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Linguistic Manipulation as a Means of Sensationalism and Ideological Influence in Political News Reporting

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Abstract

The present study analyzes the discursive strategies of manipulation in political news discourse which aims at achieving hidden interests under the veil of news coverage. It is a multidisciplinary study that adopts van Dijk's (2006) scheme of manipulation strategies at several levels of discourse (content, lexis, topics, syntax, rhetoric, and order of discourse). Specifically, the analysis is narrowed down to investigate the polarized attitudinal lexical items adopting Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal theory (Attitude category). The data consists of six target news reports classified into three pairs of articles that represent clearly opposed ideologies. All target reports cover the same political event. This systematically-selected data is an appropriate field for manifesting ideology which is the motive behind manipulation. The study concludes that five of target reports are ideologically-loaded texts and are geared towards either manipulation or persuasion. Both Al-Jazeera and SANA as Arabian news websites and Jerusalem post and Haaretz as Israeli news websites embody the Palestine-Israel conflict. Accordingly, their reports represent two conflicting ideologies each of which is manipulated to satisfy their opposed interests. Nevertheless, manipulation is not clearly manifested in Haaretz report which indicates that it is not necessarily for all ideological discourses to be manipulative but all manipulative discourses are fundamentally ideological. Reuters reports the event neutrally but CNN report is also manipulated for its own interest.

Keywords: *Manipulation, Ideology, Appraisal theory, CDA, News discourse and Quantitative analysis, Sensationalism.*

Table of Contents	
Chapter One: Introduction	1- 22
1.1 Introduction	2
1.2. Research Questions	3
1.2.1 the overarching question.	4
1.2.2 the theoretical analytical questions.	4
1.3. Significance of the study	4
1.4 Objective of the Study	5
1.5 Limitations of the Study	6
1.6 Thesis Hypothesis	6
1.7 Literature Review	7
1.7.1 manipulative discourse studies.	7
1.7.2 news discourse studies.	14
1.8 Methodology	19
1.8.1 data collection and rationale for data selection.	19
1.8.2 rationale behind the non-chronological order.	22
Chapter Two: Concepts and Definitions	23 - 45
2.1. The Concept of Manipulation	24
2.1.1 manipulation as a heterogeneous phenomenon.	24
2.1.2 manipulation as strategic maneuvering.	26
2.1.3 criteria proposed for the classification of manipulative processes.	28
2.1.3.1 truth conditionality violation.	28
2.1.3.2 speaker's interest.	30
2.1.3.3 covertness.	31
2.1.3.4 social inequality.	32
2.1.3.5 intention.	33
2.1.4 the relationship between manipulation and domination.	34
2.1.5 manipulation vs. persuasion.	37

2.2. The Concept of Ideology	39
2.3. The concept of Sensationalism	42
Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework	46 – 76
3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis CDA	47
3.1.1 van Dijk's triangulated approach about manipulation.	53
3.1.1.1 social dimension of manipulation.	54
3.1.1.2 cognitive dimension of manipulation.	55
3.1.1.2.1 cognitive techniques of manipulation.	57
3.1.1.3 van Dijk's scheme of discursive manipulation strategies .	60
3.2 The Origins of 'Appraisal Theory' within SFL	62
3.3.1 appraisal theory.	65
3.3.1.1 attitude.	68
3.3.1.2 affect.	70
3.3.1.3 judgment.	72
3.3.1.4 appreciation.	74
Chapter Four: Analysis	77 – 150
4.1. Semantic Macrostructure (Headline Analysis)	78
4.2 SANA analysis	86
4.2.1 negative portrayal of Israel "Them" vs. positive portrayal of Golan "Us".	86
4.2.2 rhetorical figures.	89
4.2.2.1 parallelism.	89
4.2.2.2 metaphoric idiom.	89
4.2.2.3 metonymy.	90
4.2.3. Local syntax	90
4.2.3.1. active vs. passive.	90
4.2.3.2 marked word order.	91
4.2.3.3 Deixis in SANA report.	92
4.2.4. Attitudinal Lexical Items Classified According to Apprasial Framework:	93

4.3. Jerusalem Post Report	99
4.3.1. discourse order in Jerusalem Post's report.	99
4.3.2. graphological features in Jerusalem Post report.	100
4.3.2.1 unconventional capitalization.	100
4.3.3. hyperbolic terms for “Them” vs. euphemistic terms for “Us”.	101
4.3.4. fallacy as a form of manipulation in Jerusalem post report.	102
4.3.5. quotation in JP as a key to the investigation of ideological manipulation.	102
4.3.6. attitudinal terms in Jerusalem Post classified according to the Appraisal framework.	108
4.4 CNN Report Analysis	111
4.4.1. ideologically-embedded reporting verb.	111
4.4.2. rhetorical figures.	112
4.4.2.1 hyperbole.	112
4.4.2.2 irony.	112
4.4.3. Syntax	113
4.4.3.1 nominalization.	113
4.4.3.2 deliberate grammatical mistake.	114
4.4.4. implication and presupposition.	114
4.4.5. attitudinal lexical items in CNN report classified according to Appraisal framework .	116
4.5 Al-Jazeera Report	121
4.5.1 illegality as a strategy of negative other-presentation in Al-Jazeera report.	121
4.5.2 classification of attitudinal lexical items in Al-Jazeera report according to Appraisal framework.	122
4.5.3 Syntax	127
4.5.3.1 active vs. passive in Al-Jazeera report.	127
4.5.4 Precise vs. vague.	128
4.6 Reuters Report	130
4.6.1 Passivization.	130

4.6.2 deliberate choice of phrasal verbs.	131
4.6.3 attitudinal lexical items in Reuters report classified according to Appraisal framework.	132
4.7. Haaretz Report Analysis	135
4.7.1. ideological discourse vs. manipulative discourse.	135
4.7.2. the strategy of disclaimer.	137
4.7.3. attitudinal lexical items in Haaretz report classified according to Appraisal framework.	138
4.8 Discussion of findings	142
Chapter Five: Conclusion	151 -
5.1 Structure of Thesis	152
5.2 Conclusion	154
5.3 Suggestions for Future Work	156
5.4 Recommendations	157
References	158 - 170
Appendices	171

List of Tables	
Table 1.1. Corpus of the present study	20
Table 3.1 Types of ‘Affect’	71
Table 3.2 Judgements of ‘social esteem’	73
Table 3.3 Judgements of ‘social sanction’	73
Table 3.4 Types of ‘appreciation’	75
Table 4.1. Headlines of Target Reports	78
Table 4.2 Israel's Portrayal in SANA Report	87
Table 4.3 Golan's portrayal in SANA report:	88
Table 4.4 Classifying Attitudinal Terms in SANA report according to The Appraisal Framework:	94
Table 4.5 Frequency of occurrence of Positive negative lexis in SANA report:94	98
Table 4.6 Quotations in Jerusalem Post Report:	104
Table 4.7 classification of attitudinal lexical items in Jerusalem Post Report:102	108
Table 4.8 Frequency of occurrence of positive negative lexis in Jerusalem post report: 106	111
Table 4.9 Attitudinal classification in CNN Report according to the Appraisal framework 109	116
Table 4.10 Frequency of occurrence of Positive and negative evaluations in CNN report:112	120
Table 4.11 Appraisal classification for attitudinal lexical items in Al-Jazeera	122
Table 4.12 Frequency of occurrence of positive and negative lexical items in Al-Jazeera report:	126
Table 4.13 Appraisal classification for attitudinal lexical items in Reuters:	132
Table 4.14 Frequency of occurrence of positive and negative lexical items in Reuters	135
Table 4.15 Appraisal Classification for the Attitudinal lexis in Haaretz Report: 126	138
Table 4.16 Frequency of occurrence of positive and negative evaluative lexis in Haaretz report:	141
Table 4.17 DSM Manifested in Target Reports.	148

List of Figures	
Figure 3.1 Van Dijk's Ideological Model	52
Figure 3.2 An overview of appraisal resources adapted from Martin and White, 2005, p. 38	66
Figure 3.3. 'Inscribed attitude' and 'invoked attitude'	70
Figure 3.4 Attitude and its subdivisions	76
Figure 4.1 Chart for overall positive and negative attitudinal lexical items in the six target reports	143
Figure 4.2 Frequency of occurrence of positively and negatively-evaluated targets in CNN report	144
Figure 4.3 Frequency of occurrence of positively-evaluated and negatively-evaluated targets in JP report	145

List of Abbreviations	
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CL	Corpus Linguistics
SFL	Systemic Functional Linguistics
DMS	Discursive Manipulation Strategies
STM	Short-Term Memory
LTM	Long-Term Memory
JP	Jerusalem Post

Chapter One

Introduction

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Language provides a powerful means of communication as it enables human beings express their feelings, desires, and thoughts. But when language is used artfully, it provides a dangerous means of deception. A human mind can cautiously process and analyze explicit ideas, but it fails to filter out cunning messages that are covertly implied between the lines. Language is deliberately used in a devious way to control the others, a process known as “language manipulation” (Rudyk, 2007). “manipulation” is defined as “a communicative and interactional practice, in which a manipulator exercises control over other people, usually against their will or against their best interests” (Van Dijk, 2006, pp. 360-361).

The two domains in society most accused of manipulating their language are politics and journalism. Politicians' statements are usually doubted for their notorious reliance on deceptive wordplay. On the other hand, a notion of biased press reminds of another domain where words are cunningly manipulated to mask realities. Fowler (1991) states that “news is not just a value-free reflection of facts. Anything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a particular ideological position” (p. 101).

News reporter s' major claim behind manipulating the language of the news is to achieve “sensationalism”; a process which is defined by Molek-Kosakwaska (2013) as “a discourse strategy of ‘packaging’

information in news headlines in such a way that news items are presented as more interesting, extraordinary and relevant than might be the case” (p.173). Nevertheless, the actual motive behind manipulation demonstrated in political news reports is that each news institution seeks to implicitly influence its own ideology on a large base of readers and at the same time to adhere to the mask of “objectivity” which is considered “ethics of journalism” (van Dijk, 2006, p.364).

Since news reporter manipulates the language of the news according to his cultural or ideological map, the unconscious effects of language manipulation in the news reports are considered contaminants as manipulation _if not detected_ leads to miscomprehension and prevents readers from the right of being provided by objective news through the lens of media. But the readers must take into account how to decipher the implications of the news report to avoid being unconsciously manipulated for the interests of others.

1.2. Research Questions

The overall aim of the present study is to investigate the discursive manipulation strategies with which news reporter s influence ideologies of their recipients. Given this aim, the present study focuses on answering specific research questions that can help unveil the ideologies embedded within six target political news reports. These are:

1.2.1 the overarching question.

How can manipulation as a heterogeneous phenomenon be manifested within political news discourse?

1.2.2 the theoretical analytical questions.

- What are the discursive manipulation strategies of Van Dijk's scheme (2006) which are manifested within target reports?
- How is the attitude of the news authors displayed within news discourse despite the claim of objectivity?
- How can Appraisal theory account for attitudinal lexical items in target reports?
- How can attitudinal words contribute to the overall manipulation of the target reports?
- How can wordplay be used to achieve sensationalism in headlines?
- How can quantitative analysis manifest manipulation in the present study?

1.3. Significance of the study

Media and politics are the two domains in our society most accused of manipulating their language. Baranowski (2013, p.3) indicates that “The problem is that in politics, we don't see the pickle jar for ourselves_ we view it through the lens of media and the media shows us a distorted view of politics” Media is important as it is the lens through which people are provided with news. Nevertheless, it is harmful because it implicitly shapes the ideologies of recipients.

Language offers media a whole arsenal of means to realize manipulative aims. Therefore, readers may unconsciously be influenced for the interests of specific institutions. That's why this study is conducted to decipher the ideologies embedded within political news reports because ideology is the motive behind manipulation. In other words, this study investigates how news reporters professionally seek to manipulate the news aiming at reinforcing a specific ideology or refuting others. Accordingly, the present study is classified as “Deception Detection” as it gives clues for readers to decipher the cunning linguistic strategies of manipulation demonstrated in the genre of political news discourse. In addition, this study gives tools to go beyond the boundary of news text because discourse is classified to be manipulative not only due to the use of specific lexical items or grammatical units but the context must be considered as well. That's why this study adopts van Dijk's (2006) triangulated approach of manipulation and Martin and White's (2005) “Appraisal theory”.

1.4 Objective of the Study

The study was conducted aiming at manifesting “manipulation” within the genre of political news discourse. The objective of this study was to decipher the cunning linguistic strategies adopted by news reporters to implicitly reinforce a specific ideology or refute others. News reporter manipulates the language of the report under the claim of “sensationalism” and hence readers are unconsciously influenced for the interests of specific institutions. Therefore, the