

Linguistic Strategies in Arabic Media Representations of the Palestine–Israel Conflict: A Faircloughian Analysis

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Abstract

News language rarely merely reports; it takes part in constituting how an event becomes intelligible. This study examines the linguistic strategies through which Arabic media represented the Palestine–Israel conflict, focusing on Al Jazeera Arabic reporting between October and December 2023. The research is qualitative and descriptive-critical, and it applies Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis to twenty purposively selected linguistic units, which were analysed at the levels of text, discursive practice, and social practice, with transitivity and social-actor categories used as supporting analytical instruments. Three findings emerge. First, the evaluative lexicon names events through the semantic fields of occupation, resistance, and aggression, so that classification precedes description. Second, grammatical agency is distributed asymmetrically along a cline that runs from explicit agents through nominalisation and passive constructions to abstraction, and the position of an actor on this cline correlates with whose responsibility is at stake. Third, the hierarchy of quoted sources allocates institutional authority unevenly. The study argues that lexical and grammatical selection operates as an ideological practice, and it proposes contemporary Arabic media discourse as a productive object for Arabic studies in Indonesia.

Keywords: Arabic media; critical discourse analysis; Fairclough; ideology; transitivity

Abstrak

Bahasa berita jarang sekadar melaporkan; ia turut menentukan bagaimana sebuah peristiwa menjadi dapat dipahami. Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi kebahasaan yang digunakan media Arab dalam merepresentasikan konflik Palestina–Israel, dengan fokus pada pemberitaan Al Jazeera Arabic periode Oktober hingga Desember 2023. Penelitian bersifat kualitatif deskriptif-kritis dan menerapkan model tiga dimensi analisis wacana kritis Norman Fairclough terhadap dua puluh satuan lingual yang dipilih secara purposif, yang dianalisis pada tataran teks, praktik diskursif, dan praktik sosial, dengan analisis transitivitas dan representasi aktor sosial sebagai instrumen analitis pendukung. Penelitian ini menghasilkan tiga temuan. Pertama, leksikon evaluatif menamai peristiwa melalui medan makna pendudukan, perlawanan, dan agresi sehingga klasifikasi mendahului deskripsi. Kedua, agentivitas gramatikal terdistribusi secara asimetris pada sebuah kontinum yang bergerak dari pelaku eksplisit menuju nominalisasi, konstruksi pasif, dan abstraksi, dan posisi aktor pada kontinum itu berkorelasi dengan tanggung jawab siapa yang sedang dipertaruhkan. Ketiga, hierarki sumber kutipan mendistribusikan otoritas kelembagaan secara tidak merata. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pemilihan leksikal dan

gramatikal bekerja sebagai praktik ideologis, sekaligus mengajukan wacana media Arab kontemporer sebagai objek yang produktif bagi kajian bahasa Arab di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: analisis wacana kritis; Fairclough; ideologi; media Arab; transitivitas



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A. Introduction

News language is rarely a matter of plain reporting. When an act of violence is covered, an editorial team must decide which word will name it, which party will occupy the subject position of the sentence, and whose voice will be given room to speak. These apparently technical decisions accumulate into a point of view. Within critical discourse analysis, language is understood not as a mirror of reality but as a social practice that is shaped by social structures and, in turn, helps to reshape them.¹ News texts therefore cannot be read as transparent windows onto events. They are constructions that carry the traces of interest, position, and power.²

The Palestine–Israel conflict is among the most densely covered and most fiercely contested events in the global media landscape. The escalation that began in October 2023 made this unusually visible. The same event was given different names, casualties were counted with reference to different authorities, and identical actions received different grammatical treatment depending on who performed them. For Arabic-speaking audiences, Al Jazeera Arabic occupies a position in this process of meaning-making that is difficult to ignore. The pressing question is therefore no longer whether an outlet holds a position, since that question is answered too easily and explains too little. The more productive question, linguistically speaking, is through which mechanisms a perspective is built, sustained, and naturalised until it feels ordinary to those who read it.

A number of studies have already placed that question at the centre of their attention. Barkho shows that Al Jazeera's internal editorial guidelines operate as a device that shapes word choice in coverage of Middle Eastern conflicts, so that positioning surfaces not as open statement but as lexical habit.³ Zibin, Altakhaineh, and Jarrah demonstrate how compound nouns in Arabic news headlines function as framing devices that compress evaluation into a single lexical unit.⁴ Malkawi, Fareh, and Rabab'ah compare English and Arabic headlines reporting the killing of the

¹ Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 55–58.

² Teun A. van Dijk, *Discourse and Power* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 27–31.

³ Leon Barkho, 'Editorial Policies and News Discourse – How Al Jazeera's Implicit Guidelines Shape Its Coverage of Middle East Conflicts', *Journalism*, 22.6 (2021), pp. 1357–74, doi:10.1177/1464884919841797.

⁴ Aseel Zibin, Abdel Rahman Mitib Altakhaineh, and Marwan Jarrah, 'Compound Nouns as Linguistic Framing Devices in Arabic News Headlines in the Context of the Israel-Gaza Conflict', *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 28.3 (2024), pp. 535–58, doi:10.22363/2687-0088-39562.

journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and find systematic differences in where the agent is placed.⁵ At the level of naming, Ayyad shows that the key terms of this conflict constitute a contested field of their own, one that shifts and mutates as it is translated.⁶

More recent work has widened that scope. Mohammed, Aladdin, and Shaari compare representations of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood in Arab and Western outlets;⁷ Khalifah, Altakhaineh, and Za'rour read the ideological positioning of Al Jazeera's bilingual coverage across 2023 and 2024;⁸ and ALoufi and colleagues set the discursive constructions of CNN and Al Jazeera side by side.⁹ Priya examines the Arabic press during the Gaza crisis,¹⁰ Rababah and Amaireh compare Arab and Israeli media representations of the 2023 events in Jenin,¹¹ while Al Zo'by and Ben Labidi consider how media representation treats Palestinian children within a civilisational frame.¹² Beyond the Palestinian theme, the tradition of critical discourse analysis in Arabic has also grown through work on conceptual metaphor in war reporting,¹³ corpus-assisted analysis of political speech,¹⁴ translation as political action,¹⁵ and studies of online and multimodal discourse.¹⁶

⁵ Rima Jamil Malkawi, Shehdeh Ismail Fareh, and Ghaleb Rabab'ah, 'Framing the Shooting of Al Jazeera Journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in English and Arabic News Headlines: A Critical Discourse Study', *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11.1 (2024), doi:10.1057/s41599-024-03784-x.

⁶ Ahmad Ayyad, 'Contested Naming Practices in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Translation Perspective', *Translation Studies*, 17.2 (2024), pp. 333–51, doi:10.1080/14781700.2023.2258133.

⁷ Awham Rashid Mohammed, Ashinida Aladdin, and Azianura Hani Shaari, 'Media Representation of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood in Arab and Western Outlets: A Critical Discourse Analysis', *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 31.3 (2025), pp. 341–61, doi:10.17576/3L-2025-3103-21.

⁸ Lama Khalifah, Abdel Rahman Mitib Altakhaineh, and Rania Za'rour, 'A Critical Discourse Analysis of Ideological Positioning in Al Jazeera's Bilingual Coverage of the 2023–2024 Gaza-Israel War', *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, 13.1 (2026), doi:10.1080/23311983.2026.2664226.

⁹ Ahmed Dakhel ALoufi and others, 'Humanitarian Disaster and Historical Injustice: CNN and Al Jazeera's Discursive Construction of the Palestine-Israel Conflict', *Media Asia*, 53.3 (2026), pp. 641–65, doi:10.1080/01296612.2025.2606197.

¹⁰ Lakshmi Priya, 'Gaza Crisis and the Arabic Press: A Discourse Analysis', *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 11.4 (2024), pp. 492–510, doi:10.1177/23477989241292150.

¹¹ Luqman M. Rababah and Hanan A. Amaireh, 'Critical Discourse Analysis of the Arab and Israeli Media Representation of Jenin's 2023 Incursions', *Jordan Journal of Modern Languages and Literatures*, 17.4 (2025), pp. 959–75, doi:10.47012/jjml.17.4.6.

¹² Mazhar Ahmad Al Zo'by and Imed Ben Labidi, 'Unchilding' Palestine: Media Representation and the Limits of Civilizational Discourse', *Cultural Studies*, 40.3 (2026), pp. 508–29, doi:10.1080/09502386.2025.2546105.

¹³ Amany Hamdy, 'Conceptual Metaphors in Media Discourse on War: A Semantic Analysis of News Coverage of the Syrian Crisis on RT Arabic and BBC Arabic', *Arab Media and Society*, 38 (2024), pp. 701–22, doi:10.70090/AMS.38.AH1.

¹⁴ Linda S. Al-Abbas, 'Syria-Israel Relations in Al-Assad's Speeches and Interviews: A Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Study', *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 12.2 (2022), pp. 292–303, doi:10.17507/tpls.1202.10; Tawffeeq A. S. Mohammed, Felix Banda, and Mahmoud Patel, 'The Topoi of Mandela's Death in the Arabic Speaking Media: A Corpus-Based Political Discourse Analysis', *Frontiers in Communication*, 7 (2022), doi:10.3389/fcomm.2022.849748.

¹⁵ Areej Allawzi and others, 'Translation as a Political Action: Reframing 'the Deal of the Century' in the Translations of the BBC', *Heliyon*, 8.2 (2022), doi:10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e08856.

¹⁶ Raeda Tartory, 'Critical Discourse Analysis of Online Publications Ideology: A Case of Middle Eastern Online Publications', *SAGE Open*, 10.3 (2020), doi:10.1177/2158244020941471; Manar Medhat

Three gaps nevertheless remain. First, most of the studies above stop at a single analytical level, usually headlines or thematic framing, so the link between micro-level linguistic choice, the practices of news production, and the surrounding socio-political context is rarely drawn together within one research design. Second, the grammatical particularities of journalistic Arabic have received little attention as ideological resources. The *مبني للمجهول* form, the use of the *مصدر* to compress a process into a noun, and the flexibility of constituent order in the *الجملة الفعلية* give the news writer a set of structural options that are not always available in English, and those options carry different representational consequences. Third, in the Indonesian context, Arabic language studies remain dominated by stylistic analysis of religious texts and by historical-orthographic research,¹⁷ so that contemporary Arabic media discourse has not yet become an established object of inquiry even though the material is abundant and its relevance to Arabic learners in Indonesia is high.¹⁸

The novelty of this study lies in three responses to those gaps. It applies all three dimensions of Fairclough's model in sequence and in mutual connection to a single Arabic corpus, rather than borrowing the vocabulary of the model alone. It also treats the grammatical resources specific to Arabic, particularly the agentless passive, nominalisation through the *مصدر*, and the abstraction of events, as analytical categories in their own right rather than as incidental remarks. In addition, it sets out an analytical matrix that explicitly links data code, linguistic unit, linguistic category, and discursive interpretation, so that the interpretive procedure can be traced and re-examined by other researchers, an obligation frequently raised against critical discourse analysis as a method.

The significance of the study is twofold. Theoretically, it extends the application of critical discourse analysis to Arabic by taking the typological features of the language seriously instead of transferring categories developed for English wholesale. Practically, its findings can inform the development of critical media literacy in Arabic language teaching, especially in reading authentic texts, so that learners grasp not only what a news sentence means but also the position that sentence offers them. Working

Shalaby, 'A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of Egypt-Gaza Border Blockage in Selected Online News Reports', *Centre for Applied Linguistics Research Journal*, 15 (2024), doi:10.60149/ATOF4399.

¹⁷ Berti Arsyad and others, 'Stilistika Al-Qur'an: Kajian Ma'ani Dan Badi Terhadap Penggunaan Uslub Al-Ilṭifāt Al-Ṣarfī', 'A Jamiy: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Arab', 13.1 (2024), pp. 252–69, doi:10.31314/ajamiy.13.1.252-269.2024; Ibnu Rawandhy N. Hula and others, 'Transcription of Pegon Gorontalo Arabic Orthography, Malay and Arabic Standard: A Contraceptive Linguistic Analysis', 'A Jamiy: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Arab', 11.2 (2022), pp. 322–41, doi:10.31314/ajamiy.11.2.322-341.2022; Kholid Mootalu, Roymanto Ilolu, and Berti Arsyad, 'Stilistika Al-Ilṭifat Dalam Al-Qur'an: Implikasinya Terhadap Kesantunan Berbahasa Dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam', 'A Jamiy: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Arab', 13.2 (2024), p. 798, doi:10.31314/ajamiy.13.2.798-804.2024.

¹⁸ St. Kuraedah and others, 'Representation of the Values of Peace, Justice, and Conflict Resolution: A Discourse Analysis of Arabic Language Textbooks in Madrasahs', *Samarah*, 10.1 (2026), pp. 572–95, doi:10.22373/sjkh.v10.i1.33489.

from this framework, the study aims to identify the linguistic strategies used in Al Jazeera Arabic reporting on the Palestine–Israel conflict, to analyse how those strategies represent the actors involved, and to explain how such choices relate to the practices of news production and to the socio-political context that surrounds them.

B. Method

This study is qualitative in nature and descriptive-critical in design. A qualitative approach was chosen because the aim is not to measure how often particular linguistic forms occur but to interpret the meaning and ideological function of linguistic units in their contexts of use. The analytical design follows Fairclough's three-dimensional model, operationalised as three sequential stages of work: description of the text, interpretation of discursive practice, and explanation of social practice.

The data source is Arabic-language news published by Al Jazeera Arabic between October and December 2023. This period was selected because it represents the phase of escalation with the highest reporting intensity, so that the range of linguistic forms available for analysis is sufficient. The research data consist of linguistic units, that is, words, phrases, and clauses, rather than whole news articles.

Data were collected through documentation, supported by close reading and note-taking. Selection was purposive and followed three criteria: the unit refers to an event or an actor in the conflict; the unit contains an evaluative marker, a transitivity construction, or a source attribution that can be analysed; and the unit recurs or is representative of a wider pattern in the corpus. Twenty data items were obtained on this basis and coded D1 to D20.

The principal instrument is the researcher, supported by data cards arranged as a matrix with the following columns: data code, Arabic linguistic unit, working translation, Faircloughian dimension, linguistic aspect, and discursive interpretation. Working translations were kept close to the source so that the grammatical structure of the original remains visible, and were then checked again to ensure that no shift of meaning had been introduced by the translator rather than by the text.

Analysis proceeded in three stages. At the descriptive stage, each unit was examined for lexical choice, transitivity structure, and social-actor category, including the inspection of passive forms, nominalisation, and agent deletion. At the interpretive stage, the data were related to the practices of text production, particularly patterns of source selection, attribution, and intertextual relation. At the explanatory stage, the results of the two previous stages were connected to the socio-political context and the power relations surrounding news production.

It should be stated plainly that purposive selection carries methodological consequences that were recognised from the outset. The data collected are not intended to represent the whole of the coverage in proportional terms; they represent

the range of linguistic forms available within the corpus. The findings therefore explain patterns rather than measure their distribution, and every statement about tendency is restricted to the data actually analysed.

Validity was maintained through theoretical triangulation, using transitivity categories and social-actor categories as cross-checks on interpretation, through persistent observation by repeated reading of the corpus, and through peer examination of the translations and of the coding. Differences of interpretation arising in peer examination were resolved by returning to textual evidence rather than to assumptions about the outlet under study.

C. Results and Discussion

Before the findings are presented, the theoretical framework requires critical examination so that the analytical position of this study is clear. Fairclough conceives of discourse as a practice that operates simultaneously at three levels, namely text, discursive practice, and social practice, and insists that the three be read as a single whole rather than as three separate analyses placed side by side.¹⁹ The strength of the model lies in its refusal of two equally lame positions: a formal reading that stops at sentence structure without explaining why that structure was chosen, and an ideological critique that leaps directly to political conclusions without showing its linguistic evidence. In Fairclough's model, an ideological claim is legitimate only when it can be traced back to concrete textual traces.²⁰

The model is not immune to objection. The criticism most often raised concerns its interpretive character: an analyst may find the ideology he set out to find, while the reader has no means of testing that interpretation. Wodak and Meyer answer this objection by insisting on reflexivity about the analyst's position and transparency about analytical procedure.²¹ This study adopts the same stance, and for that reason draws on two supplementary instruments that supply relatively checkable categories. The first is the transitivity system of functional grammar, which sorts clauses by process type and participant role, so that the question of who does what to whom can be answered by reference to form rather than to impression.²² The second is the inventory of social-actor categories, which distinguishes collectivisation, functional naming, suppression, and a range of further options available to the writer of a text.²³

¹⁹ Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 71–73.

²⁰ Fairclough, *Language and Power*, pp. 129–33.

²¹ Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, eds., *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, 3rd edn (London: SAGE, 2016), pp. 22–26.

²² M. A. K. Halliday and Christian M. I. M. Matthiessen, *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 4th edn (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 213–20.

²³ Theo van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 23–32.

Combining the three eclectically is not done without reason. Fairclough supplies the larger architecture connecting text to context; functional grammar supplies micro-categories that keep the analysis close to form; and the social-actor inventory supplies a vocabulary for talking about people rather than processes alone. For Arabic, this combination demands one important adjustment. The Arabic verbal system provides a passive with no slot for an agent, and its morphology provides the مصدر, which allows an entire process to be compressed into a noun. These two resources are not simply equivalent to the English passive and to English nominalisation, since both are more common and less conspicuous in Arabic journalistic prose, which makes their masking effect all the more subtle.²⁴ With that theoretical background in place, the findings are presented below.

1. Lexical Choice and the Construction of a Semantic Field of Conflict

The first finding concerns the way events are named. In the corpus, naming does not proceed through verbs that describe what happened but through nouns that classify it. The four linguistic units below display that pattern.

Table 1. Lexical Choices and the Construction of the Semantic Field of Conflict

Code	Data	Translation	Lexical Aspect	Representational Effect
D1	طوفان الأقصى	Al-Aqsa Flood	Metaphorical naming	Ties the event to the image of an elemental force and to a religiously charged space
D2	الاحتلال الإسرائيلي	The Israeli occupation	Ideological vocabulary	Classifies the relation as a continuing legal and political condition
D3	المقاومة الفلسطينية	Palestinian resistance	Morphological presupposition	Positions the action as a response to a prior action
D4	الحرب على غزة	The war on Gaza	Prepositional relation	Marks directionality, so the relation appears one-way rather than reciprocal

These four items show that classification precedes description. In D1, naming the operation with طوفان moves the event out of the domain of human action and into the domain of an immense and unstoppable natural image, while anchoring it to al-Aqsa as a space dense with historical and religious reference. A metaphor of this kind works economically: it conveys an evaluation without stating one, and because it takes the form of a proper name it is difficult to contest within the sentence that contains it. Naming has long been identified as the point at which meaning in this conflict is most densely contested, not least because every name brings its own version of history with it.²⁵

In D2, the choice of الاحتلال differs categorially from more neutral options such as الوجود or السيطرة. This مصدر form does not describe a single event occurring at a single moment; it describes a condition that persists. Once a condition is named with a noun,

²⁴ El Mustapha Lahlali, *Arabic Media and the Ukrainian Conflict: Discourse and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 2025), pp. 41–47, doi:10.4324/9781032643830.

²⁵ Ayyad, 'Contested Naming Practices', pp. 336–40.

it ceases to be something requiring proof and becomes a background assumed in common by writer and reader. The attribute الإسرائيلي then binds that condition permanently to one party. Reference to collective memory, and to the Nakba in particular, reinforces the working of such a lexicon because it connects today's events to a sequence of events that already carry names.²⁶

D3 shows that presupposition can be lodged in morphology. The word المقاومة is a مصدر of the فاعل pattern, which semantically presupposes two parties facing one another. The shape of the word, in other words, already implies that a prior action gave rise to the action being named. This choice contrasts with nouns that name an action as an attack standing on its own. Such density of evaluation within a single lexical unit is consistent with findings on compound nouns in Arabic headlines, which serve as framing devices that are compact yet forceful.²⁷

D4 shows that even something as small as a preposition carries representational weight. The construction الحرب على غزة uses على, which marks a target, so that Gaza is placed as the party acted upon. Compare the hypothetical الحرب في غزة, which marks location alone and leaves the relation between parties looking symmetrical, or الحرب بين, which asserts reciprocity. All three are grammatical and all three can refer to the same event, yet each offers the reader a different position. This is precisely the central argument of critical discourse analysis: a choice that looks trivial in grammatical terms is never trivial in discursive terms. Cognitive work on the discourse of the Gaza conflict likewise indicates that such blending of images operates at the conceptual level rather than merely at the level of style.²⁸

2. Transitivity and the Distribution of Agency

The second finding concerns the distribution of agency. The six items below, when ordered not by their appearance in the corpus but by the visibility of their agents, form a reasonably regular cline.

Table 2. The Cline of Agency in Transitivity Constructions

Code	Data	Translation	Type of Construction	Status of the Agent
D5	قصفت إسرائيل غزة	Israel bombarded Gaza	Active material process	Explicit and in agent position
D6	شنت إسرائيل غارات على القطاع	Israel launched air raids on the Strip	Material process with nominal object	Explicit, but the action is compressed into a noun

²⁶ Aladdin Assaiqeli, 'Palestine in Visual Representation: A Visual Semiotic Analysis of the Nakba', *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, 21.1 (2021), pp. 99–126, doi:10.33806/IJAES2000.21.1.6.

²⁷ Zibin, Altakhaineh, and Jarrah, 'Compound Nouns as Linguistic Framing Devices', pp. 545–50.

²⁸ Soussen Boukhennoufa and Hanane Saihi, 'Multimodal Blends and Israel's Genocide in Gaza: A Critical Cognitive Study', *Discourse and Society*, 37.3 (2026), pp. 402–28, doi:10.1177/09579265251376047.

D7	استشهد مدنيون فلسطينيون	Palestinian civilians were martyred	Verb with no agent slot	Not available in the structure
D15	قتل عشرات الأشخاص	Dozens of persons were killed	Agentless passive	Deleted
D16	وقع قصف على غزة	Shelling occurred in Gaza	Nominalisation of the event	Disappears together with the process
D17	تصاعد التوتر	Tension escalated	Abstraction	Replaced by an abstract entity

At the first end of the cline, D5 offers a complete material process. The verb **قصف** presents agent, action, and target within a single clause, and the verb-subject-object order customary in the **الجملة الفعلية** places the action first while keeping the agent in a position the reader cannot overlook. Responsibility, in the grammatical sense, is plainly visible. D6 shifts slightly: the agent remains explicit, but the action is repackaged as the noun **غارات**, so that what the agent does is no longer to bomb but to launch something. The shift is small, yet it moves attention from the deed to the object of the deed.

D7 presents the most interesting case linguistically. The verb **استشهد** performs two operations at once. First, it classifies the death as martyrdom, a religious and moral evaluation that is not stated separately but embedded in the choice of verb. Second, the structure of the verb offers no place for an agent, so the question of who caused the death does not arise on the surface of the clause. A strong evaluation and the deletion of the agent travel together in a single word. It should be stressed that deletion of this kind is not necessarily deliberate; it may equally be a convention of journalistic style. It is precisely because it is conventional that its effect is hard to notice.

D15 continues that movement through the **مبني للمجهول** form. The construction **قتل** states that a killing took place without stating who killed, and the choice of **الأشخاص** for the victims adds a further layer of indeterminacy because the word specifies neither nationality nor status. In D16 the deletion goes further still. The clause **وقع قصف** turns the process into a noun and pairs it with a verb of occurrence, so that shelling appears as an event that took place of its own accord. D17 stands at the far end: **تصاعد التوتر** makes tension the actor and removes human beings from the clause altogether. Conflict then appears as a process without a cause.

Two things must be said honestly at this point. First, the corpus of this study is too small to support statistical claims. The observation that agents tend to be deleted in some events and retained in others is an indication drawn from the available data, not a generalisation about the coverage as a whole. Second, several of the forms on this cline are conventions of news style that also appear in outlets of very different political orientation. The finding is therefore best read as a map of the grammatical resources available and of how those resources are distributed within the corpus,

rather than as a verdict on editorial intent. Comparative work on headlines in two languages in a similar case shows that distributional patterns of this kind can indeed be tested systematically once the corpus is enlarged.²⁹

3. The Representation of Social Actors

The third finding concerns how social actors are named. Here the most consistent asymmetry in the corpus appears, and it lies in the register of naming rather than in any openly stated evaluation.

Table 3. Categories of Social-Actor Representation in the Corpus

Code	Data	Translation	Category of Representation	Discursive Effect
D8	الشعب الفلسطيني	The Palestinian people	Collectivisation	Constitutes a continuing unity of identity
D9	المدنيون الفلسطينيون	Palestinian civilians	Categorisation by status	Activates the civilian–combatant distinction
D10	أطفال ونساء غزة	The children and women of Gaza	Specification by age and gender	Brings the reader close to victims as persons
D11	سكان القطاع	The residents of the Strip	Spatial identification	Anchors identity in place
D12	الجيش الإسرائيلي	The Israeli army	Institutional representation	Presents the agent as an institution
D13	القوات الإسرائيلية	Israeli forces	Military lexicon	Foregrounds force and security
D14	الحكومة الإسرائيلية	The Israeli government	Political actor	Moves the action into the domain of policy

The first four items name the Palestinian side with vocabulary drawn from the domain of persons. الشعب in D8 is a collectivisation that constitutes a continuing unity and gives historical continuity to the group it names. D9 narrows this to a category of status, and the choice of المدنيون is not discursively neutral, since it calls in the civilian–combatant distinction of humanitarian law. D10 moves furthest towards the personal by naming children and women, a choice that directly activates the reader’s affective response. D11 anchors identity in space. Taken together, all four place the Palestinian side in the register of people.

The next three items name the Israeli side with vocabulary drawn from the domain of institutions. الجيش, القوات, and الحكومة are institutional nouns that retain full agency, since an institution can still act as agent in a clause, but that agency adheres to no individual. The effect is twofold and deserves careful attention. On one hand, institutional naming keeps responsibility at the organisational level, which is standard and defensible journalistic practice. On the other, it creates distance: the reader faces a structure rather than a person. When one side is named through children and the

²⁹ Malkawi, Fareh, and Rabab’ah, ‘Framing the Shooting of Al Jazeera Journalist Shireen Abu Akleh’; Syofyan Hadi and others, ‘Lexical Cohesion Analysis on Articles of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict in Arabic and English Online Newspapers’, *Studies in English Language and Education*, 11.1 (2024), pp. 403–19, doi:10.24815/siele.v11i1.30977.

other through forces, the moral distance offered to the reader is not the same for both, even though no single sentence explicitly evaluates either.

This asymmetry explains why the analysis of social-actor representation cannot be separated from the analysis of transitivity. The side named institutionally in Table 3 is the side that appears as an explicit agent at the first end of the cline in Table 2, whereas the side named personally tends to appear as an affected participant or as a victim in agentless constructions. The two patterns support one another and produce a single coherent order of representation. Similar patterns have been reported in analyses of Arabic social media posts during the 2021 escalation,³⁰ and in work on the discursive strategies through which Arab and Western media narrate the same group.³¹

One absence must also be recorded methodologically. Among the twenty items analysed, no lexeme naming Israeli civilians was found. This absence cannot be read straightforwardly as systematic erasure by the outlet under study, since it may result from a sampling procedure that concentrated on linguistic units of a particular thematic type. What can responsibly be stated is that the category does not appear in this corpus, and that testing that absence would require a larger corpus designed specifically for the purpose. To claim more would be to exceed the available evidence.

4. Discursive Practice: Source Selection and the Hierarchy of Voices

The second dimension of Fairclough's model shifts attention from the text to the way the text is produced and consumed. In this corpus, the traces of discursive practice are most visible in patterns of source attribution.

Table 4. The Distribution of Sources and Their Discursive Functions

Code	Source	Translation	Type of Authority	Function in the Discourse
D18	بيانات الجيش الإسرائيلي	Israeli military statements	Military institutional authority	Supplies a security frame and the official account of the acting party
D19	وزارة الصحة في غزة	The Gaza Ministry of Health	Civil institutional authority	Lends numerical legitimacy to casualty figures
D20	سكان غزة	Residents of Gaza	Experiential authority	Provides direct testimony and the texture of daily life

These three types of source are not discursively equal. D18 brings in the voice of an institution that is at the same time the party whose actions are being reported, so that quoting it serves a double function as information and as claim. D19 brings in a civil institution that serves as the reference for casualty figures, and in practice a figure

³⁰ Othman Aref Al-Dala'ien and others, 'Analyzing Verbal and Pictorial Arab's Facebook Posts During the Israeli Attack on Gaza Strip in 2021', *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 23.1 (2023), pp. 114–39, doi:10.17576/gema-2023-2301-07.

³¹ Bushra Khalaf Edam, Ashinida Aladdin, and Azianura Hani Shaari, 'Discursive Strategies Unveiled: Exploring Arab and Western Media Narratives on Arab Women', *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 24.4 (2024), pp. 173–91, doi:10.17576/gema-2024-2404-10.

is the form of authority most often taken to be objective, even though it always issues from a process of record-keeping with limits of its own. D20 brings in residents as witnesses, and testimony works differently from data: it persuades not through number but through proximity.

It is also worth noting that the three do not receive equal placement within the structure of a news report. Institutional sources usually appear earlier and are presented in direct reporting clauses, while residents' testimony tends to be placed towards the end of the text as atmospheric supplement. Such placement is not merely a matter of layout. In online reading, the opening of a text attracts far more attention than its close, so the ordering of sources helps determine whose voice a reader is most likely to remember. The hierarchy of authority is therefore formed not only by the choice of who is quoted but also by the decision about where the quotation is placed.

Discursive practice also involves processes outside the text. Transnational news frequently passes through stages of editing and translation that function as a secondary form of gatekeeping, and it is at those stages that frames can shift without the final reader's awareness.³²³³ At the organisational level, internal editorial guidelines act as a compass that standardises word choice, so that lexical consistency across reports is not accidental but a product of policy.³⁴ At the level of reception, discourse does not stop at the news text, since it is continued, disputed, and sometimes inverted by audiences in comment threads and other digital spaces.³⁵ These three layers confirm that the lexical and grammatical patterns of Tables 1 to 3 do not arise from the individual awareness of a single reporter but from a chain of institutional practices that shape it.

5. Social Practice: Language, Ideology, and Power Relations

The third dimension calls for an explanation of why this order of representation makes sense in its context. Here the analysis moves from the question of how to the question of why. Pan-regional Arab media operate before an audience for much of which the Palestinian conflict is not foreign news but part of collective memory and identity. In that context, a lexicon that names events through the semantic fields of occupation, resistance, and martyrdom is not experienced as a deviant choice but as

³² Boualem Fardjaoui, 'Consequences of US Recognition of Jerusalem as the Capital of Israel in Arab Media Discourse: The Case of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya', *Translation Studies: Theory and Practice*, SI.1 (2023), pp. 86–92, doi:10.46991/TSTP/2023.SI.1.086.

³³ Mouad Mbeker, Karima Bouziane, and Marouane Zakhir, 'Framing Conflict News in Transnational Media: English-Arabic Transediting/Translation as Secondary Gatekeeping and Frame Mutation', *Studies in Media and Communication*, 14.3 (2026), pp. 208–22, doi:10.11114/smc.v14i3.8518.

³⁴ Barkho, 'Editorial Policies and News Discourse', pp. 1364–68.

³⁵ Sadiq Mahdi Kadhim Al Shamiri, 'A Critical Stylistic Study of Cyber Trolls' Comments on the Al-Jazeera Arabic TV Channel's YouTube Videos Concerning the Israeli-Iranian 2024 Conflict', *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 15.8 (2025), pp. 2547–57, doi:10.17507/tpls.1508.11.

ordinary language. This is what Fairclough calls naturalisation: a way of speaking that loses its character as a choice and becomes common sense.

Naturalisation works in both directions, and it is important not to forget this. Media shape audiences, but audiences also shape media, since a vocabulary that feels foreign to readers creates distance and eventually loses reach. The patterns found in this corpus are therefore better understood as the meeting point of editorial policy, the conventions of Arabic journalistic language, and audience expectation, rather than as the product of a single decision. Analysis of Arab leadership rhetoric during the same period shows that the same vocabulary also circulates in official political discourse, so that media and politics borrow from one another's stock of words.³⁶ Work on the discourse of the opposing side shows the equivalent from the other direction: the framing of threat and the justification of action are likewise accomplished through similar linguistic devices, only with the contents reversed.³⁷

That symmetry matters for the theoretical claim of this study. Critical discourse analysis is not charged with deciding which side is right; its task is to show that every representation is built and can therefore be analysed. The pattern known as the foregrounding of in-group virtue and out-group fault is a general tendency of group discourse rather than the distinguishing mark of any one outlet.³⁸ Placed within that frame, the findings of this study show how such a general tendency is realised through resources specific to Arabic, above all the agentless passive, nominalisation through the مصدر, and the evaluation embedded in the morphology of words such as استشهد and المقاومة.

The three findings answer directly to the objectives set out in the introduction. The linguistic strategies employed consist of evaluative naming, the management of agency, and the selection of actor categories. The representation of actors is formed through an asymmetry of register between personal and institutional naming. The relation between language and ideology appears in the way these three strategies reinforce one another and come to seem ordinary within their conditions of production and reception. It should be added that the study has limitations that bound the reach of its claims: the corpus is small and drawn from a single outlet, the time span is short, and the analysis is confined to written text without regard to images, layout, or audiovisual elements, which in conflict reporting are often the principal

³⁶ Ibrahim Bani Abdo and others, 'Constructing Narratives: Arab Leadership Rhetoric and Its Influence on Public Opinion During the Gaza War', *Studies in Media and Communication*, 14.3 (2026), doi:10.11114/smc.v14i3.8508.

³⁷ Ala'eddin Banikalef and others, 'Framing Threats and Justifying Actions: A Multitheoretical Analysis of Avichai Adraee's Facebook Discourse', *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, 26.1 (2026), pp. 419–40, doi:10.33806/ijaes977.

³⁸ Van Dijk, *Discourse and Power*, pp. 65–69.

carriers of meaning.³⁹ Examining the same patterns in a larger, cross-outlet corpus is necessary to test how far these findings hold.⁴⁰

D. Conclusion

This study began from a simple assumption, that the language of news helps determine how a conflict is understood, and set out to show through which mechanisms this happens in Al Jazeera Arabic reporting on the Palestine–Israel conflict between October and December 2023. Applying Fairclough’s three-dimensional model to twenty linguistic units, it arrived at three interconnected findings.

First, events are named through nouns that classify rather than verbs that describe, so that evaluation is already contained in the name before any account begins. Second, grammatical agency is spread along a cline running from explicit agents through nominalisation and the passive to abstraction, and an event’s position on that cline determines how far a reader can raise the question of responsibility. Third, social actors are named in two registers, that of persons for one side and that of institutions for the other, and the difference produces an unequal moral distance without ever being stated openly. These patterns are supported by a hierarchy of sources that distributes authority unevenly.

The implication is that Arabic studies in Indonesia have good reason to widen their object to contemporary media discourse, and that Arabic reading instruction can be enriched by exercises in recognising grammatical choices as choices. The study is limited by a small corpus, a single outlet, a short time span, and a scope confined to written text. Further research should enlarge the corpus using corpus-based methods, compare outlets of differing orientation, extend the time span, and bring visual elements into the analysis.

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³⁹ Boukhennoufa and Saihi, ‘Multimodal Blends’, pp. 405–10.

⁴⁰ Khalifah, Altakhaineh, and Za’rou, ‘A Critical Discourse Analysis of Ideological Positioning’; Priya, ‘Gaza Crisis and the Arabic Press’, pp. 500–505.

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