Israeli offensive—to stamp out rocket fire by *Gaza militants*—began on 27 December. (January 6, 2009)
- Clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian gunmen continue as Israel attempts to end *militant rocket fire*. (January 6, 2009)
- A spokesman *for the militant group*, Osama Abu Hemdan, told AFP news agency: “As long as it [the Israeli military] remains in Gaza, resistance and confrontation will continue.” (January 17, 2009)

- The authenticity of the tape, posted on a number of *Islamic militant websites*, could not be independently verified. (January 14, 2009)
- In Israel, a second person was killed by *a militant rocket*. (December 29, 2008)

#### AJE

- *Gaza fighters* fired *home-made rockets* into southern Israel. (December 28, 2008)
- The Israeli military onslaught has, so far, failed to achieve the stated aim of stopping *Palestinian fighters from firing rockets* into southern Israel. (January 12, 2009)
- Four Israelis have also been killed by *Palestinian rockets*. (January 15, 2009)
- Israeli government officials say they are not targeting civilians, only trying to stop rockets by the *Palestinian Hamas movement* governing Gaza, which are still being fired into southern Israel. (January 5, 2009)
- His comments were echoed by Israel's interior minister who said there would be no let up until the threat of *Palestinian rockets attacks* from the Gaza Strip had been removed. (December 31, 2008)

Both channels pursue almost totally different strategies vis-à-vis their lexis. Compare AJE's "Gaza fighters" with BBC's "Gaza militants"; "Palestinian rockets"/"militant rockets"; "Gaza fighters"/"militants in Gaza"; "stopping Palestinian fighters from firing rockets"/"end Gaza militants' ability to fire rockets." The choice of language leads to the emergence of two contrasting and competing discursive and social strategies that depict the world of the conflict and its context in two different ways (Jessop, 2002). AJE strives to treat the Israelis and the Palestinians discursively equally. For the BBC, equality is not possible due to power differentials on the ground. Compare AJE's *Palestinian Hamas Movement* and *Palestinian rocket attacks* with BBC's *Palestinian militant group Hamas* and *militant rockets*. The BBC rewords the Palestinians and the appellations their groups give themselves negatively. In other words, the BBC pursues a two-tier social and discursive policy, one for each side of the conflict. AJE strives not to reword the social and discursive context of the conflict. In other words, it tries to pursue one-tier social and discursive policy for both sides of the conflict. Lexis is ideational, and so are agency and nominalization at levels higher than lexis. "Internal guidelines rarely deal with language units above lexis, but the type of vocabulary internal guidelines and editorial power holders tell journalists to employ exerts an impact on the type of construction journalists and editors are to use at levels beyond words" (Barkho, 2010, p. 84). An investigation of the language the broadcasters employ at levels higher than words and phrases is beyond the scope of this study, but it will be quite revealing to see whether the lexical categorization of voices they employ in their coverage of the Gaza War impact their selection of grammatical patterns and structures.

#### *Historic Indexicals*

Indexicals are those linguistic expressions whose reference changes from one context to another, namely pronouns (Kaplan, 1989). Discursively, indexicals extend beyond those identified by Kaplan and may include any linguistic expression whose reference

shifts from context to context and from one speaker to another. On close examination, Kaplan's theory has a critical element in the sense that an indexical linguistic expression has at least two sorts of meaning. "The first sort of meaning is often called 'character' or 'linguistic meaning'; the second sort is often called 'content'" that has a lot of bearing on the dialectical relationship between a text's discursive and social functions (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2007).

It is a key CDA feature to relate texts to their historical, social, and discursive contexts (Fairclough, 1989). Chilton (2004), for instance, shows that relying on the text for meaning is insufficient and for a proper understanding readers and listeners need to link the text to their historical context or "backstage knowledge" (p. 154). Fairclough (1995) draws "a distinction between internal relations within an order of discourse and external relations" (p. 183). AJE, in its strife to distance itself from what it sees as an "Anglo-Saxon" way of coverage, places some Arabic and Islamic indexicals within a context that is akin to Arab and Islamic culture and "alien" to what is the norm in the West. Note how AJE's internal guidelines explain to reporters the following linguistic expressions in the framework of their Arabic and Islamic historical context:

- **Fatwa** is simply a legal decree in Islam by a religious authority or court and issued by a mufti. (It is NOT a death sentence.)
- **Jihad** means an inner spiritual struggle for perfection NOT a holy war. It is not by tradition a negative term. It also means the struggle to defend Islam, to rally against things challenging it. It does not always need translating; we can simply use the word jihad.

Now compare with the BBC's:

- **Eretz Israel**—This phrase literally means the Land of Israel (Hebrew: Eretz Yisrael) and refers to the ancient kingdoms of the Bible. According to the Bible, the Kingdom of Israel was the nation formed around 1021 BC from the descendants of Jacob, son of Isaac, who was given the name Israel, meaning struggles with God.
- **Temple Mount**—This site is holy to Jews . . . It is known in Jewish tradition as the "abode of God's presence." For religious Jews . . . and secular Jews, giving up the Temple Mount is unthinkable.

These are voices of the past that AJE and the BBC try to explain to their reporters. AJE tries to put its historic indexicals within a new context that is palatable and acceptable to modern-day viewers, Muslims and non-Muslims. It strives to recontextualize and reconceptualize what is normally seen as negative and pejorative in the West into a positive and benign categorization. See how AJE interprets the lexical items *fatwa* and *jihad* for its reporters, the interpretation that for sure the BBC would frown upon. On the other hand, the BBC keeps and preserves the reference of the two historic indexicals, leaning heavily on Biblical reference. Historic reference is crucial in understanding the conflict. Both the Israelis and Palestinians resort to historic indexicals with cultural and religious references (Barkho, 2006). Western viewers

are generally well versed in the Bible. Muslim and Arab viewers are well versed in the Koran. Thus, linguistic structures with historical references such as al-Quds (Arabic) and Jerusalem (English), al-Aqsa (mosque in Jerusalem seen by Muslims as their third holiest shrine) and Haram al-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary) are easy for Muslims to understand but extremely difficult for Westerners to fathom.

### *The Order and Disorder of Language*

The order in which we use language even at the level of single words is part of the way we classify others. This classificatory function of language may add order or disorder to the social world, defining social reality in different ways. Assisted by language, we give labels, names, identities, etc. to individuals and groups but rarely think of the harm the labels we attach may have. Classifying and categorizing is mainly carried out in light of the social power those characterized and labeled have. Normally, the powerful get positive categorizations while the powerless are classified in a negative way. Language, as Michel Foucault (1982, 1984) says, has the power to establish social reality, and behind its lexical and grammatical order hide intricate relations of power and knowledge created and enacted upon through the different linguistic formations it allows us to make. Foucault goes on to say that the linguistic formations we make are not innocent and are mainly deployed in favor and in the interest of those—individuals, groups, institutions—with authority and power.

The BBC, in its internal guidelines and news discourse, does not seem to treat the protagonists on an equal level. It responds to the power relations that exist on the ground that separate the Israelis from the Palestinians as a people. The response is echoed in the discursive strategies it adopts at the higher levels of the organizational hierarchy. These strategies, mainly in the form of internal guidelines, become an integral part of organizational culture and knowledge, and through education—the BBC College of Journalism and al-Jazeera Training Center—they are made to be assimilated as part of organizational ideology. Discursive inequality is something the powerful in the organization nurture and call for. Note the following statement from Malcolm Balen, BBC's Senior Editorial Advisor and the official who has written most of BBC's Middle East internal guidelines:

What is the right balance between stories from Israel and stories from Palestinian territories and surrounding countries? It is a bit like in a non-electoral period here. The government of the day is going to get more coverage than opposition parties because it has the power to do things. And Israel clearly has more power to do things.

Roger Hardy, BBC's Middle East analyst, concurs: "There are structural differences between the Palestinians and Israelis . . . it is my feeling [that] the facts on the ground to a certain extent determine the choice of language we use."

AJE takes a different discursive stand. In its internal guidelines, news discourse, and organizational culture and knowledge, there is a persistent attempt to treat both

protagonists as equal. This is the distinctive discursive and social paradigm shift AJE has created for itself and that linguistically sets it apart from rivals such as the BBC and CNN and its sister channel al-Jazeera Arabic. AJE's Managing Editor Tony Burman puts it clearly:

Number one we cover the Palestinian side as thoroughly as we do the Israeli side. In our view, we see in a far more fair-minded holistic way than our competitors. In other words there is no suggestion at all ever of us having a pro-Israeli tilt. I would argue in AJE that we have no Palestinian tilt except by virtue of the fact that we cover it thoroughly... we have a situation when two sides all of a sudden are treated on a network such as ours as equals. The matter in itself in my mind is quite groundbreaking particularly in terms of Western treatment of that issue.

### *The Named and the Nameless*

At times of crisis different groups develop different discursive strategies or practices (Jessop, 2002). Competing strategies normally lead to contestation and resistance, but usually the discursive practices of those with knowledge and power reign. The Israelis and Palestinians as groups have their own discursive strategies to represent themselves. They have also developed distinctive linguistic strategies when talking and writing about each other. It is important to see how close AJE and the BBC are to Palestinian and Israeli registers that mark off socially and ideologically distinct areas of experience, categorization, and classification. Lexis is the best discursive tool to measure such categorization (Halliday, 1993). Lexis, as Fowler (1991) says, does not only sort out experiences of those employing it but it outlines in detail how different groups and individuals are classified and conceptualized.

Palestinian fighters and their groups turn almost into "nameless linguistic" entities in the BBC corpus. They are invariably described as *militant* or *militants*. This particular lexical item is one of the most frequently used in the BBC corpus (147 times), more than six times per story on average. It collocates in a variety of ways with other related linguistic structures, turning the Palestinians into something almost anonymous. Note the following expressions: *militant*, *militants*, *Gaza militants*, *Hamas militants*, *militant web sites*, *Palestinian militants*, *militant attacks*, *militant rockets*, *militant movement*, and *militant bases*. AJE does not use "pejorative" terms to describe the Palestinians or their armed groups. It strives to treat both sides of the conflict discursively equally.

### *Renaming and Overnaming*

Linguistic formations in the news do not usually represent what voices would like them to be. AJE and the BBC often introduce or promote their own structures to represent a concept with which the protagonist may agree or disagree. Fowler (1991) calls this way of coding the social experiences of others by inventing new terms "re-lexicalization" (p. 84). But the BBC and AJE do not pursue the same discursive strategies when naming or renaming the Palestinians or Israelis. AJE distances

itself from BBC's re-lexicalizations of Palestinians that it sees as negative. At the same time, it exerts no discursive effort to re-lexicalize the Israelis. The BBC takes an almost opposite discursive stand. While it employs Israeli names, it re-lexicalizes those of the Palestinians. Note how the Palestinians and their groups are reworded by the BBC into *militant* or *militants*.

The corpus also reveals, as far as the BBC is concerned, the discursive process of overnaming, which Fowler (1991) calls overlexicalization. Here, writers add additional linguistic formations in an attempt to explain the social reality of a concept or a particular group not from the group's viewpoint but from the organizational stand. What is interesting here is that the renaming is power driven and is generally negative and pejorative of the powerless and positive and favorable to the powerful. Note the following BBC examples:

- Hamas, *the Islamic militant group* that controls Gaza
- *The Palestinian militant group* Hamas
- A spokesman for the militant group, Osama Abu Hemdan
- The *militant group's* exiled political leader, Kahled Meshaal.

*The International Correspondent "Complex"*

It is a well-known fact that Israel barred Western news organizations, including the BBC, and their international staff from entering Gaza. Stranded on the Israeli side of the border, they relied on their local or national stringers and reporters. Let us now examine a short extract taken from a 45-minute speech BBC's World News Editor John Williams gave at a conference in Sweden to see where the BBC positions itself vis-à-vis its national and international correspondents:

At the start of this year, as Israeli forces attacked Gaza, most international journalists were forced to watch from a hill outside Sderot. Israel closed the border and refused to allow anyone. The BBC—like Al Jazeera—relied on its local staff and the local news agencies. By locking out the Jerusalem-based press corps, the Israeli authorities believed they could control the story. Thanks to the bravery of the Palestinian journalists, the story was told.

The extract tells us in clear terms that the BBC categorizes its journalists into "local" and "international" and that it gives both the same degree of credibility and independence in coverage.

Let us now contrast how AJE locates itself vis-à-vis "local" and "international." Here is a short extract from a speech by AJE's Managing Editor Tony Burman given at the same conference:

AJE has a worldwide staff of about 1,100 employees, drawn from more than 50 nationalities. It constitutes the most diverse news service in the world. There are many of us from the BBC, CNN, European networks and, yes, the CBC in Canada—but many more come from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. The key aspect of Al Jazeera English is its global perspective. Our "home team" is not in London, Atlanta, New York, or Toronto. We have no "home team."

Burman's discourse is almost the opposite of Williams. There is no categorization of journalists into "local" and "international" as evident in "We have no home team." His discourse differentiates and brands his organization in opposition to its rivals because his channel, in his words, "provides alternative voices to the Anglo-American monopoly of CNN, BBC, etc. that has dominated the world of international journalism."

Now let us turn to AJE and BBC's news discourse and see how the two broadcasters view their "local/international" categorization:

1. Israel has refused to allow international journalists to enter Gaza without supervision, making it impossible to independently confirm casualty figures. (BBC, January 15, 2009)
2. Israel launched its offensive on the Gaza Strip on 27 December and has refused to allow international journalists to enter Gaza without supervision, making it impossible to independently confirm casualty figures. (BBC, January 15, 2009)
3. It is impossible to independently confirm casualty figures as Israel has refused to allow international journalists to enter Gaza. (BBC, January 17, 2009)
4. More than 1,200 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's offensive, including more than 400 children, according to UN and Palestinian medical sources. (AJE, January 17, 2009)

It is interesting to see how the BBC frames its local correspondents based in Gaza. The choice it makes is to cast doubt both socially and discursively on the authenticity of the information its local journalists provide. Part of the framing is discursively represented in the broadcaster's use of almost similar linguistic choice as in 1, 2, and 3 "making it impossible to independently confirm." The BBC repeats the choice whenever casualty figures and damage inflicted by Israel on Gaza is reported. Note how AJE shuns such framing and compare and contrast with the speech by BBC's Williams. The framing turns into something like a buzz phrase that cannot be but the result of training or education that are both ideological in character since they discursively and socially help shape organizational strategies and discourse. The framing is suggestive of the control media organizations exercise over how members could speak and write (Cameron, 2000). The framing is so rigid that after reading a couple of stories, careful readers may easily predict the generic structure that is to follow. AJE does not suffer from BBC's local correspondent 'syndrome' as example 4 above shows.

## **Conclusion**

In light of the analysis, in which textual evidence is only one of the main components of investigation, the study finds that AJE's discursive and social paradigm is based on lexical and contextual equity among the news-discourse participants regardless of the power differential on the ground. The BBC's paradigm clearly reflects the power differential on the ground in its news discourse as evidenced in the discursive disparity with which the protagonists are represented. AJE attempts to achieve linguistic parity

between the sides of the conflict by distancing itself from the centers of power and focusing more on the popular or the “market place.” But for both broadcasters, and regardless of parity or disparity of the linguistic description of the voices in the discourse, the paradigm is coercive and not arbitrary; it is normative and not subjective since field and floor reporters and editors are obliged to comply with internal guidelines regardless of their viewpoints and attitudes.

The BBC and AJE use the same language—English—to provide two different versions of truth. The communicative event is packaged in different ways in order to represent the broadcasters’ views of the world. The study reveals “the how it is” of their discursive and social patterns and solves some of the questions CDA as a discipline has been grappling with, particularly how to link texts with contexts and the interrelationships between the micro- and macroworlds of discourse. For example, the study demonstrates how discursive instructions the two broadcasters have in place are woven into the news discourse and how these instructions are employed to categorize the voices in the conflict. Social power comes from the highest levels in institutional hierarchy.

The investigation has come across no trace of struggle or clash between the holders of discursive power—senior editors with a say in the selection of discursive and social patterns—and the receivers of discursive orders and instructions—reporters and junior editors. Thus, the struggle between the centripetal and centrifugal forces of discourse is not equal or fair. In the BBC as an institution, the struggle is normally “lopsided” as far as the coverage of the Middle East is concerned. AJE tries hard to destabilize and disperse the centripetal forces, represented in the centers of influence and power. As a result of the struggle between these two opposing forces (heteroglossia), the two broadcasters have developed their own distinctive social and discursive characteristics of Middle East coverage.

For instance, AJE not only distances itself from the BBC lexis but the distinctive discursive niche it carves for itself sets it also apart from Al Jazeera Arabic. AJE treats the Palestinians on equal footing with the Israelis discursively and socially. The BBC rewords and overlexicalizes the Palestinians and the appellations their groups give themselves negatively. In other words, the BBC pursues a two-tier social and discursive policy, one for each side of the conflict. AJE strives not to reword or overword the social and discursive context of the conflict. In other words, it tries to pursue a one-tier social and discursive policy for both sides of the conflict. Meantime, the BBC frames its local correspondents based in Gaza. The choice it makes is to cast doubt both socially and discursively on the authenticity of the information its local journalists provide. AJE shuns such framing.

## Notes

- [1] “Internal guidelines” are not the stylebooks that media outlets make available to the public. Internal guidelines deal mainly with what to say and what not to say and are supposed to be strictly confidential. The author is indebted to the Al-Jazeera network for access to its two sets of internal guidelines—one for the Arabic service and one for the English service. The

BBC is very strict about confidentiality of its internal guidelines and I could only obtain an incomplete copy of the corporation's Middle East guidelines that is mainly a list of hundreds of words, phrases, and occasionally sentences reporters and editors are required to use in covering Israel and Palestine. The BBC has made public only a small portion of its Middle East internal guidelines, 24 terms, which can be accessed from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/newswatch/ifs/hi/newsid\\_6040000/newsid\\_6044000/6044090.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/newswatch/ifs/hi/newsid_6040000/newsid_6044000/6044090.stm).

- [2] All the interviews with managing editors and journalists were conducted by the author unless indicated otherwise.

## References

- Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Barkho, L. (2010). *News from the BBC, CNN and al-Jazeera – How the Three Broadcasters Cover the Middle East*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton.
- Barkho, L. (2006). The Arabic Al-Jazeera vs. Britain's BBC and America's CNN: Who does journalism right. *American Communication Journal*, 8(1), 1–15. Retrieved from <http://www.acjournal.org/holdings/vol8/Essays/arab2.pdf>
- Barkho, L. (2007). Unpacking the discursive and social links in the BBC, CNN and Aljazeera's coverage of the Middle East. *Journal of Arab and Mosul Media Research*, 1(1), 11–29.
- Barkho, L. (2008). BBC's discursive strategy and practice. *Journalism Studies*, 9(2), 287–294.
- Bhatia, V. K., Flowerdew, J., & Jones, R. H. (2008). *Advances in discourse analysis*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Blommaert, J., & Bulcaen, C. (2000). Critical discourse analysis. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 29, 447–466.
- Blommaert, J., Collins, J., Heller, M., Rampton, B., Slembrouck, S., & Verschueren, J. (2003). Introduction. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 13(1), 1–11.
- Cameron, D. (1996). Style policy and style politics: A neglected aspect of the language of the news. *Media, Culture and Society*, 188, 315–333.
- Cameron, D. (2000). *Good to talk? Living and working in a communication culture*. London, United Kingdom: Sage.
- Chilton, P. (2004). *Analyzing political discourse. theory and practice*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Chouliaraki, L., & Fairclough, N. (1999). *Discourse in late modernity: Rethinking critical discourse analysis*. Edinburgh, United Kingdom: Edinburgh University Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. London, United Kingdom: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media discourse*. London, United Kingdom: Edward Arnold.
- Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical discourse analysis. In T. Van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as social interaction. discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction* (Vol. 2, pp. 258–284). London, United Kingdom: Sage.
- Fish, S. (1981). What is stylistics and why are they saying such terrible things about it? In D. Freeman (Ed.), *Essays in modern stylistics* (pp. 53–78). London, United Kingdom: Methuen.
- Flowerdew, J. (2008a). Critical discourse analysis and strategies of resistance. In V. K. Bhatia, J. Flowerdew, & R. Jones (Eds.), *Advances in discourse studies* (pp. 195–210). London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1982). Afterword: The subject and power. In H. L. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow (Eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* (pp. 208–226). Brighton, United Kingdom: The Harvester Press, Brighton.
- Foucault, M. (1984). The order of discourse. In M. Shapiro (Ed.), *Language and politics* (pp. 108–138). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Fowler, R. (1991). *Language in the news*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Goffman, E. (1979/1981). *Forms of talk*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

- Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning*. London, United Kingdom: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1993). Towards a language-based theory of learning. *Linguistics and Education*, 5(2), 93–116.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Martin, J. R. (1993). *Writing science: Literacy and discursive power*. London, United Kingdom: Falmer.
- James, W. (1997). *The meaning of truth: A sequel to pragmatism*. New York, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Jessop, B. (2002). *The future of the capitalist state*. Cambridge, MA: Polity.
- Kaplan, D. (1989). Demonstratives. In J. Almog, J. Perry & H. Wettstein (Eds.), *Themes from Kaplan* (pp. 481–563). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Koven, M. (2002). An analysis of speaker role inhabitation in narratives of personal experience. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 34, 167–217.
- Lee, D. (1992). *Competing discourses: Perspective and ideology in language*. London, United Kingdom: Longman.
- Martin, J. R. (1992). English text: System and structure. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamin.
- Meyer, M. (2001). Between theory, method, and politics: Positioning of the approaches to CDA. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer, (Eds.) *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 14–31). London, United Kingdom: Sage.
- Philo, G. (2007). Can discourse analysis successfully explain the content of media and journalistic practice? *Journalism Studies*, 8(2), 175–196.
- Richardson, J. (2008). Language and journalism: An expanding research agenda. *Journalism Studies*, 9(2), 152–160.
- Schegloff, E. (1997). Whose text? Whose Context? *Discourse and Society*, 8(2), 165–187.
- Silverstein, M. (2004). Cultural concepts and the language–culture nexus. *Current Anthropology*, 45, 621–652.
- Simpson, P. (1993). *Language, ideology and point of view*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- (2007). In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/indexicals/>
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (2007). Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/indexicals/>
- Toolan, M. (1997). What is critical discourse analysis and why are people saying such terrible things about it? *Language and Literature*, 6(2), 83–103.
- Verschueren, J. (2001). Predicaments of criticism. *Critique of Anthropology*, 21(1), 59–82.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1988a). *News analysis: Case studies of international and national news in the press*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1988b). *News as discourse*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 4, 249–283.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Multidisciplinary CDA: A plea for diversity. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 95–120). London, UK: Sage.
- Weber, J. J. (1992). *Critical analysis of fiction*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Rodopi.
- Widdowson, H. (1995). Discourse analysis: A critical view. *Language and Literature*, 4, 157–172.
- Widdowson, H. (1996). Reply to Fairclough. Discourse and interpretation: Conjectures and refutations. *Language and Literature*, 5(1), 57–69.
- Widdowson, H. (1998). The theory and practice of critical discourse analysis. *Applied Linguistics*, 19(1), 136–151.
- Widdowson, H. (2000). Critical practices: On representation and the interpretation of text. In S. Sarangi & M. Coulthard (Eds.), *Discourse and social life* (pp. 155–169). London, United Kingdom: Pearson Education.
- Zabaleta, I., Xamardo, N., Gutierrez, A., Urrutiam, S., & Fernandez, I. (2008). Language development, knowledge and use among journalists of European minority language media. *Journalism Studies*, 9(2), 195–211.

Copyright of Communication Studies is the property of Central States Communication Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

**Fonte: Communication Studies, v. 62, n. 1, p. 23-40, 2011. [Base de Dados]. Disponível em: <<http://web.ebscohost.com>>. Acesso em: 11 mar. 2011.**

A utilização deste artigo é exclusiva para fins educacionais