

## **A Discourse Analysis of Palestine Issue as Portrayed in the Selected Renowned International English Newspapers**

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13831965>



Sumaira Azim<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Hafiz Javed ur Rehman<sup>2</sup>

### **Abstract**

*This study uses Teun A. van Dijk's "Us versus Them" model to examine how the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is portrayed in editorials published in national and international newspapers through the lens of critical discourse analysis. The public's perception of this conflict, which is rooted in historical, political, and cultural tensions, has been greatly shaped by media narratives. The study aims to highlight the ways in which language shapes social identities and power dynamics in any representation mediated by the media. It draws from a comprehensive analysis of editorial content on the topic published in two major international newspapers*

### **Keywords:**

*Palestine-Israeli issue, "us & them model", Media coverage and public perception, CDA, International English Newspapers*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Palestine -Israel issue has a big crisis at the international level not only from Muslims' perspective but from humanity's perspective as well. As, the co-inhabitants of this earth, humanity deserves peace and needs mutual co-existence. But for that to materialize, we have to adhere to our legally and morally established boundaries. If we transgress our limits, there is going to be problems both at the local and international level (Hafiz& Condit (2022), Hafiz & Mustanir(2019), Waqar & Hafiz (2019).

This study uses Teun A. van Dijk's "Us versus Them" model to examine how the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is portrayed in editorials published in national and international newspapers through the lens of critical discourse analysis. The public's perception of this conflict, which is rooted in historical, political, and cultural tensions, has been greatly shaped by media narratives.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Phil Scholar, Department of English, Qurtuba University of Science and Technology, Peshawar.

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer Department of English, The University of Agriculture, Peshawar.

The study aims to highlight the ways in which language shapes social identities and power dynamics in any representation mediated by the media. It draws from a comprehensive analysis of editorial content on the topic published in two major international newspapers, The New York Post and The Guardian. As diverse and wide-ranging as the coverage it has received from international media, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one of the longest-running issues of the modern era. Media outlets, through a variety of coverage formats, including news articles, editorials, and opinion pieces, frequently take the lead in shaping the public's perception and attitude toward international conflicts.

Critical discourse analysis, according to Dijk (2001), is analytical study that identifies instances of social power abuse, dominance, and inequality in a text or speech within a social and political context, as well as how these disparities are resisted, reinforced, and recreated in texts or talks (p. 352). It is evident from this that language can serve a multitude of important purposes when examined in the right context.

The Palestine-Israel conflict is currently of great global interest to people. This study investigates and analyzes the act of conflict in international newspaper editorials using Van Dijk's "us versus them" model. This study attempts to understand how language plays a role in the construction of identities and power relations in newspaper editorial discourse. With a focus on editorials, the research contributes to our understanding of how language impacts conflict globally and provides a nuanced critique of the Us versus Them narrative. The way that the media and newspapers portray this conflict shapes public opinion around the world.

### **Problem Statement**

Biased media coverage of the Palestine-Israel conflict distorts public perception and serves to uphold deeply ingrained ideological narratives, societal divisions, and geopolitical interests. Based on this, the current study critically examines editorial discourses in order to uncover the covert mechanisms and linguistic techniques that may be used to implement such biases. It focuses on how the media affects public opinion, feeds the conflict, and influences national and international policies associated with the conflict. In exchange, this study seeks to advance public understanding of the media's role in portraying global conflicts and the principles of fair and moral journalism.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To highlight Van Dijk indicators used in the English newspapers editorials that reveal dominance, power abuse, and marginalization.

## Research Questions

1. What are Van Dijk indicators used in the selected English newspapers editorials that reveal dominance, power abuse, and marginalization?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter of the literature review applies Dijk's "Us versus Them" model and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to the media's portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It goes into greater detail about how the media shapes discourse and public opinion because CDA highlights the ideologies and power structures that are present in media texts. In the case studies, this chapter expounds on the function of media representation in molding public opinion and policy decisions. It also identifies and tackles bias and propaganda in media discourse. It has been examined how alternative media and digital platforms can address a range of viewpoints and counter-narratives, with a particular focus on democratizing the dissemination of information.

An overview of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict in brief One of the longest-running geopolitical conflicts in modern history is the one involving Israel and Palestine. It has resulted in great suffering and displacement and is based on a variety of historical, political, religious, and cultural claims and grievances. Its origins can be found in the nationalist movements of the Jews and Arabs in the region of Palestine, which was ruled by the Ottoman Turks before coming under British mandate in the following century. Following the British withdrawal and the Arab-Israeli War that followed, the State of Israel was established in 1948, resulting in a great deal of displacement and the growth of a sizable refugee population that is still bitter and unassimilated (Khalidi, 2010).

The Us versus Them model developed by Teun A. van Dijk is a critical model of how discourse is used to construct in-group ("Us") and out-group ("Them") identity. It is an offshoot of CDA. This model focuses on how language divides the in-group in an affirmative mode and the out-group in a negative mode, as well as how it forms and reinstates social minutiae. According to van Dijk, a few obvious forms of discursive strategies that control and regulate the development of group specificity include victimization, negative other-presentation, positive self-presentation, and national self-glorification (Dijk, 1998).

Any conflict depicted in the media has the potential to further reinforce prejudices and stereotypes or to aid in their resolution by fostering empathy and understanding. Media coverage employs language and images that convey highly dynamic responses, which can be used to influence public opinion and policy decisions. For example, portraying one group as the aggressor and the other as the victim may shape how the conflict is seen and handled internationally. Yes, the way the media reports on it. Since the media sets the agenda, issues that are highlighted in their reports also become the public and political agenda's top priorities. The said agenda-setting role may only serve its own cause since it can prioritize some stories or agendas. On the other hand,

marginalizing others, thereby impacting the way conflicts would be perceived and addressed within society (McCombs and Shaw, 1972).

In media discourse, dominance and power refer to a group or individual's ability to control the narrative and thereby influence public perception. Less influential social groups suffer as a result of this influence, which always works in favor of social hierarchies and structures. In the media, this role is essentially given to those who own and run media outlets as well as those who have access to them, such as dignitaries, politicians, and businesspeople. This is also evident in the corporate market, where media owners may choose to ignore issues like environmental deterioration or provide insufficient coverage of issues like labor strikes that have an impact on their companies' management or operations. The strategies that the media uses to apply dominance and power normally include selective facts, naturalizing the issue, and language (Dijk, 1996).

A tactic used to draw boundaries between in-groups (US) and out-groups (THEM)—those against whom action is warranted and those who are demonized—is called polarization. It can appear in narratives about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where one side is fundamentally good and the other is fundamentally evil. An oversimplified portrayal of the problems has the potential to exacerbate tensions and drive a wedge between communities (Dijk, 2008).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The qualitative design of this research study will turn to critical discourse analysis in a socio-cognitive framework. In this regard, the discursive construction of power, dominance, and social identities through media texts will be emphasized. The present study on media and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict provides a comprehensive account of the theoretical framework and methodology employed in this chapter. Within a sociocognitive framework, CDA and Van Dijk's Us versus Them model explicate in depth how language interacts in media texts to establish and maintain power structures, social identities, and ideologies.

### **Selection Criteria:**

The Guardian and the New York Post have been selected for their large readership and dissimilar editorial opinions. These will lend a diversified foreign perspective on the conflict.

## **Theoretical framework**

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

A methodology known as critical discourse analysis (CDA) maps the ways in which power dynamics and social injustices both produce and are produced by discourse. According to academics like Teun A. van Dijk, Ruth Wodak, and Norman Fairclough, CDA is a critical viewpoint for exposing hidden ideologies present in texts and

utterances rather than a methodology due to its broad scope. Fundamentally, CDA is predicated on the recognition that language is fundamentally a social practice as well as a tool for communication. It illustrates the reciprocity between language and society, showing how discourses both constitute and are themselves a part of these social structures. Van Dijk claims that the paper considers how discourses maintain social inequality by producing and reproducing the power that is held and ideology. Using this method, an attempt is made to show how texts or conversations support or undermine these power relations.

### **Socio-Cognitive Approach**

Unlike other approaches, Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach is a global framework introducing cognitive processes as situated within both social and discursive analysis. Thus, foregrounding the role of mental models understood as cognitive representations in general of events or actors appurtenant to them within society, or just any particular setting, and their way of shaping and being shaped by discourses. Thus, it is by an approach aloft which interrelations are played between cognition, society, and discourse so as to arrive at nuanced understandings about the ways in which language can construct and perpetuate power relations and social structures.

### **ANALYSIS**

Using editorials from international newspapers as its source material, this chapter will employ a critical discourse analytical approach to examine how the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is portrayed in the media. In order to comprehend how language and discourse represent meanings for the creation of identities and justifications as well as in influencing perception, the study will employ Van Dijk's Us versus Them model. The editorials in international newspapers, including *The Guardian* and *The New York Post*, were examined for this study. The chapter aims to explore principal themes and discursive strategies characterizing the editorials, to elucidate how such techniques have contributed to the construction of the conflict narratives, and to examine some of the implications of these representations for public perception and international relations. The next section examines the role of media in presenting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by going over modality, evidentiality, categorization, national self-glorification, positive self-presentation, negative other-presentation, and victimization in detail.

### **Analysis of International Newspapers Editorials**

#### **1. The *Guardian* Editorials**

This section applies Van Dijk's Us versus Them model to an analysis of editorials from the British newspaper *The Guardian*. The main goals will be to pinpoint the main themes and narratives and use the model's indicators to comprehend how discourse

affects how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is portrayed. The Guardian's editorials frequently draw attention to the conflict's humanitarian effects, condemn both sides for continuing the violence, and stress the need for a peaceful conclusion. The stories usually highlight the imbalance of power, depicting the Palestinians as suffering under blockade and occupation and Israel as a powerful military force. The editorials also stress how important it is for the international community to address the issue and help find a fair resolution.

### **a. Modality and Evidentiality**

Modality in *The Guardian* editorials conveys varying degrees of certainty, often expressing strong condemnation of violence and humanitarian concerns. Evidentiality is used to support these claims by referencing credible sources, thus enhancing the reliability and authority of the statements made in framing international conflicts and influencing public opinion within a national context. By critically examining these narratives, we gain a deeper understanding of the biases and ideologies that underpin media representations of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in Pakistani newspapers. For instance, Evidentiality is present in statements like "*According to Amnesty International, the blockade has had a devastating impact on the civilian population,*" (*The Guardian*, October 8, 2023, p. 2) which attribute the information to a reputable source, thus bolstering its credibility. "*The situation in Gaza has reached catastrophic levels, as reported by the United Nations.*" (*The Guardian*, October 8, 2023, p. 2) The phrase "*has reached catastrophic levels*" uses high modality to assert the severity of the crisis as an undeniable fact.

### **b. Categorization**

Categorization in *The Guardian* editorials often involves labeling Palestinians as victims and Israel as the dominant force. This distinction helps frame the conflict in a way that elicits sympathy for Palestinians and critical scrutiny of Israeli actions. For example, phrases like "*the suffering of Palestinian civilians*" categorize Palestinians as innocent victims, while descriptions of Israeli military actions as "*aggressive policies*" categorize Israel as the aggressor. This clear categorization reinforces the Us versus Them narrative, where Palestinians are portrayed as the oppressed group and Israel as the oppressor (*The Guardian*, November 1, 2023, p. 3). In the editorial titled *The Guardian view on an Israeli assault on Rafah: Gaza's people have no plan to run*, published on (February 8, 2024) states that, "*The suffering of Palestinian civilians under the Israeli blockade is a humanitarian disaster.*" (*The Guardian*, February 8, 2024, p. 9) This phrase categorizes Palestinians as innocent victims of a humanitarian disaster, emphasizing their plight.

### **c. National Self-Glorification and Positive Self-Presentation**

National self-glorification and positive self-presentation are evident in editorials that highlight the efforts of the international community and human rights organizations in advocating for Palestinian rights. These narratives emphasize the moral and humanitarian actions taken by these entities, portraying them in a positive light. An example of this is seen in statements like "*International organizations have consistently condemned the violations of human rights and called for an end to the blockade*," which presents these organizations as proactive and compassionate actors advocating for justice and humanitarian aid (The *Guardian*, December 14, 2023, p. 4). "*International organizations have consistently condemned the violations of human rights and called for an end to the blockade*." (The *Guardian*, December 14, 2023, p. 4). This presents international organizations as proactive and compassionate actors advocating for justice and humanitarian aid, enhancing their moral standing on the global stage.

#### **d. Negative Other-Presentation and Victimization**

Negative other-presentation involves depicting Israel in a negative light, focusing on its aggressive actions and policies, while victimization emphasizes the plight of the Palestinians.

For instance, the editorial might state, "*Israel's military operations have resulted in significant civilian casualties*," presenting Israel as the aggressor. Conversely, victimization is evident in phrases like "*Palestinian families are struggling to survive under the harsh conditions imposed by the blockade*," which highlight their victim status and evoke sympathy (The *Guardian*, November 1, 2023, p. 2).

The analysis of editorials from The *Guardian* demonstrates how international media uses Van Dijk's Us versus Them model to frame the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The editorials emphasize the humanitarian consequences, criticize both sides for perpetuating violence, and highlight the need for a peaceful resolution. Through the strategic use of modality, evidentiality, categorization, national self-glorification, positive self-presentation, negative other-presentation, and victimization, the editorials construct narratives that portray Palestinians as victims of a severe humanitarian crisis and Israel as the dominant military aggressor. This approach underscores the responsibility of the international community in addressing the conflict and advocating for a just solution, shaping public perception towards a more balanced and humanitarian perspective on the conflict.

## **2. New York Post Editorials**

This section analyses editorials from the American newspaper *New York Post* using Van Dijk's Us versus Them model. The focus will be on identifying the key themes and narratives and applying the model's indicators to understand how discourse shapes the representation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

### **a. Modality and Evidentiality**

Modality in the *New York Post* editorials conveys varying degrees of certainty, often expressing strong support for Israel's actions and skepticism towards Palestinian narratives.

Evidentiality is used to support these claims by referencing credible sources, thereby enhancing the reliability and authority of the statements made. For instance, in an editorial *Biden's war on manufacturing peace requires Hamas' elimination and other commentary* discussing a recent conflict escalation, the phrase "Israel has the unequivocal right to defend itself against rocket attacks" uses high modality to assert Israel's right to self-defense as an undeniable fact. Evidentiality is present in statements such as "According to the Israeli Defense Forces, over 1,500 rockets have been fired into Israel in the past week," which attribute the information to a reputable source, thus bolstering its credibility (*New York Post*, December 27, 2023, p. 5).

### **b. Categorization**

Categorization in the *New York Post* editorials often involves labelling Israelis as victims and defenders, while Palestinian militant groups like Hamas are labelled as aggressors. This clear distinction helps frame the conflict in a way that elicits sympathy for Israelis and justifies their military actions. For instance, the editorial states, "The constant threat to Israeli lives from Hamas rocket attacks is intolerable," categorizing Israelis as innocent victims and Hamas as the aggressor responsible for this threat (*New York Post*, November 1, 2023, p. 7). The phrase "The international community must recognize the terrorist nature of Hamas and support Israel's right to defend itself" further categorizes Hamas as a terrorist organization and calls for international support for Israel, emphasizing the need for justice and accountability (*New York Post*, November 1, 2023, p. 7).

### **c. National Self-Glorification and Positive Self-Presentation**

National self-glorification and positive self-presentation are evident in editorials that highlight Israel's achievements, moral high ground, and resilience in the face of adversity.

These narratives emphasize the positive attributes and actions of Israel, portraying it in a favorable light.

An example of this is seen in statements like "Israel has shown remarkable restraint and precision in its military operations, taking great care to minimize civilian casualties," which presents Israel as a responsible and humane actor in the conflict (*New York Post*, November 1, 2023, p. 7). "Israel has shown remarkable restraint and precision in its military operations, taking great care to minimize civilian casualties." (*New York Post*, November 1, 2023, p. 7)

This presents Israel as a responsible and humane actor, enhancing its moral standing on the global stage. By highlighting Israel's humanitarian efforts and military



precision, the editorials seek to portray it as a responsible and humane actor on the global stage. For example, the statement, "*Israel has shown remarkable restraint and precision in its military operations, taking great care to minimize civilian casualties*," presents Israel as a responsible and humane actor, thus enhancing its moral standing (*New York Post*, November 1, 2023, p. 7).

#### **d. Negative Other-Presentation and Victimization**

Negative other-presentation involves depicting Palestinian militant groups in a negative light, focusing on their aggressive actions and policies, while victimization emphasizes the threats faced by Israelis. For instance, the editorial might state, "*Hamas's indiscriminate rocket fire has caused untold suffering for Israeli families*," presenting Hamas as the aggressor. Conversely, victimization is evident in phrases like "*Israeli communities are living in constant fear of the next attack*," —which highlight their victim status and evoke sympathy (*New York Post*, 2023, p. 5). "*Hamas's indiscriminate rocket fire has caused untold suffering for Israeli families*." (*New York Post*, October 25, 2023, p. 1) Hamas is negatively presented as the aggressor through the use of terms like "*indiscriminate rocket fire*" and "*untold suffering*," which emphasize the brutality of its actions. Negative other-presentation and victimization are prominent in the *New York Post* editorials, where Palestinian militant groups are depicted as the aggressors and Israelis as the victims. Similarly, the statement, "*Israeli communities are living in constant fear of the next attack*," victimizes Israelis by emphasizing their ongoing fear and hardship, thereby evoking sympathy and support (*New York Post*, December 27, 2023, p. 5).

#### **Conclusion**

Finally, the fine-grained analysis using the *Us versus Them model* by Van Dijk on international editorials carried in *The Guardian* and *The New York Post* provides an advanced understanding of how these newspapers cover the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Both newspapers develop different storylines and use distinct discursive moves that ultimately convey the regional outlooks and editorial stances of the respective newspapers. Whereas the *Guardian* is more humanitarian-based in terms of the conflict and standing up against both parties in perpetuating violence when the need for a peaceful solution is imminent. Editorials stress such imbalance of power, such that while Israel more often is showcased as a considerably powerful military, the Palestinians suffer under occupation and blockade. The *Guardian* builds the story with a high modality level and reliable sources to indicate that the international community is responsible for managing this conflict and bringing out the just end. Categorization discourses dominated by presentations of the Palestinians as an innocent victim and Israel as an aggressor; national self-glorification and positive self-presentation highlight the moral and humanitarian efforts of the international organizations. The *New York Post*, on the other hand, insists on Israel's sovereignty in self-defense, the

threat from Palestinian militant groups, and a supposed anti-Israel bias in the world community.

This study effectively addressed the research questions by exploring how the Palestine-Israel conflict is represented in international newspaper editorials. The findings highlighted the role of media in shaping public perceptions through various discursive strategies. International media, according to the publication's ideological position, provided more defensive or balanced viewpoints. In order to identify and dismantle biased narratives, the study emphasized the significance of ethical journalism and media literacy. It also emphasized the need for more responsible and balanced reporting in order to promote a nuanced understanding of international conflicts.

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