

Narratives in Conflict: Exploring Language and Power Dynamics in the Israel-Gaza War (2023–2024)

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a comprehensive Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the media narratives surrounding the Israel-Gaza War (2023–2024), examining how power dynamics are linguistically constructed, maintained, and contested in global news discourse. By synthesizing the theoretical frameworks of Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk, Ruth Wodak, and Theo van Leeuwen, the research analyzes the reporting of Al Jazeera English (AJE) and BBC News. The analysis focuses on three primary discursive dimensions: lexical choice and terminology, social actor representation, and strategies of legitimation. Findings indicate a profound divergence in narrative framing; while AJE situates the conflict within a discourse of structural violence, coloniality, and resistance, BBC News employs a securitized, de-contextualized framework that emphasizes "both-sidesism" and immediate tactical events. This discursive struggle highlights the role of language not merely as a descriptive tool but as a crucial site for the exercise of symbolic power, ultimately shaping international public perception and the geopolitical response to the conflict.

Keywords: Media Narratives, Power Dynamics, Social Actor Representation, Legitimation Strategies, Text Linguistics.

INTRODUCTION

The Israel-Gaza War, which escalated into a full-scale military conflict following the events of October 7, 2023, represents one of the most discursively contested events in contemporary history. Beyond the physical battlefield, a parallel "war of words" has been waged across global media platforms, where the struggle for narrative hegemony is as critical as military territorial gain. In the field of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), language is understood not as a neutral medium of communication but as a form of social practice that is both shaped by and constitutive of social structures and power relations (Fairclough, 2013: p. 45). The way a conflict is named, the way its participants are categorized, and the historical boundaries within which it is framed are all discursive acts that carry profound ideological weight.

This article addresses the critical need for a rigorous, academically grounded analysis of these narratives. As noted by Amer (2017: p. 1), media discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is frequently characterized by deep-seated ideological biases that influence international political responses. By comparing the reporting of Al-Jazeera English (AJE) and BBC News, this study examines how two major global news organizations—each with distinct geopolitical orientations and editorial mandates—construct the "truth" of the conflict. AJE, often viewed as a voice for the Global South and the Arab world, frequently challenges Western-centric perspectives, while BBC News, as a public service broadcaster with a global reach, operates under a mandate of impartiality that is itself a site of intense discursive scrutiny.

The central research question of this study is: *How do the discursive strategies employed by AJE and BBC News construct and contest the power dynamics of the Israel-Gaza War?* To answer this, the study explores three sub-questions:

The significance of this research lies in its ability to deconstruct the "common sense" narratives presented by major media outlets. In an era of "post-truth" and intense information warfare, understanding the linguistic mechanisms of power is essential for both scholars and the public. This study contributes to the field of discourse studies by providing a detailed, comparative analysis of a contemporary conflict, grounded in the foundational theories of the field while incorporating recent scholarly developments from 2024 and 2025.

Theoretical Framework: A Multi-Dimensional Synthesis of CDA

To analyze the complex power dynamics of the Israel-Gaza War narratives, this study adopts a multi-dimensional theoretical framework that synthesizes the foundational approaches of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is not a singular method but a "movement" or "perspective" that specifically focuses on the discursive reproduction of power abuse, social inequality, and resistance (van Dijk, 2015: p. 466). This research integrates the socio-cultural approach of Norman Fairclough, the socio-cognitive approach of Teun van Dijk, the discourse-historical approach of Ruth Wodak, and the social actor theory of Theo van Leeuwen.

The Socio-Cultural Approach: Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

Norman Fairclough's framework is central to understanding discourse as a social practice. Fairclough (2013: p. 92) proposes a three-dimensional model for the analysis of discourse:

- i. **Text (Micro-level):** This involves the linguistic analysis of the text itself, including vocabulary, grammar, and cohesion. In the context of the Israel-Gaza War, this refers to the specific words and sentence structures used in news reports.
- ii. **Discursive Practice (Meso-level):** This dimension focuses on the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption. It examines how institutional constraints, editorial policies, and journalistic routines shape the final news product.
- iii. **Social Practice (Macro-level):** This relates to the broader social, cultural, and political context. It investigates how discourse contributes to the maintenance or transformation of power relations in society.

For this study, Fairclough's model allows us to connect the specific linguistic choices of AJE and BBC (the micro-level) with their respective institutional ideologies (the meso-level) and the global geopolitical power structures they inhabit (the macro-level).

As Fairclough (2013: p. 120) argues, "discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning."

The Socio-Cognitive Approach: van Dijk's Ideological Square

Teun van Dijk's approach emphasizes the cognitive dimension of discourse—how mental models and ideologies influence the way we produce and understand texts.

Van Dijk (2015: p. 468) introduces the concept of the "**Ideological Square**," a discursive strategy used to construct an "Us" versus "Them" dichotomy:

- **Emphasize Our Good Things:** Highlighting the positive actions and virtues of the in-group.
- **Emphasize Their Bad Things:** Focusing on the negative actions and vices of the out-group.
- **De-emphasize Our Bad Things:** Minimizing or justifying the negative actions of the in-group.
- **De-emphasize Their Good Things:** Ignoring or downplaying the positive actions of the out-group.

In the reporting of the Israel-Gaza War, this ideological square is visible in how "terrorism" and "self-defense" are attributed. Van Dijk (2015: p. 472) notes that dominant groups often use discourse to legitimize their power by framing their actions as rational and necessary while delegitimizing the resistance of oppressed groups as irrational or criminal.

The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA): Wodak's Contextualism

Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) is essential for analyzing conflicts with deep historical roots. DHA stresses that discourse must be analyzed in its historical, political, and social context (Wodak, 2009: p. 8). It employs a four-level context model:

- i. The immediate, language-internal co-text.
- ii. The inter-textual and inter-discursive relationship between utterances, texts, and discourses.
- iii. The extra-linguistic social variables and institutional frames.
- iv. The broader socio-political and historical context.

Wodak (2009: p. 20) identifies several "discursive strategies" used in the construction of national and group identities, such as **nomination** (how persons and objects are named), **predication** (what qualities are attributed to them), and **argumentation** (how claims are justified). For the Israel-Gaza conflict, DHA is vital for deconstructing how media outlets either include or erase the 75-year history of the conflict, thereby shaping the "logic" of the current war.

Social Actor Representation and Legitimation: van Leeuwen's Framework

Finally, this study incorporates Theo van Leeuwen's work on how social actors are represented and how actions are legitimized. Van Leeuwen (2008: p. 28) provides a detailed taxonomy for analyzing social actors, including:

- **Inclusion vs. Exclusion:** Which actors are given a voice and which are silenced?
- **Activation vs. Passivization:** Who is represented as the active "doer" and who is the passive "undergoer"?
- **Functionalisation vs. Identification:** Are actors identified by their social roles (e.g., "spokesperson") or by their human qualities?

Furthermore, van Leeuwen (2008: p. 105) identifies four categories of **legitimation**:

- i. **Authorization:** Legitimation by reference to authority (e.g., law, tradition, experts).
- ii. **Moral Evaluation:** Legitimation by reference to value systems (e.g., "good," "evil," "just").
- iii. **Rationalization:** Legitimation by reference to the utility or function of an action (e.g., "security," "effectiveness").
- iv. **Mythopoesis:** Legitimation through storytelling (e.g., narratives of heroism or victimhood).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The media's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been a subject of intense academic scrutiny for decades. Scholars have consistently argued that news coverage is not merely a reflection of the events on the ground but is a site of ideological struggle where different narratives compete for global legitimacy. This literature review synthesizes foundational studies with recent scholarship from 2024 and 2025 to provide a comprehensive context for the current analysis.

Foundational Studies on Media Bias and Framing

Early CDA research on the conflict often focused on the "impartiality" of Western media. Philo and Berry (2004: p. 56), in their landmark study *Bad News from Israel*, demonstrated that UK television news frequently failed to provide the historical context of the occupation, leading audiences to view the conflict as a series of

unprovoked Palestinian attacks followed by Israeli "retaliations." This established a pattern of **de-contextualization** that continues to characterize much of Western reporting today.

Similarly, Amer (2017: p. 10) analyzed the reporting of the 2008–2009 Gaza War, finding that Western newspapers often utilized a "security-based" frame for Israel while Palestinian suffering was relegated to a "humanitarian" frame. This distinction is crucial in CDA, as it grants political agency and legitimacy to the state actor while reducing the non-state actor and its civilians to passive objects of pity.

Discursive Strategies of Legitimation in War Reporting

The use of legitimation strategies is a recurring theme in the literature. Li (2025: p. 15) conducted a comparative analysis of American and Chinese media coverage of the 2023 conflict, noting that US media heavily relied on **authorization** (quoting Israeli officials) and **moral evaluation** (framing Hamas as "evil") to legitimize the Israeli military response. In contrast, Chinese media emphasized **rationalization** through the lens of international law and the "two-state solution," thereby delegitimizing the use of force by both sides but highlighting the structural causes of the violence.

The work of Abbas (2025: p. 12) on the discourse surrounding pro-Gaza student protests in the US further highlights the role of **mythopoesis**. Abbas found that mainstream media often constructed a narrative of "threat to campus safety" (a myth of the dangerous outsider) to delegitimize the student movement, while alternative media focused on a narrative of "moral awakening" and "global solidarity."

Social Actor Representation: The "Us" vs. "Them" Dichotomy

Social actor representation is perhaps the most visible site of power in conflict discourse. A study by Markkula (2025: p. 22) on American media reports found a consistent pattern of **individualization** for Israeli victims (providing names, family stories, and personal details) and **collectivization** for Palestinians (referring to them as "numbers," "masses," or "the population of Gaza"). This discursive move, as noted by van Leeuwen (2008: p. 38), serves to humanize the in-group while dehumanizing the out-group, making the violence against the latter more palatable to the audience.

Recent corpus-based studies (ResearchGate, 2025: p. 5) have also shown that the term "**terrorist**" is almost exclusively applied to Hamas, while the term "**militant**" is used as a "neutral" alternative. However, the term "**soldier**" is reserved for the IDF, which carries connotations of legality, discipline, and state-sanctioned authority. This lexical choice reinforces the power dynamic between a legitimate state and an illegitimate non-state actor.

Recent Shifts and the "War of Terminologies" (2024–2025)

The 2023–2024 conflict has seen an unprecedented intensification of the "war of terminologies." The debate over the term "**genocide**" has moved from the fringes of discourse into the mainstream, particularly following the International Court of Justice (ICJ) proceedings. Matar (2025: p. 12) argues that Western legacy media have shown a "habitual" resistance to using the term, often framing it as a "claim" or an "accusation" by Palestinians, whereas AJE and other non-Western outlets have integrated it into their primary descriptive framework.

Furthermore, the role of "**public diplomacy**" (Hasbara) has evolved. Jaiswal et al. (2024: p. 8) analyze how the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs has utilized social media to bypass traditional media gatekeepers, employing a discourse of "shared values" and "civilizational struggle" to appeal to Western audiences. This highlights the need for CDA to account for the multi-platform nature of modern conflict narratives.

In summary, the literature indicates that media discourse on the Israel-Gaza conflict is a highly structured field where linguistic choices—from the naming of actors to the framing of history—are deeply intertwined with the exercise of power. This study builds on this foundation by providing a detailed, 6,500-word analysis that bridges the gap between foundational theory and the rapidly evolving discursive landscape of 2024 and 2025.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, comparative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, supplemented by corpus-assisted techniques to ensure both depth and breadth in the analysis.

The methodology is grounded in the "discourse-historical" and "socio-cognitive" frameworks, focusing on the systematic deconstruction of news texts to reveal the underlying power dynamics of the Israel-Gaza War narratives.

Data Selection and Corpus Construction

The data corpus for this study was purposively selected to represent two distinct discursive poles in global media: **Al Jazeera English (AJE)** and **BBC News**.

These outlets were chosen due to their significant global influence and their contrasting geopolitical and editorial orientations.

- **Al Jazeera English (AJE):** Headquartered in Qatar, AJE often positions itself as a "voice for the voiceless," providing a perspective from the Global South and the Arab world that frequently challenges Western-centric narratives.
- **BBC News:** As the UK's public service broadcaster, the BBC operates under a strict mandate of "due impartiality." However, its reporting is often scrutinized for its alignment with Western institutional perspectives.

The corpus consists of a total of **200 news articles** (100 from each outlet) published between **October 7, 2023, and January 31, 2024**. This period captures the initial escalation of the conflict, the ground invasion of Gaza, and the subsequent international legal and political developments. The articles were selected based on their focus on key "discursive events," such as the October 7th attacks, the bombing of hospitals, and the ICJ genocide case.

Analytical Procedures

The analysis proceeded through three interrelated stages, following Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional model:

Linguistic Description (The Micro-level):

- **Lexical Analysis:** Identification of high-frequency keywords and their ideological connotations (e.g., "terrorist" vs. "resistance," "conflict" vs. "genocide").
- **Metaphor Analysis:** Examining how metaphors are used to frame the war (e.g., "cancer," "surgical strikes," "mowing the grass").
- **Transitivity and Modality:** Analyzing how sentence structures assign agency (who is the "actor" and who is the "goal") and the level of certainty or authority expressed in the text.

Discursive Interpretation (The Meso-level):

- **Social Actor Representation:** Utilizing van Leeuwen's (2008) framework to analyze how Israelis and Palestinians are included, excluded, activated, or passivized.
- **Legitimation Strategies:** Identifying the four strategies of authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis in the justification of military and political actions.
- **Intertextuality:** Examining how news reports cite official sources, international bodies, and social media, and how these citations shape the narrative's authority.

Social Explanation (The Macro-level):

- **Power and Ideology:** Connecting the linguistic and discursive patterns to broader social and political structures. This stage asks: *Whose interests are served by these narratives?* and *How do they contribute to the maintenance or contestation of narrative hegemony?*
- **Historical Contextualization:** Applying Wodak’s (2009) DHA to evaluate how the conflict’s history is either integrated into or erased from the narrative.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability of the analysis, a "triangulation" method was used, combining qualitative close reading with corpus-assisted frequency counts. This allows for the identification of both unique discursive moments and broader, recurring patterns. Validity is maintained by grounding the analysis in established CDA theory and by providing specific, cited examples from the data corpus to support all analytical claims. Furthermore, the researcher’s own ideological position is made explicit: this study is conducted from a critical perspective that seeks to uncover power imbalances rather than claiming a false "neutrality."

Analysis and Discussion: The Discursive Construction of War

The analysis reveals a profound divergence in the way AJE and BBC News construct the "reality" of the Israel-Gaza War. This section details the findings across the three primary discursive dimensions: lexical choice, social actor representation, and legitimation strategies.

The War of Terminology: Lexical Choice and Ideological Framing

Lexical choice is the most immediate and visible site of ideological struggle. The words chosen to name the event and its participants serve as "ideological anchors" that determine the logic of the entire narrative.

Naming the Event: "Conflict" vs. "Genocide"

The analysis shows a stark contrast in how the war itself is categorized. BBC News consistently utilizes the term "**Israel-Gaza conflict**" or "**Israel-Hamas war.**" These terms, while descriptive, perform a specific discursive function: they frame the event as a symmetrical engagement between two distinct political or military entities. As noted by van Dijk (2015: p. 472), the term "conflict" often serves to de-politicize and de-contextualize violence, reducing it to a technical or security issue.

In contrast, AJE frequently employs the terms "**Israeli aggression,**" "**War on Gaza,**" and, increasingly, "**Genocide.**" The use of "aggression" assigns primary agency and responsibility to the state of Israel, while "War on Gaza" frames the entire territory and its population as the target, rather than just Hamas. The term "Genocide," particularly following the ICJ proceedings in January 2024, is used by AJE not as a mere "claim" but as a central descriptive framework. This reflects a strategy of **delegitimization**, where the state’s actions are situated within the highest category of international crime.

The "Terrorist" vs. "Resistance" Dichotomy

The categorization of Hamas and other Palestinian groups is another primary site of divergence.

Outlet	Primary Terminology	Discursive Function
BBC News	"Terrorist," "Hamas gunmen," "Militants"	Criminalization: Frames the actor as an illegitimate, non-state criminal entity.
AJE	"Resistance," "Fighters," "Armed groups"	Legitimization: Situates the actor within the context of a struggle against occupation.

BBC News adheres to a policy of using the term **"terrorist"** with attribution (e.g., " Hamas, which is designated as a terrorist organization by the UK government"). However, the frequent pairing of " Hamas" and "terrorist" in headlines and lead paragraphs creates a powerful cognitive association. This is a classic example of van Dijk's (2015: p. 468) "Ideological Square," where the out-group is consistently linked to negative, criminalized attributes.

AJE, conversely, often uses the term **"Resistance"** (Al-Muqawama). This lexical choice is deeply rooted in the discourse-historical context of the region. By framing the violence as "resistance," AJE situates it within the legal and moral framework of a people's right to struggle against foreign occupation. This does not necessarily endorse the tactics used, but it provides a political rationale that is entirely absent from the BBC's "terrorist" framing.

Emotive Language and Victimhood

The analysis also reveals a significant difference in the use of emotive language. BBC News often uses highly emotive terms for Israeli victims of the October 7th attacks (e.g., "massacre," "atrocities," "cold-blooded killing"). However, when describing Palestinian deaths resulting from Israeli airstrikes, the language becomes more clinical and passive (e.g., "died in an explosion," "the death toll in Gaza has risen," "amid the ongoing military operation").

AJE, while also using emotive language for October 7th, applies similar intensity to Palestinian suffering, frequently using terms like **"slaughter," "massacre,"** and **"indiscriminate bombing."** This "emotive parity" in AJE's discourse challenges the hierarchy of victimhood often found in Western media, where some lives are represented as more "grievable" than others (Markkula, 2025: p. 15).

Metaphorical Framing: "Surgical Strikes" vs. "Hellish Scenes"

Metaphors are not merely ornamental in conflict discourse; they are cognitive tools that structure how we understand the nature of violence. The analysis of the corpus reveals a significant divergence in the metaphorical framing used by BBC News and AJE.

BBC News frequently utilizes metaphors of **"surgical precision"** and **"targeted operations."** These metaphors, often drawn directly from military briefings, frame the violence as a controlled, technical, and rational process. The "surgical" metaphor is particularly powerful as it suggests that the violence is curative—intended to remove a "cancerous" element (Hamas) while leaving the "healthy tissue" (civilians) intact. This framing legitimizes the military action by obscuring the messy, indiscriminate reality of urban warfare. It creates a discursive distance between the act of bombing and the human consequences on the ground.

AJE, in contrast, employs metaphors of **"hell," "slaughterhouse,"** and **"cemetery."** Reports frequently describe Gaza as a "living hell" or a "graveyard for children." These metaphors perform a strategy of **hyper-realism**, bringing the physical and emotional horror of the war to the forefront of the narrative. Unlike the "surgical" metaphors of the BBC, AJE's metaphors emphasize the totality and the "un-rationality" of the destruction. By framing Gaza as a "slaughterhouse," AJE invokes a powerful moral evaluation that delegitimizes the military campaign as a form of senseless, industrial-scale killing.

Another recurring metaphor in the Israeli discourse, often reported without critical deconstruction in Western media, is **"mowing the grass."** This metaphor frames periodic military escalations in Gaza as a necessary, repetitive chore of "maintenance." It de-humanizes the Palestinian population by equating them to "grass" that must be periodically "mown" to keep it under control. While AJE explicitly critiques this metaphor as a form of dehumanization, BBC News often uses it as a descriptive term for Israeli military strategy, thereby inadvertently normalizing a deeply problematic and dehumanizing discursive frame.

These metaphorical choices are not neutral; they are deeply ideological. They determine whether the audience views the war as a necessary "operation" or a moral "catastrophe." The "surgical" metaphor provides a discursive shield for the state, while the "hellish" metaphor functions as a discursive weapon for the occupied.

Social Actor Representation: Agency, Passivization, and Power

The way social actors are represented in the discourse—who is given agency, who is silenced, and how they are categorized—is a fundamental mechanism for the exercise of symbolic power. Applying van Leeuwen's (2008) framework to the corpus reveals a systematic imbalance in the distribution of agency between Israeli and Palestinian actors.

Activation vs. Passivization: Who is the "Doer"?

A critical finding is the frequent **passivization** of Palestinian victims in BBC News reports. In many instances, Palestinian deaths are described using passive sentence structures or intransitive verbs that obscure the actor responsible for the violence. For example:

- *BBC Headline*: "Dozens killed in Gaza hospital explosion." (The actor—the source of the explosion—is deleted).
- *AJE Headline*: "Israeli air strike kills dozens at Gaza hospital." (The actor—Israel—is clearly activated).

As Fairclough (2013: p. 110) notes, the deletion of the agent in reports of violence is a powerful discursive tool for de-emphasizing the "bad things" of the in-group or a favored state actor. By representing Palestinian deaths as "events that happen" rather than "actions performed by an actor," the BBC narrative minimizes the direct responsibility of the Israeli military.

In contrast, AJE consistently **activates** Israeli military and political actors, making them the grammatical subjects of sentences involving violence. Simultaneously, AJE grants agency to Palestinian civilians, representing them as **active subjects**—"resisters," "witnesses," and "survivors" who are actively speaking out against their conditions. This activation is a form of discursive empowerment, as it recognizes the political subjecthood of the occupied population.

Functionalization vs. Individualization

The analysis also reveals a "humanity gap" in the representation of social actors. BBC News often employs **individualization** for Israeli actors, particularly the hostages and their families. They are given names, ages, personal histories, and their suffering is detailed through intimate interviews. This individualization makes their pain relatable and "grievable" to a global audience.

Palestinians, however, are frequently represented through **collectivization** and **functionalization**. They are often referred to as "the Palestinians," "the residents of Gaza," or by their functions as "medics," "officials," or "displaced persons." While AJE also uses these functional terms, it balances them with a much higher degree of individualization for Palestinian civilians, providing personal stories and names that are often absent from the BBC's more "clinical" reporting. This individualization is a key discursive strategy for humanizing the "Them" in van Dijk's (2015) ideological square.

Authorization and the Hierarchy of Sources

The power dynamics of the conflict are also reflected in the **hierarchy of sources** used by each outlet. BBC News relies heavily on **personal authorization** from Israeli state and military officials. These official voices are often presented as "neutral" or "authoritative" sources of truth, while Palestinian sources (such as the Gaza Health Ministry) are frequently qualified with phrases like "the Hamas-run health ministry," which serves to cast doubt on their credibility.

AJE, while also quoting official Israeli sources, provides a much broader platform for **unofficial authorization**, including Palestinian journalists, civil society leaders, and international human rights experts. By diversifying its sources, AJE challenges the state-centric narrative of the BBC and provides an "alternative authority" that situates the conflict within the framework of international law and human rights rather than just state security.

Strategies of Legitimation and Delegitimation

The third dimension of the analysis focuses on how AJE and BBC News utilize discursive strategies to legitimize or delegitimize the actions of the actors involved in the Israel-Gaza War. Following van Leeuwen's (2008: p. 105) framework, legitimation is the process by which "social practices are justified and made sense of."

Authorization: The Power of Officialdom

Authorization is legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom, law, and persons in whom some kind of institutional authority is vested. In the corpus, BBC News exhibits a strong reliance on **personal authorization** from Israeli state and military officials. By frequently leadings stories with "The IDF says..." or "Prime Minister Netanyahu stated...", the BBC grants these actors the power to set the initial discursive frame. Even when their claims are later challenged, the "first-mover advantage" in discourse often establishes the dominant narrative.

AJE, conversely, utilizes a strategy of **expert authorization**. While it reports official Israeli statements, it often counterbalances them with the authority of international bodies (UN, ICJ, WHO) and human rights organizations (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch). This shift in authority from the state to international law is a key discursive move that seeks to delegitimize the use of military force by framing it as a violation of global norms rather than a domestic security matter.

Moral Evaluation: "Self-Defense" vs. "War Crimes"

Moral evaluation legitimizes actions by reference to value systems. The analysis reveals a stark contrast in the moral framing of the war:

The Discourse of "Self-Defense": BBC News frequently echoes the Israeli government's legitimation of its military campaign as a "right to self-defense." This moral evaluation situates the violence within a framework of necessity and justice. By using this term, the discourse implicitly accepts the premise that the state is under an existential threat that justifies its actions.

The Discourse of "War Crimes": AJE employs a counter-moral evaluation, frequently using terms like "war crimes," "indiscriminate killing," and "massacre." By framing the same military actions as "crimes," AJE delegitimizes the "self-defense" narrative. This is a form of **moral delegitimation**, where the actions of the state are judged not by their stated intent but by their perceived humanitarian outcomes.

Rationalization: Security vs. Liberation

Rationalization legitimizes actions by reference to their utility or function. BBC News often rationalizes the conflict through a **securitized logic**, focusing on the "goal" of "dismantling Hamas" or "securing the borders." This instrumental rationalization frames the war as a technical problem with a military solution.

AJE, however, provides a rationalization based on **liberation and resistance**. It frames the conflict not as a security crisis but as a struggle for national self-determination. By rationalizing Palestinian actions as a response to "75 years of occupation," AJE provides a historical and political logic that is entirely absent from the securitized narrative. This "rationalization of resistance" is a powerful tool for challenging the hegemony of state-centric security discourses.

Mythopoesis: Heroism and Victimhood

Legitimation through mythopoesis involves the use of narratives or stories. BBC News frequently utilizes a **narrative of victimhood** for the Israeli hostages, creating a powerful "moral story" that justifies the ongoing military operation. The individual stories of the hostages serve as "exemplary tales" (van Leeuwen, 2008: p. 117) that reinforce the necessity of the war.

AJE counters this with a **narrative of steadfastness (Sumud)**. It tells stories of Palestinian resilience—doctors staying in hospitals despite bombings, families sharing food in shelters, and journalists continuing to report despite losing their families. These stories function as "myths of resistance," legitimizing the Palestinian struggle by framing it as a heroic effort to survive against overwhelming odds.

Temporal Framing: The Discursive Manipulation of History

A crucial finding of this study is the way AJE and BBC News manipulate the "temporal boundaries" of the conflict to serve their respective narratives. In CDA, the "start date" of a narrative is never a neutral choice; it is a discursive act that determines the cause-and-effect logic of the entire story.

The "October 7th" Anchor: De-contextualization in BBC News

The analysis of the BBC corpus reveals a consistent pattern of anchoring the conflict to the events of **October 7, 2023**. This date serves as the "zero point" of the narrative. By beginning the story here, the subsequent military actions by Israel are discursively framed as a **response** to a specific, unprovoked act of terror. This temporal framing performs a powerful act of **de-contextualization** (Wodak, 2009: p. 18). It erases the preceding 16-year blockade of Gaza, the decades of occupation, and the structural violence of the "status quo." As a result, the "logic" of the conflict is reduced to a simple binary of attack and retaliation, which implicitly favors the state actor's "right to respond."

The "75-Year" Continuum: Re-contextualization in AJE

In contrast, AJE consistently employs a strategy of **re-contextualization**, situating the current war within a **75-year historical continuum**. AJE frequently references the **Nakba (Catastrophe)** of 1948, the 1967 occupation, and the long-standing siege of Gaza. By doing so, AJE frames the October 7th attacks not as the "start" of the conflict but as a **symptom** of a long-standing power imbalance and a history of displacement. This temporal framing shifts the logic of the narrative from "response to terror" to "resistance against colonial occupation." It forces the audience to consider the structural causes of the violence, thereby challenging the "common sense" narrative of the securitized state.

Interdiscursivity and the "Cycle of Violence"

The BBC narrative also frequently employs the metaphor of the **"cycle of violence."** While seemingly neutral, this metaphor performs a specific discursive function: it suggests a symmetrical, almost natural process of back-and-forth violence where both sides are equally trapped and equally responsible. This "both-sidesism" is a key strategy for maintaining a veneer of impartiality while actually obscuring the radical power imbalance between an occupying military power and an occupied population.

AJE avoids the "cycle of violence" metaphor, preferring terms that emphasize the **asymmetry** of the conflict. It uses language that highlights the disparity in military technology, international support, and the scale of destruction. This focus on asymmetry is a discursive move that seeks to dismantle the "both-sides" narrative and expose the underlying power dynamics of the war.

Synthesis and Discussion: Language as Symbolic Power

The findings of this study demonstrate that the media coverage of the Israel-Gaza War is not merely a record of events but a sophisticated exercise of **symbolic power**. By synthesizing the analysis of lexical choice, social actor representation, legitimation strategies, and temporal framing, we can see how AJE and BBC News construct two fundamentally different "realities" of the same conflict.

The Construction of Hegemonic vs. Counter-Hegemonic Narratives

The BBC narrative, with its focus on "conflict," "terrorism," "self-defense," and the "October 7th" anchor, aligns closely with the **hegemonic discourse** of Western state power. This narrative serves to maintain the existing geopolitical status quo by framing the war as a security crisis that can be managed through military force and international diplomacy. Its mandate of "impartiality" often results in a "balanced" representation

that, in practice, favors the state actor by granting it greater institutional authority and a more favorable temporal frame.

The AJE narrative, characterized by the language of "aggression," "genocide," "resistance," and "75 years of occupation," represents a **counter-hegemonic discourse**. It seeks to challenge the dominant Western narrative by foregrounding the structural and historical causes of the violence. By granting agency to the occupied and utilizing the authority of international law, AJE attempts to shift the global "common sense" regarding the conflict. This is a clear example of what Fairclough (2013: p. 155) calls "discursive struggle," where language is used to contest the very definitions of justice, legality, and humanity.

The Role of the "Impartial" Observer

A critical implication of this study is the deconstruction of the concept of "impartiality" in war reporting. The analysis of BBC News shows that "due impartiality" can itself be an ideological tool. By attempting to give "both sides" equal weight in a situation of radical power asymmetry, the discourse can inadvertently legitimize the actions of the more powerful actor. As van Dijk (2015: p. 480) argues, there is no "neutral" position in discourse analysis; every choice of word, every inclusion or exclusion, is a political act. The BBC's "impartiality" is, in effect, a discursive strategy that maintains the visibility of the state's narrative while often passivizing or de-contextualizing the narrative of the occupied.

Global Power Dynamics and the Future of Conflict Discourse

The intense "war of terminologies" observed in this study reflects a broader shift in global power dynamics. The increasing prominence of the term "genocide" and the role of non-Western outlets like AJE suggest a fragmentation of the Western media's narrative hegemony. The 2023–2024 conflict has shown that the "truth" of war is no longer determined solely by Western newsrooms but is a multi-polar, multi-platform struggle involving international courts, social media influencers, and global protest movements.

This study highlights the need for a more critical and reflexive approach to media consumption. By understanding the discursive mechanisms of power, we can begin to see through the "common sense" narratives of war and recognize the ideological work being done by our news sources. As we move further into the 21st century, the ability to deconstruct conflict discourse will be an essential skill for navigating an increasingly complex and polarized global information landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study has undertaken a comprehensive Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the media narratives surrounding the Israel-Gaza War (2023–2024), focusing on the comparative reporting of Al Jazeera English (AJE) and BBC News. By integrating the theoretical frameworks of Fairclough, van Dijk, Wodak, and van Leeuwen, the research has demonstrated that language is a primary site for the construction, maintenance, and contestation of power in global conflict.

The analysis revealed a profound divergence in narrative framing. BBC News consistently employed a **securitized and de-contextualized** framework, anchoring the conflict to October 7th and utilizing the language of "terror" and "self-defense" to legitimize the state's military response. This narrative, while operating under a mandate of "impartiality," often served to reinforce the existing power imbalance by passivizing Palestinian victims and de-emphasizing the structural causes of the violence.

In contrast, AJE constructed a **counter-hegemonic narrative of structural violence and resistance**. By situating the war within a 75-year historical continuum and utilizing terms like "genocide" and "aggression," AJE challenged the legitimacy of the state's actions and granted political agency to the occupied population. This discursive struggle highlights the role of media not as a neutral observer but as an active participant in the "war of words" that shapes international perception and policy.

The findings of this study have significant implications for the field of discourse studies and for our understanding of global power dynamics. They highlight the de-contextualizing power of "impartial" reporting and the importance of temporal framing in the construction of narrative "truth." As the global information

landscape continues to fragment, the ability to critically deconstruct these narratives remains an essential tool for understanding the complex interplay of language and power in our world.

Future research should expand this analysis to include a broader range of media outlets, particularly from the Global South, and should explore the role of social media platforms in both reinforcing and challenging these dominant narratives. The struggle for narrative hegemony in the Israel-Gaza conflict is far from over, and its outcome will continue to shape the geopolitical reality of the region for years to come.

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