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Faculty of Arts  
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A Thesis  
Submitted in Fulfillment of PhD

Linguistics

## Some Linguistic Features of English Political Press Releases

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**2013**

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## **Acknowledgements**

I am deeply thankful and grateful to my supervisor, Prof. Jeanette Atiya who supported me to pursue this thesis. She guided me through all the stages of the study. Her great efforts in reading the thesis were so valuable. Her shrewd comments and advice were indispensable.

I owe a lot to my mother who always motivated me since my first days at school and along my academic life. Her love, patience and confidence were also influential.

## **Abstract**

A Refugee is a term that has been used to refer to Iraqi citizens after the Iraqi invasion by international Troops and initiation of internal conflicts. Since March 2003, the war in Iraq has started and thousands of women, children and men were forced to flee across the borders of other countries seeking a safe shelter.

This Thesis analyzes the language used by the UNHCR in the press releases on Iraqi refugees during and after the war. It sheds light on the way the UNHCR traces the deterioration of the situation in Iraq including the suffering and problems faced by Iraqi refugees. Furthermore, the thesis defines the main features characterizing (UNHCR) (United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees) political press releases as a special type of discourse.

The analysis focuses on the way the UNHCR uses the power of its discourse to direct public opinion and urge its readers to make contributions for raising funds and supporting the Iraqi people. It presents the influence of linguistics and its tools in persuading the public to take action to help the Iraqi refugees.

**Keywords:** Iraqi Refugees, UNHCR, Discourse Analysis, Political Press Releases, Rhetoric, Persuasion, Linguistic Features, Cohesive Devices, Deixis, Rhetorical Devices, Figures of Speech.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**INTRODUCTION**



## **Chapter One**

### **1.0. Introduction**

#### **1.1Context of the Study**

The language of press releases has been chosen as the target of analysis in this study. In fact, the importance of press releases lies in being the input source for stories and articles which are written by the journalists as stated by van Dijk, (1988) & Bell (1991) and many other linguists. Jacobs (1990) writes several studies including a whole length book *Preformulating the News* (1990, 1999 a, 1999 b) on the language of press releases issued in the Dutch language and published in Belgium. Jacobs, 1999a, Pander Maat , 2007and Bhatia, 2004 ) believe that press releases serve more than just formative purposes. They also incorporate “persuasive and promotional elements”. Maat (2007) presents a study on the promotional elements of press releases. He also discusses the audience targeted in the production process of press releases like share holders, investors and customers. (McLaren, Y., 2008:637).

Other researchers investigate the language of press releases like (Hodges, 2006, Lassen, 2006, McLaren, Y. & Gurau 2005). Press releases in particular are considered to be extensively acting as the major source employed by journalists to write news stories.

Researchers in Egypt pay no attention to the analysis of the language of press releases in general and political ones in particular. Despite the fact that many linguistic studies are done to examine the language of news media and political speeches. Yet, there is little attention in the discourse analysis of press releases.

The aim of this thesis is to shed light on political press releases. The topic of interest of the study is the analysis of the press releases issued by the UNHCR with focus on the press releases on Iraqi refugees after the war in Iraq in 2003.

## **The Iraqi War:**

The war in Iraq started on March 2003 when a combined troops from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Poland invaded the Iraqi cities and succeeded in removing the Iraqi government and its former president Saddam Hussein . *The Iraqi invasion* has been known later as *the war in Iraq* ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003\\_invasion\\_of\\_Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003_invasion_of_Iraq)). The effect of war has been tremendous leaving hundreds of thousands of Iraqis displaced because of inner political unrest.

## **UNHCR:**

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is an international humanitarian agency established on December 14, 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly for the welfare and rescue of the refugees and displaced people worldwide. (<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c2.html>).

During the Iraqi war, the UNHCR played a significant role in rescuing the Iraqi citizens. Inner military conflicts were initiated inside the Iraqi cities which lead the Iraqis to flee to near- by countries and borders seeking safe shelters. Here started the role of the UNHCR in providing the Iraqis with the needed food, aid, camps and other humanitarian materials. During that time, the UNHCR has organized several charity conferences to collect donations for the Iraqis. Several press conferences by the UNHCR representatives were held to appeal to the public and international communities to contribute to the Iraqi refugees. All the activities conducted by the UNHCR including conferences, press conferences or voluntary activities are written and announced in the

press releases published on the agency's official website. All the releases can be found on the UNHCR web page (<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c2.html>). The UNHCR rescue works are still taking place by the agency up to the present time and even after the establishment of a new Iraqi government.

#### Press Releases:

A **press release** is “a written or recorded communication directed at members of the news media for the purpose of announcing to the world something that is perceived to be newsworthy”. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Press\\_release](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Press_release)). It refers to anything deliberately sent to a reporter or media source is considered to be “a press release”. It is information released by the act of being sent to the media ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Press\\_release](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Press_release)).

The first press release was created by Ivy Lee in 1906. He works the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. He issued the first press release to inform the public and journalists about a train accident that happened in the city at that time. He wanted to issue the story of the accident himself before any claims about the story are announced by other journalists.

A press release is sent to editors and journalists either to be published in a magazine, journal, or on a website. Sometimes a press release is announced and read in a press conference during awareness or campaigns like political and business campaigns attended by journalists and media representatives. They are also sent to media sources to announce information about a company, organization, event, product or service.

Sometimes companies and organizations tend to hire a special “publicity agency” to be responsible for writing, issuing and distributing the release to the newswires and journals. This is done to serve the company or business personal goals . This image can increase the sales of a product or win the public opinion in favor of a certain politician during elections. (<http://www.free-press-release.com/how-to-press-release/what-is-press-release.html>).

The importance of press releases lies in the fact that they can play an important role in creating a positive and good image of the business, company, product, politicians and public figures.

There is a standard distinguishing format for the press release. First of all, the body of the press release consists of 4 to 5 paragraphs with word limits ranging between 400 to 500 words. It should answer all the “WH” questions which are (who, what, where, when and why). The structure of the press release includes the following: A headline, dateline, introduction, body, boilerplate (which is a short section with information about the issuing company, organization, product or service), close and finally media contact information. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Press\\_release](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Press_release)) .

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study:**

The study investigates the predominant linguistic features of press releases issued by the (UNHCR) the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees Press Releases on Iraqi refugees who have been displaced because of the war on Iraq and the bad conditions they are facing every day. Also, the thesis attempts to find out the power of the linguistic features employed in the press releases as tools of persuasion.

## **1.3 Significance of the Study:**

This study attempts to analyze the features of the press releases published in English. Most of the earlier studies were analyses of press releases in other languages. Second, the focus of the analysis is on political press releases dealing with the Iraqi refugees, unlike most of the preceding studies on financial, commercial or biotechnological issues. The method of analysis is going to be discourse analysis.

## **1.4 The Aim of the Study:**

The main aim of this study is therefore to define the main features characterizing (UNHCR) United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees political press releases as a special type of discourse.

## **1.5 Research Questions:**

The research will focus on the following questions:

1. What are the common discourse features characterizing UNHCR press releases?
2. What are the dominant deictic elements characterizing the press releases? What is their function?
3. How has repetition been used to emphasize a certain point of view?
4. What are the lexical items used to refer to the Iraqi conflict?
5. What are the pre-dominant rhetorical features used at a high density in the press releases?
6. How does the UNHCR use the power of its discourse to shape public opinion and urge its readers to make contributions for raising funds and supporting the Iraqi people?

## **1.6 Procedures**

### **1.6.1. Data Collection:**

The corpus used includes all the UNHCR Press releases issued in English about the Iraqi refugees dating from 2003 up to the 2011 and placed on the (UNHCR) official websites. The number of press releases to be analyzed is 42.

### **1.6.2. Data Selection:**

The reason for choosing the UNHCR official website in particular is that it combines a variety of releases that tackle the same subject (refugees). The focus of the thesis is to analyze the releases dating back to 2003 up to 2012. The reason for choosing these releases is to review the way the UNHCR reports the effect of the Iraqi war on the Iraqi refugees from its outbreak up to that date.

### **1.7 Research Method and Theoretical framework**

The study aims to analyze some of the linguistic features of the press releases. Discourse analysis is used as the general framework. Halliday and Hassan's (1976) theoretical framework of lexical cohesion will be adopted. Also, analysis of Deixis employed in the UNHCR press releases is carried out following Yule's division of Deixis into three types which are personal, spatial and temporal in his book, *Pragmatics* (1996). Furthermore, analysis of the figurative language used in the corpus is also examined following Leech's analysis of figurative language in his book *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (1971). The predominant rhetorical features that appear in the releases are also depicted in the study. The choice of these features is based on the use of rhetoric in its modern definition as "the art of persuasive discourse", (Cockroft & Cockroft, 2005: 3). Several political and media studies have investigated the use of rhetoric as a successful persuading tool. (Charteris-Black, 2005, Halmari, 2005, Beard , 2000).

### **1.8. Organization of the Study:**

The Thesis consists of Six Chapters. Chapter One introduces the topic and context of the study and the reasons for choosing this topic. It also explains the general theoretical framework that is used in the study. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature related to press releases, media language, political discourse, press releases. It also contains a theoretical framework on discourse analysis and the discourse tools that

are used in the analysis such as: cohesive devices, deixis and rhetorical figures. Chapter Four includes analysis of cohesive Devices in the press releases .These devices are repetition, synonyms, antonyms, collocations and semantic chains. Chapter five is divided into two sections. In the first section, analysis of the use of figurative language is presented. The figures of speech will include metaphor, hyperbole, alliteration and consonance. The second section of the chapter is entitled *Rhetorical Features*. It deals the predominant rhetoric features employed in the corpus like: Three-part lists, lists, the number game and listing, contrastive pairs and parallelism.

Chapter Six is the final chapter that comprises the conclusion and the findings that have been detected from the analysis of the press releases. It provides answers for various research questions related to the topic of the study.