

Strategies of power in multilingual global broadcasters

How the BBC, CNN and Aljazeera shape their
Middle East news discourse



School of Education and Communication
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Dissertation No 3

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Leon Barkho was an Assistant Professor at Iraq's Mosul University before joining Reuters in 1991 as a reporter and then bureau chief. During his seven years with Reuters he covered one of the world's most intractable and sensitive conflicts pitching Iraq against the United States. After leaving Reuters in 1997 he joined the Associated Press as a staff writer. As a journalist his articles appeared in major U.S. and British newspapers. Since 2001 he has been working at Sweden's Jönköping University where he has been teaching English and media.

Barkho earned an M.A. in applied linguistics in 1997. During his first tenure as an academic at Mosul University he published about a dozen papers on English linguistics, grammar and translation. His publications at Jönköping University, mainly tackling a critical analysis of media discourse, have appeared in *American Communication Journal*, *Journalism Studies*, *Studies in Language and Capitalism*, *Journal of Arab and Muslim Media Research* and *International Journal of Business Studies*. A major piece of his work is scheduled for the *Journal of Pragmatics* in early 2009. His essay in *Journalism Studies*, included in this volume, won the best paper award.

This study deals with the Middle East reporting of three gigantic media companies which together are largely responsible for refining and shaping our views of events in the world. The informational and communicative arm of these giants – Aljazeera, the BBC and CNN – is unprecedented in the history of human communication. The BBC, for example, broadcasts in 33 languages and has an army of nearly 10,000 journalists. In only one decade Aljazeera has turned into the kind of media whose power policy and decision makers can hardly ignore. The recent addition of an English language satellite channel has turned the network into a global media player. CNN, the world's first 24-hour news satellite channel, has services in 12 languages and several English editions covering the four corners of the world.

But the study is not about Aljazeera, the BBC or CNN as new phenomena in world media and communication. Its purpose, approach, data and analysis focus mainly on their Middle East reporting and specifically how they represent the voices involved in the conflict in Iraq and the ongoing struggle between the Palestinians and Israelis. The investigation is mainly concerned with the language of hard news discourse and how the broadcasters intentionally or otherwise produce and reproduce certain linguistic items and patterns to interpret both the discursive and social worlds of the events they carry.

The study comprises five papers all published in international journals dealing with issues of critical discourse analysis. Together, the papers highlight the significant role power holders have in shaping the discourse of their institutions. They provide a new theoretical framework to arrive at the discursive patterns and social assumptions to uncover how the strings of power help refine and shape these patterns and assumptions relying on a variety of sources and empirical data besides textual material. The ultimate aim is to increase awareness and consciousness among both reporters and audiences of how discursive choices are made and the social relationships of power behind them are enacted.

The picture painted in the five papers is not a happy one for readers who have long taken the 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' of the BBC, CNN and Aljazeera for granted. A vital role of a critical analyst is to help readers first to become conscious of how the more powerful in the society work to control our lives through their discourse and that we cannot be emancipated unless we can recognize how and why they do that. It will be rather shocking for many readers to realize that the language we read and listen to is mostly what the broadcasters intentionally have selected to shape the world of both conflicts their own way and not the way the observers (journalists) want it to be or we as audiences expect it to be.



HÖGSKOLAN FÖR LÄRANDE
OCH KOMMUNIKATION
HÖGSKOLAN I JÖNKÖPING

ISBN 978-91-628-7632-6

Leon Barkho

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Cover and layout: Andreas Eckert
Printed by: ARK-tryckaren AB

For Sverige,
Its people,
Its humanity,
Its tolerance,
And honesty.

Acknowledgement

When I sent this dissertation to the printers I was about to celebrate my 55th birthday. So why did it take me so long to get enrolled in a Ph.D. course? The answer is simple: I did not have the chance until I came to Sweden and Joined Jönköping University's International Business School. This is the place where I was accommodated, appreciated and given the opportunity to read for a Ph.D. Thus I am deeply indebted to Jönköping University and its fledging but vibrant business school and specifically the crown of its research centers, the MMTC.

My thanks are also due to Jönköping University's School of Education and Communication whose scholars worked so hard to have me enrolled as a Ph.D. candidate in their programs.

The list of names of people who have contributed to my career development since I landed in Sweden is indeed too long to recount. However, the writing of this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D. would have remained a far fetched dream had it not been for the concerted efforts of my supervisors, Professors Lars-Åke Engblom and Robert Picard. To them I owe a great deal. Their oversight, supervision and encouragement are behind the record time I wrote the papers and the plaudits they have received. The shortcomings, and they must be there due to our human nature no matter how hard we try, are mine. The papers are not without limitations but good researchers are the ones who look forward to grow and develop, first by recognizing their own limitations and second challenging the status quo of research in their fields.

My special thanks and gratitude go to my colleagues at the language department who did everything possible to let me concentrate on my Ph.D. studies and research. To my colleagues at the MMTC I say 'thank you' for all those nice words of appreciation and encouragement that I would get after publishing each of my papers. And finally I want to thank my Ph.D. colleagues with whom I spent some of the nicest time in my life as we haggled and fought over social science issues in some of the splendid courses we had together.

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Introduction

The scope of the study

This study deals with the Middle East reporting of three gigantic media companies which together are largely responsible for refining and shaping our views of events in the world. The informational and communicative arm of these giants – Aljazeera, the BBC and CNN – is unprecedented in the history of human communication. The BBC, for example, broadcasts in 33 languages and has an army of nearly 10,000 journalists. In only one decade Aljazeera has turned into the kind of media whose power policy and decision makers can hardly ignore. The recent addition of an English language satellite channel has turned the network into a global media player. CNN, the world's first 24-hour news satellite channel, has services in 12 languages and several English editions covering the four corners of the world.

Occupying the center stage in world media, the three behemoths have not escaped the attention of media and communication scholars. There is no lack of research looking into these three broadcasters to the extent that one might feel very little remains which has hitherto not been examined. And readers might wonder what else this study could say about them.

However, a cursory look at the literature provides a different picture. Most studies investigating these companies have focused on them as mainly new phenomena vying for attention, influence and audiences. Others have approached them as separate entities with unified strategies and plans despite their disparate approaches and methods which do not only set them – as independent broadcasters – apart but, on close examination, show marked divisions in the way they tackle their various services, languages and broadcasts (c.f. Rushing and Elder 2007; El-Nawawy and Iskander 2003; Robinson 2002; Aitken 2007; Lynch 2007; Miles 2006; Kung-Shankelman 2000).

This study is not about Aljazeera, the BBC or CNN as new phenomena in world media and communication. Its purpose, approach, data and analysis focus mainly on their Middle East reporting and specifically how they represent the voices involved in the conflict in Iraq and the ongoing struggle between the Palestinians and Israelis. And in the investigation of any representation in media one has first to decide what to include and what to exclude and at the same time what to 'background' and what to 'foreground.' Here, the investigation is mainly concerned with the language of discourse and how the broadcasters intentionally or otherwise produce and reproduce certain linguistic items and patterns to interpret both the discursive and social worlds

of the events they carry.

This short introductory chapter to the study, comprising five papers with one of them having the dual function of a cover and an article, first discusses the dissertation as a whole and how the papers fit into it and what each of them adds to it. Then the chapter briefly lays out the state of research in relation to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of media texts and what the study adds to the field. Thereafter, it addresses the implications of the findings with regard to media companies, journalists and society. But let us begin first by briefly describing the purpose and the method the study pursues whose clarification I find necessary for the understanding of the study as a whole.

What is the study about?

This study is about the connection between online Middle East hard news as output and the connections its discursive practices and social patterns have with power holders in the three channels as social institutions. One major aim is theoretical through which I try to address widespread underestimation in the literature of the significant role power holders, whether editorial or political, have in shaping the discourse of their institutions. The second is to provide a new theoretical framework to arrive at the discursive patterns and social assumptions to uncover how the strings of power help refine and shape these patterns and assumptions relying on a variety of sources and empirical data besides textual material. The third is to increase awareness and consciousness among both reporters and audiences of how discursive choices are made and the social relationships of power behind them are enacted. In order to understand the power behind discourse one has to be conscious of who creates it, how it is created, why it is created in that particular manner and for what purpose.

The who? the how? the why? and the what? of discourse are my main focus in this study and hence my reliance on sources other than the material texts which normally are the mainstay of CDA analyses. I try to explain the existing discursive conventions in the Middle East discourse of the three broadcasters not by solely relying on written texts. Discoursal power relations and struggles are arrived at ethnographically through observation, communication, interviews, secondary data, documents as well as material texts.

The picture painted in the five papers is not a happy one for readers who have long taken the 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' of the BBC, CNN and Aljazeera for granted. A vital role of a critical analyst, as Fairclough (1989) points out, is to help readers first to become conscious of how the more powerful in the society work to control

our lives through their discourse and that we cannot be emancipated unless we can recognize how and why they do that. The language we read and listen to is the product of ‘domination and oppression’ the broadcasters intentionally exercise to have it shaped their own way and not the way the observers (journalists) want it to be or we as audiences expect it to be.

The power of discourse and the ideologies behind it CDA scholars have unpacked mainly through reliance on media output, that is by what the broadcasters say or write. This kind of analysis, where researchers rely on the micro discursive elements of the text or its immediate and ‘frontstage’ characteristics to arrive at its macro social elements, or its remote and ‘backstage’ characteristics has been criticized as inefficient and inadequate (Chilton 2004). There have been calls to reverse the approach, working to first unpack the text’s macro social assumptions, or their world, and then move down to its micro elements. This study incorporates both ways but solidifies the analysis by employing the ethnographic angle which prominent CDA scholars have urged to deploy but have stopped short of applying.

The analysis of the language of media texts (in our case online hard news reports) is carried out within the framework of the following sets of questions: (1) who decides about the sensitive and most important discursive practices reporters have to use and the social contexts they are used in, (2) how is the world of the reported events represented in discourse and the influence discursive and social power holders exercise in it, (3) what motivates power holders to settle on the discursive options that set their outlets apart from others and represent the social world of the events they carry differently, (4) what kind of relationships exist between the actors (the powerful and the less powerful) in the newsroom and how these relationships surface in discourse, (5) what are the discursive and social origins of the linguistic options the broadcasters make and where do they come from, (6) what motivates the broadcaster to select a particular choice from among numerous ones that are discursively and socially available, and (7) what impact do the choices made have on representation?

To answer the questions above I follow a particular agenda in pursuing a CDA of the online hard news discourse the three broadcasters use in covering the Middle East. I want first to highlight both the discursive practices and social strategies the broadcasters adopt in their coverage. More specifically, to see how the discursive and social ways they use to communicate events are constrained by the companies as social institutions within which reporters live and function. Second, I want to show how these institutions interfere not only in the choice of linguistic options but also in the type of social categorization and representation the reported voices are given. Two major points of reference I have used as a guide to implement this agenda: (1) ethnography and (2) material texts, with emphasis in the first four papers placed on

the former and in the last one on the latter.

Implications of the study

One important implication of CDA is to increase people's consciousness of how media texts are created and how they are masked with the ideological power of the institutions creating them. So long as audiences are not aware of how this ideological power is exercised, they will remain shackled by the discursive patterns and social order constraints that are a characteristic of discourse. But despite the plethora of studies on these lines, critical analysts have unfortunately failed in their endeavor to feed back their findings to the subjects of their research and have not succeeded even to impress them by the rigor and the intricacies of their critical analyses (Flowerdew 2008).

It may not be surprising therefore to see media practitioners shunning the implications of CDA research. The reasons are amply discussed in the first paper but it is worth reiterating one fundamental point. For CDA scholars and the philosophers underpinning their investigations the selection of discursive patterns and their social orders are part of 'common behavior' and when it comes to social behavior and its representation, media outlets mostly rely on 'common-sense' assumptions.

CDA relies heavily on contemporary social theorists such as Habermas, Foucault and Bourdieu, among others, whose notions of how language embodies the exercise of power in modern societies almost shape the ideological workings of discourse. These theorists are largely responsible for what is often referred to in contemporary social theory as 'the language turn' which has persisted despite postmodernist assertions that we are on the threshold of the visual turn with the emergence of visual media giants like youtube.

One major implication of the study for the society in general is that the discursive patterns that shape the Middle East news and their social representations are purposefully selected by institutional power holders. Audiences should be made aware of the fact that many of the important and sensitive options of language they read or listen to are not part of the 'common-sense' prevalent in the society and among those creating and disseminating the discourse. Discursive patterns particularly at the level of lexis and phraseology are imposed on reporters because the institutional structures they happen to be with make it incumbent on them to have their reports structured and shaped in one particular way rather than another. The news output (discourse) in the case of the three broadcasters is not natural and commonsensical. Reporters have very little room to maneuver with regard to discursive practices at certain levels

of language. What looks as common consent in a media institution is forced and coercive since it is imposed on the institution in the form of internal guidelines, specialized and confidential sets of glossaries and multi-layered mechanisms of discursive control and gate-keeping (c.f. white 1950).

The papers fit within this whole of how consciously and purposefully discursive and social power is enacted in the discourse of the three broadcasters albeit of course from different angles. Social theorists influencing CDA as well as prominent CDA scholars agree that wherever there is power there must be resistance. True, human beings have the capacity to change and that change is potentially always possible but it is hard to realize in institutions like the BBC, CNN and Aljazeera even if their members develop what critical analysts describe as the right “critical consciousness of domination and its modalities” (Fairclough 1989: 4). Organizational members do feel how they are discursively and socially exploited by the power holders through their guidelines, checks and balances, editorial procedures and other measures, but despite their consciousness their resistance is minimal.

The discursive and social categorization and hierarchies so evident in the critical analysis of the five papers are not hidden, implicit or covert neither to the power holders nor to the mass of reporters. Since we now have empirical evidence that they are not, and that these media institutions are aware of their distinctive ways of the workings of discursal power, it is not surprising therefore to see media unimpressed by the stream of CDA studies since they stop short of devising ways to challenge their discursive and social worlds. Unchallenged, media power holders see the discursive and social worlds they have created for themselves as the most suitable among the options available to them.

CDA research implications will only be challenging when discursal power holders see that analysts have unraveled a world that is not known before, and when they provide alternatives of different discursive ways of representing the same communicative event. It is hoped that the rewrites of certain discursive and social orders of discourse done in the five papers and the comparisons and parallels made out of the variety of representations, whether discursive or social of the same event and participants, will help media power holders to realize that there are two sides of the same coin and that there is more than one suitable discursive pattern and social order to represent an event. The inclusion of three global and multilingual broadcasters in the study should in itself imply that there is more than one discursive pattern and social order to present an event or a voice. The broadcasters share a lot in common in the way they exercise their power, but their divisions on how to translate their discursive and social power into reality are too many to ignore.

If discourse creators and practitioners are conscious and aware of how overwhelming ideological power is, we as audiences do not have the same degree of consciousness and hence for us the ideological power workings of discourse are very likely to be hidden and implicit. As people, CDA is a vital tool to uncover how power is enacted in media. But has CDA informed audiences and the society of how language is manipulated to serve ideological power? Perhaps not yet. CDA, as the papers show, has been harshly criticized for its limited scope and confinement to only a very limited number of texts the unraveling of their ideological power and bias are seen by many critics as foregone conclusions. The study attempts to address the shortcomings by expanding the scope of texts and outlets and at the same time triangulating them with ethnography, an aspect that has been sorely lacking in the literature. This triangulatory approach, outlined in detail particularly in the first paper, will hopefully work as a challenge to the literature, the media companies themselves, their journalists and audiences.

Approach and method

There is a great deal in the qualitative methodology literature on the philosophical underpinnings of research, but information is paltry when it comes to how to relate the different philosophical elements to the research procedure. Few qualitative writers would agree on the assumptions to adopt or the precise procedures necessary for data collection, analysis and reporting of research findings. However, they are almost unanimous on what order these procedures should take, advising researchers to establish their epistemological and ontological assumptions first and then move to issues concerning data gathering and analysis as well as the researcher's role, the actors and the setting.

Space and restrictions on the number of words academic journal editors and publishers impose on contributors make it hard to clarify in detail the philosophical assumptions underlying the research and the techniques employed in conducting it. This section sets out the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the study and outlines its interpretative approach based on the critical discourse analysis of written hard news texts.

Philosophers have grappled with the nature of reality and the interaction between researchers and those they study. There is no one single way to view the reality out there and the relations to that researched. Therefore researchers need to decide which ontological and epistemological foundations they will base their studies on, preferably before starting in earnest. But it is important for these foundations not to be imposed on the study. In other words researchers are advised to see the nature of

reality and their interaction with their objects in the light of the requirements of their studies. Ontological issues like these are amply explained in the first paper.

This work adopts an interpretive epistemology of human knowledge. Objective truth does not lurk somewhere awaiting us to find it. We gather meaning of things around us only when we engage with them. Here it is argued that reality is constructed through the different forms of language mainly conversation and writing. To understand this reality one has to resort to the means that help to explain it. Hence for me reality is interpretation through language.

Doing interpretive research involves many actors who may construct reality in different ways. These actors include the subjects and objects of the study as well as other factors such as context, traditions, values, history and religion, among others. Each of these may bring their own understanding of reality resulting in diversity of opinion and view of the world around us:

Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. Isn't this precisely what we find when we move from one culture to another? (Crotty 1998 :8)

Understanding does not wholly rely on one actor. It is an interaction not only between us as subjects and those we research as objects. The meaning we have is not only the one that we impose on the things around us. We may hold to it, preserve it and struggle for it. But we need to remember that the particular meaning we form about objects is not inherent. As Crotty (1998 :10) suggests we “import meaning from somewhere.” This “somewhere” may happen to be the object, tradition, values, religion, etc.

Through this epistemological stand I see language as discourse and that the texts subjected to critical analysis cannot be taken as accomplished entities and an end in themselves. Language is not merely a composition of artifacts or signs but a product in the formation of which so many actors are involved. The text is merely one part of discourse and to understand it we need to move to its world which includes among other things the processes involved in producing it. For a proper understanding of the news reports, one has to move away and beyond their linguistic description toward the interpretative processes and the participants involved in creating them. While CDA scholars stress the importance of these processes, they have mostly used the text as the only means to unravel them. Here, besides the texts, the researcher relies on conversation and communication with the participants and observation of the

processes they undertake to produce them.

The papers as a whole offer what I see as a carefully illustrated guide of how to apply this interpretative approach, mainly through the kind of triangulation of data which though offering the researcher's own interpretations and explanations, adds some degree of objectivity that makes it hard for both the practitioners and readers to challenge its findings even if they come from different social or historical backgrounds. CDA's interpretations and explanations, as the papers illustrate, have been mainly pilloried for the limited scope of their empirical data rendering them easy prey to challenge by both readers and practitioners.

The main reason for this choice of approach, which makes ethnography a substantial element in understanding discourse, is that the way power is exercised in modern society is so complicated that it is not easy at all to unravel its strings by merely focusing on the text itself – and the strings that enact power in media and specifically news reporting will certainly pass unnoticed unless approached through conversation and observation in order to determine the influence they exercise on discourse.

Thus the approach to the language of hard news reporting is called critical not in the sense of its being confined to bringing to the surface the power relationships that are hidden or implicit in the text itself, that is, the connections between the language of the text and the workings of ideological power that are gleaned from the text alone. The hidden determinants that play a role in the discursive and social properties of hard news cannot be unearthed if the analysis revolves around the text's linguistic properties and the social relations analysts can glean from it. As the papers on the whole show the ideological power of hard news requires much more than an analysis of textual material to arrive at. There are so many actors and forces which influence reporters' output and which are very difficult to determine by merely looking into the text.

Approaches to CDA, particularly those dealing with media, have essentially focused on the text's 'micro' structures in order to reveal the 'macro' structures of the social institutions producing it. The 'dialectical' relationship between both structures has been arrived at by merely conversing with and observing the 'micro' level. In this study, I argue that it is high time for CDA analysts to strike a balance between the 'micro' and 'macro' structures of the text they analyze. This means a balanced movement away from the observation of and conversation with the language of the text toward the processes of text production and social institutions involved in news output. Many of the findings of this research would have been missed had the author relied exclusively on the micro characteristic of the textual material.

Richardson (2008: 152) lashes out at CDA approaches which confine themselves to the micro structures in the study of media since they say “more about the views and methods of the analyst than the language of journalism ... Such an approach is appreciably wrongheaded.” The other essential element which CDA scholars approaching media have ‘wrong-headedly’ stressed is their insistence that the same kit of analytical tools can be applicable to all types of texts. This has perhaps led to the suggestion that the tools applied to the analysis of the novel genre can be applied to newspapers and that all newspaper content can be analyzed using the same tools. Hard news discourse, as this study shows, is a unique genre which needs its own kit of analytical tools combining and merging ethnography at the level of social practices with a desiderata of linguistic features suitable to the analysis of discursive practices.

This study attempts not to ‘hide’ behind linguistic logocentrism that has characterized most CDA studies. It is much less pre-occupied with the intricacies of the language of the text, placing more emphasis on its world and context through a triangulatory approach that involves among other things newsroom anecdotes, mass media reports, interviews, observation, editors’ blogs, among others. There is a lot of evidence from social theorists and prominent CDA scholars in the five papers on how important it is for analysts to triangulate their studies with ethnography, but I still feel it is necessary to reiterate Bloomaert (1999: 6) who argues:

The fact is that discourses... have their “natural history” - a chronological and sociocultural anchoring which produces meaning and social effects in ways that cannot be reduced to text-characteristics alone.

The discourses journalists produce in the form of hard news stories are always bound and situated in their social contexts. A proper analysis of these texts cannot be done by relying solely on their linguistic properties. “These aspects of the study of the language of journalism remain the most underdeveloped” (Richardson 2008: 153) and the five papers making up this dissertation are an attempt to fill in this gap.

Research as communication

The above sections have perhaps left the question of whether it is possible to talk about journalistic epistemologies or realities unanswered from an empirical viewpoint. But if there are journalistic realities, do we really know how they arise?

To answer this epistemological question, the study seeks to re-examine three major propositions which have been at the center of media research for decades, namely

whether reporters' job is simply to record events, whether they are detached or simply involved participants or observers, whether they are biased.

Answers to the propositions above are embedded in the five papers. I will stop short of furnishing categorical responses here and leave it to readers to arrive at them as they wade through the mass of empirical data in the chapters that follow. However, one important response has to be offered in advance. While critical research in the past decade has strived to provide evidence that media, contrary to common claim, do not actually inform, but try to work as agents of others' power and expectations (c.f. Poerksen 2008), this study attempts to wade into the institutional and political structures of this power, revealing how reality designs are created and adopted in advance in gigantic media institutions like the BBC, CNN and Aljazeera and that these designs, contrary to common scholarly belief, are not implicit, natural or arbitrary.

The epistemological perspective that binds the five papers distances itself from constructivism since the journalistic reality of the three global broadcasters does not wholly depend on how the observer (journalist) sees the world. It is not wholly subjective since the reality of the events reported holds essential objective elements as represented in style guidelines, strict editorial control and numerous gate-keeping mechanisms all working together as part of an attempt to steer the world in a distinctive way (c.f. White 1950 and Breed 1955). This epistemological stand is akin to that of Bourdieu (1990, 1991), the French sociologist who, while not denying the subjectivism of discourse, underlines at the same time its objective angle. Journalistic objectivity cannot be understood as purely observer-dependent because simply this observer is not free as the empirical research and ethnographic observation of the three broadcasters amply demonstrate.

This epistemological approach does not totally deny the personal responsibility of the journalist but it stresses that in the case of global and multilingual media environment of the BBC, CNN and Aljazeera journalists must obey and if not they are made to obey the editorial and political mechanisms in place to preserve the outlet's 'self-image' and 'professionalism'. The empirical data and investigation in this study show that journalists are given special ways of how to construct reality. And as the role media play in our contemporary world is much more significant than ever, this study describes how global media giants construct their realities which previous critical research saw as a gap and urged future research to bridge. Poerksen (2008: 298) identifies the same gap and urges researchers to have it filled since

the significance of the media for the contemporary world experience is greater than ever: it will be the task of future research work to analyze and describe the construction of media realities, which are increasingly

becoming the primary realities in which people live, as appropriately and comprehensively as possible.

Is it then ‘Tell it as it is’ or something else

‘Tell it as it is’ is one of the most quoted phrases or ‘mottos’ my respondents used to demonstrate where they stand with regard to the reality of the events their journalists (observers) cover. But is it really ‘Tell it as it is’ or ‘It is as you tell it’ (Forester and Poerksen 2002: 99) or ‘It is as we want you to tell it.’ The three phrases display three different constructions of journalistic reality and no media firm would be happy with the last two regardless of whether empirical research provides evidence of them or not. These issues are extensively elaborated on in the five papers making up this study. But it is worthwhile to reiterate what the respondents had to say when approached about their views of how their journalists should see the reality of the world and the discourse they use to represent it:

We will train you as a journalist. We will give you guidelines you must read and understand. We will empower you to go and report what you see in a way that conforms to our overarching editorial ambition.

Jerry Timmins, BBC’s Head of Region, Africa and Middle East

When it comes to the conflict in general we are not so sensitive as they (the BBC and CNN) are because we are not afraid of the Israeli pressure ... (which) made them put that sort of list (special Middle East glossaries) down ... We are not neutral, I am telling you, because we cannot equate between the two, victims (Palestinians) and victimizer (Israel).

Ahmed Sheikh, Aljazeera’s editor-in-chief

Choice of language and terms and expressions is in the hands of standards and practices department (in Atlanta).

Nick Wren, CNN’s Managing Editor – Europe, Middle East and Africa

A few samples from internal guidelines, extensively analyzed in the study, tell whether it is ‘Tell it as it is’ or ‘It is as you tell it’ or something else:

We use ‘martyr’ to refer to Palestinians killed by Israel. Refrain from using the term in other conflicts involving Arabs and Muslims like Iraq and Afghanistan. (Aljazeera Arabic)

You must abide by the channel’s guidelines ... and our policy with regard to Iraq is not to say “Arab Shiites or Arab Sunnis. It suffices to say Sunnis

and Shiites". ... Do not say "Shiite Hizbollah" ... Do not say "Muslims and Jews" when reporting Palestine ... (Aljazeera Arabic).

Martyr – we will NOT use. (Aljazeera English)

Resistance – do not use when talking about Iraq. Use armed groups, fighters etc. instead. (Aljazeera English)

Intifada - ... So, for example, it is preferable to say that "Sharon's visit and Palestinian frustration at the failure of the peace process sparked the (second) intifada or uprising" rather than it "led" to it or "started" it ... (BBC)

... Avoid saying East Jerusalem "is part" of Israel or suggesting anything like it. Avoid the phrase "Arab East Jerusalem", too, unless you also have space to explain that Israel has annexed the area and claims it as part of its capital ... (BBC)

Watzlawick (1976) opens his seminal work *How Real is Real?* with the a sentence which says that "the so called reality is the result of communication." This research would have failed to delve into the social and discursive reality of the BBC, CNN and Aljazeera had it confined its scope to their written output. The description of the reality of the three broadcasters in this study has been made possible through communicating and conversing with the power holders and observing their production, both input and output processes in situ - the ethnographic perspective which CDA analysts have been reluctant to supplement their studies with. Language is the overarching means through which conversation and communication are possible and through it the construction of reality not only of broadcasters but also of individuals, societies and cultures can be developed.

Major conclusions

Some of the research findings have already been touched upon in the above section. As this study is a compilation of five papers, the research questions raised and the conclusions arrived at may vary, but they still fall within the framework of the basic questions drafted in this introduction with the critical analysis also geared towards verifying the propositions. Here is a summary of the basic conclusions the five papers arrive at:

- Relations between internal and external power actors in the composition of discursive practices particularly at the level of lexis or

vocabulary are not dialectical. Journalists and editors have to respond to the needs, whether political or economic, of those to whom they owe their existence regardless of their own 'ideational' assumptions. Critical analysts have tackled these relationships extensively, but their assumptions have always been that of hidden power relations based on commonsensical 'consent' rather than 'coercion'.

- Particular options at the level of lexis or vocabulary are made by editors and written in style guides, which provide the preferred sets of the lexical categories to use and not to use. These options indicate representations of the world from the networks' ideological viewpoint which is often determined by those holding the reins of power.
- Contrary to commonly held views so far – whether by social theorists or CDA scholars – the power of discourse is visible to media people and is consciously 'manipulated' in terms of representation. And moreover, media people themselves believe that they and to a certain extent their audiences are aware of this power 'manipulation'
- Aljazeera's vocabulary is a case of one organization with two divergent discourses selected from a host of options to address issues of power relations and ideology. It is indeed a conscious attempt by the power holders to respond to the realities of the English speaking audiences in the case of the English Channel which has its own style guidelines and Arabic speaking audiences in the case of the Arabic Channel.
- The Arabic services of the BBC and CNN are not seen as valuable by their power holders as AljE is to Aljazeera as a network. BBC and CNN's Arabic services adhere to style guidelines written for the main English service. They, from both social and discursive strategic perspective, are peripheral orbits in the domineering English habitus and field.
- In organizational settings, powerful actors in Habermas's 'systems' exercise their authority in a manner that is largely invisible and hardly felt by lesser powerful actors. Reporters are usually aware of how the holders of power in organizations like the BBC, CNN and Aljazeera control their lives. They have not grown to accept the 'systems' imposed on them as natural or commonsensical as Gramsci and Garfinkel argue because they feel the weight of power all around them.

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- Selection of discourse particularly at the level of lexis is ‘deterministic’ as reporters are under obligation not to steer away from their style guidelines when manufacturing the news. Therefore, the choice may run contrary to the common sense prevalent among members of the organization or ‘systems’.
 - A striking feature is the emphasis the BBC and Aljazeera Arabic Channel place on the ‘religious’ character of the Palestinian and Israeli conflict in their style guidelines. AljA relies on Prophetic Tradition to force the ‘consent’ of reporters with regard to lexical and other choices. Similarly, the BBC relies heavily on the Bible to explain lexical options with regard to Israel and to a lesser degree on Islamic tradition with regard to Palestinians.
 - Aljazeera’s dominance of the Arabic television market illustrates that it takes a little more than common and feasible economic policies necessary for the growth and development of a television channel directed at or originating in the Middle East. Aljazeera’s rivals may even have a better access to cash, equipment, personnel and satellites, but they still dismally trail behind it in polls and ratings.
 - It seems the traditional means rivals have used to compete with Aljazeera do not hold in a region where culture, religion and history still play a pivotal role in driving the society. While rivals strive to meet international production standards, they usually lack Aljazeera’s warmth or cultural relevance.
 - Investigating the textual function of hard news discourses reveals four important layers of the traditional inverted pyramid structure. The linguistic analysis has shown that different grammatical, lexical and semantic characteristics realize the discourses of these layers, with each of them exhibiting different social practices and assumptions.
 - The BBC and CNN stories display a tendency to transform Israeli official discourses into public language, employing mainly paraphrased discursive characteristics that make them palatable to the public at large.
 - BBC editors are aware of the terminology they use and its deficiencies to describe the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but they are mostly in the dark with regard to the type of syntactic structures used in reporting

it.

- BBC's choice of vocabulary reflects the unequal division of power, control and status separating the Middle East protagonists and this inequality surfaces at several levels and is strongly backed by editorial strategy and policy.
- The premise on which BBC's abbreviated version to facts and terminology on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is based does not hold across the 24 terms the corporation has made public and it can be gleaned from the interviews that this handout may have complicated rather than eased editorial tensions and other pressures with regard to the coverage of the conflict.

Summary of papers

Let me summarize the major themes of each paper and its status with regard to reviewing and publishing.

A slightly shorter version of the first paper *The discursive and social power of news discourse – the case of Aljazeera in comparison and parallel with the BBC and CNN* is published in issue 3, 2008 of *Studies in Language and Capitalism*. In its present shape, the paper is meant to function as a cover for the whole dissertation and an independent paper at the same time. It is the last article I wrote to round up the study. It extends the scope of critical analysis from the investigation of a few texts and the scrutiny of their micro discursive features to how the text is produced at the macro level of production. The interplay between the discursive and the social mainly through ethnographic observation and analysis sheds much more light on the holders of editorial power in media organizations than hitherto known. Like the other papers it pursues a textual analysis of the online news output of mainly Aljazeera in comparison and parallel with the online news output of both the BBC and CNN. But it steers away from mainstream CDA literature by focusing on aspects other than texts. The analysis triangulates CDA with ethnographic research which includes observation, stories, field visits, interviews and important secondary data such as media reports and samples from style guidelines. The ethnographic angle is found to be crucial in unraveling both the social and discursive worlds of Aljazeera, the BBC and CNN. It has helped the researcher to draw conclusions that extend and occasionally contradict commonly held views with regard to how the three networks create and disseminate hard news and the ideas and concepts mainstream CDA literature employs to explain and understand these processes.

The second paper *The Arabic Aljazeera Vs Britain's BBC and America's CNN: Who Does Journalism Right?* was in fact the first paper which I wrote at the start of my career as a doctoral student in 2005. Its appearance in *American Communication Journal* Volume 8, Number 1, Fall 2006, was the catalyst to pursue the topic in greater depth and detail and settle on it as the major theme of the study. It was written to mark the Arabic language satellite channel's 10th founding anniversary and examine the reasons that helped the young broadcaster to transform the television landscape in the Middle East and beyond in such a short period. Even before launching its English channel on November 15, 2006, Aljazeera Arabic had gained global reputation and become a name which governments and decision-makers across the world could hardly ignore. Research on Aljazeera normally attributes the network's meteoric rise to fame to what is occasionally described as unlimited access to the coffers of its founders and sponsors, the ruling family in Qatar. This paper attributes the network's success to reasons other than access to financial resources. Cash is not a problem for most media outlets vying to seize the attention of more than 300 million viewers in a region where television, particularly satellite channels, have become a major source of news and information. The paper finds that Aljazeera has built a dedicated following in both Arab and Islamic worlds through the perseverance of its mostly western-educated editors to show respect for the religion, culture, tradition and aspiration of its listeners – the thing which its competitors like the BBC and CNN sorely lack in their Arabic language services. The paper brings to light how Aljazeera's world is socially constructed and what drives it apart from that of its main rivals, the BBC and CNN, mainly through a critical analysis of their discourses.

The third paper *Unpacking the discursive and social links in BBC, CNN and Al-Jazeera's Middle East reporting* is issued in the *Journal of Arab and Muslim Media Research* Volume 1, Number 1, 2007. It addresses the issue of how to understand the language of journalism in relation to the moments of why and how news is differently structured and patterned. English online stories tackling the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, issued by the BBC, CNN and Al-Jazeera, are critically analysed following Fowler and Fairclough's seminal texts. The results of the findings are discussed in interviews with the editors of the three international networks in order to see what links these linguistic features have with the interviewees' social assumptions, ideologies and economic conditions. The article finds first that the discourse within the news pyramid is composed of four major layers: quoting, paraphrasing, background and comment. Second, it demonstrates that there are marked differences in the discourse structures and layers that the three networks employ in the production of the news stories they issue in English. Third, Al-Jazeera English exhibits marked differences in the discursive features and their social implications at the four layers of discourse to report the conflict when compared with both the BBC and CNN. Fourth, the article shows that the differences in linguistic patterns largely reflect and respond to

each network's social and political assumptions and practices as well as economic conditions.

The fourth paper *BBC's discursive strategy and practices vis-à-vis the Palestinian-Israeli conflict* appeared in *Journalism Studies* Volume 9 Issue 2, 2008. This is the only paper that is wholly based on BBC's Middle East reporting of the most sensitive of stories, namely the conflict between Israel and Palestine. It examines BBC's strategy and discursive practices with regard to the conflict. Like other papers, it triangulates critical linguistic analysis of BBC's English and Arabic online reports with the results of extensive interviews with BBC editors, articles by mainstream media as well as BBC's guidelines and the editors' blogs. The aim behind the triangulation is to see whether the corporation's beliefs, norms and assumptions vis-à-vis the issue have a hand in the shaping of its discursive features. In order to understand why and how news is differently structured and patterned, Fowler (1991) urges critical linguists to contextualize their studies by examining discourse-related moments other than the text itself. The contextualization of the linguistic representations of the conflict demonstrates that BBC language reflects to a large extent the views, assumptions and norms prevalent in the corporation as well as the unequal division of power and control between the two protagonists despite the corporation's insistence on impartiality, balance and neutrality in its coverage of the conflict.

A slightly shorter version of the last paper *Fundamentalism through Arab and Muslim Eyes – A Hermeneutic Interpretation* is scheduled to appear as a separate chapter in a new volume *Media and Fundamentalism* edited by Stewart Hoover of Colorado University and is currently in print (Continuum Press 2008). This is the article which attempts to put the whole thesis into an interpretative and hermeneutic context and provide a framework on how to approach the discursal bifurcation and categorization of the actors or participants the three broadcasters cover and of which the previous papers provide extensive analysis. It deals with how to explain the current deep divide between the 'Christian' West and the Arab and Muslim East. The essay focuses on discursal (rhetorical and oratory struggle) with a fundamentalist, extremist or radical nature that accompanies the conflicts and wars both worlds are currently involved in. Words are as important as swords and maybe more lethal. While guns may not be available to everyone, words, thanks to today's advances in information technology and digitization, are there everywhere through television, newspapers, radio, the Internet and other electronic gadgets. And the Arabs, perhaps more than any other nation, are making full use of these devices, particularly the television. The paper illustrates that beside the battle of guns a battle of words is raging which has become a characteristic feature of media not only in the Arab and Muslim world but also in the West and Israel. This war using fundamentalist discourse as a weapon exists in a mutually-constitutive or even dialectical relationship as the Arab and Muslim

fundamentalist discourses, though very ferocious and bitter, are found to be mainly a reaction or response to that emanating from the West.

Altogether, the papers re-examine two important analytical perspectives of CDA: methodology and power relations. With regard to methodology, it introduces a new framework or approach that relies less on logocentrism and supremacy of linguistic intricacies. Instead of always starting with the micro elements of texts, the study foregrounds the macro elements as represented in the process of production at the newsroom level. To achieve this aim, it goes beyond textual material and lands in its world through ethnographic observation to see how and why it is created and by whom and for what purpose. Besides interviews, it resorts to stories gathered from communicating and observing the informants, examining their blogs and media reports. This marriage of text and its real world responds to some of the harshest critique lodged at CDA from inside and outside the discipline. The method has proved very revealing from an empirical and practical viewpoint, generating great deal of interest from both the practitioners and scholars.

The second important contribution is in the area of discursive power and how it is exercised in hard news as an independent genre. The papers together provide empirical evidence that hard news discourse displays distinctive power relations that may not be found in other types of media discourse. The way power is exercised in hard news discourse, as empirically illustrated in the study, should prompt CDA scholars to reexamine the premises they have relied on so far. The ideological workings of power are not 'natural' or 'commonsensical' as it is the case with other discourse genres. The exercise of discursive power is well-planned in advance and the institution is made to abide through well-established mechanisms that ensure its practices, whether discursive or social, are incorporated in the final output.

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