

## THE REFLECTION OF WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT POLICIES IN THE NEWS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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**Abstract.** This study was mainly concerned with corpus analysis of the news gathered from Tehran Times, an international English newspaper of Iran, in 2017 regarding the officials commenting in water resource management issues in Iran. A corpus of 15 (above 3000 words) news pieces selected according to the content and topic was analyzed. The news were classified under officials' concern, their criticism the past and current plans and calling for attention, and their hopelessness. All in all, the news show a dark hopeless future of water resource in Iran.

**Keyword:** News value, water resource, ideology, discourse analysis.

**Introduction.** Regardless of the way news values have been conceptualized, many researchers have pointed to their ideological nature, including linguists. Thus, Fowler (1991) states that news values are culturally and socially constructed rather than 'natural' (pp. 13, 15). Bell stresses that 'these are *values*. They are not neutral, but reflect ideologies and priorities held in society' (Bell, 1991: 156, italics in original). Cotter (2010) calls news values important 'ideological factors' (pp. 8, 67) and points out that they reinforce or establish 'an "ideology" about what counts as news' (p. 67). News values are also ideological in the sense that they can work to reinforce *other* ideologies (rather than just an ideology of what is newsworthy). Richardson (2007: 93) mentions a study by the Glasgow Media Group which showed that coverage of television news about developing countries focused on negative happenings such as war, terrorism, disaster and conflict. This presents a narrow preconceived view of these countries, particularly if other countries would *not* show the same foregrounding of the news value of Negativity. To give another example, if it was found that stories about Central Asian republics like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, etc., consistently foreground the news value of Novelty (unexpected aspects), whereas stories about the USA and the UK foreground the news value of Eliteness, this could be seen as reproducing an ideology of the 'normal' and 'elite' Us versus the 'exotic' Them.

Despite these ideological aspects of news values, they have not yet been the focus of critical linguistic analyses of news discourse. Instead, they are either ignored and only mentioned in passing, or introduced as part of journalistic culture but not much used in the actual analysis. For instance, there is no index entry for 'news values' in Fairclough's *Media Discourse*, and a search in the databases LLBA and MLA for 'CDA' or 'Critical Discourse Analysis' together with 'news values' comes up with only two results. Among the critical linguists who mention news values in passing, Baker et al.'s (2013) book, *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes*, is a recent example that only refers to news values four times in 270 pages (although there are additional mentions of *newsworthy/ newsworthiness*). Concerning those critical books on media or news discourse that introduce news values, two classic examples are Van Dijk (1988b) and Fowler (1991). Van Dijk (1988b) interprets news values as constraints that 'have a cognitive representation' (p. 121). These constraints are said to underlie the production of news, including selection and formulation: 'the interpretation of events as potential news events is determined by the potential news discourse such an interpretation (model) may be used for, and conversely. News production seems circular: Events and text mutually influence each other' (p. 113). Despite making this connection to discourse/text, news values themselves are of a cognitive nature for Van Dijk (1988b), and thus do not feature much in his analyses of news discourse (e.g. Van Dijk, 1988a, 1988b). Similarly, Fowler (1991) starts off by explaining Galtung and Ruge's (1965) original news values, but comes up with his own cognitive conceptualization. In this definition, news values are seen as socially constructed 'intersubjective mental categories' (p. 17), although Fowler also argues that they are 'qualities of (potential) reports' and 'features of representation' (p. 19). Nevertheless, Fowler does not discuss news values much in his book when analyzing language, with only a few mentions throughout. To be clear, both Fowler and Van Dijk do see news as having discursive, social and cognitive dimensions and Van Dijk's general work on values and ideology certainly accounts for their discursive expressions.

A more recent addition to the Critical Discourse Analysis of newspapers is Richardson (2007). News values are seen by him as one of several professional practices 'that shape journalism as a discourse process and therefore help to account for the products of newspaper discourse' (p. 182). Richardson explains news values as 'the criteria employed by journalists to measure and therefore to judge the "newsworthiness" of events' (p. 91); he talks about events (such as a war involving Britain) satisfying news values (p. 182), but also writes that 'news values are the (*imagined*) preferences of the expected audience' (p. 94, italics in original). The relationship between these different conceptualizations is not discussed at length or in depth, but if we interpret Richardson's remarks correctly, this means that in his view an event occurs, it satisfies particular news values, journalists measure and judge this newsworthiness based on what they imagine their audiences find

newsworthy, and use this judgment to 'select, order and prioritise the collection and production of news' (p. 91). Like the books of Fowler and Van Dijk, Richardson's book itself is not overly concerned with news values or their analysis. To name a second contemporary example, Machin and Mayr (2012) introduce an account of news values as related to crime reporting in their introductory chapter, alongside other concepts such as media panic, but they then only draw on news values a few times in the rest of their book.

These examples are not presented here as criticism of these (and other) linguists; they just demonstrate that critical linguists have so far not found the notion of news values to be very useful. But why is this the case? Why are critical linguists, who focus on uncovering power relations and ideology, not interested in news values even though these values have been called deeply ideological? One obvious reason is that such linguists have focused on answering other valid research questions, such as the representation of agency.

But for us, there are three additional potential reasons for this neglect: first, the disciplinary origin of news values in Journalism/Communication Studies means that some (critical) linguists are simply unfamiliar with the concept. Second, most (critical) linguistic research tends to uncritically adopt the conceptualization of news values from Journalism/Communication Studies (e.g. as properties of events or selection criteria); there is no real questioning or in-depth engagement with such conceptualizations. From this, it follows that news values are not seen as relevant for linguistic analysis, but appear to be regarded as *outside* the text. Third, there is no readily available linguistic framework for analyzing news values, in contrast to other well-developed linguistic tools such as analyses of transitivity, active/passive voice, nominalization, predication, argumentation, modality, speech acts, metaphor, lexis, and so on, which are described in general introductions to CDA and books on the critical analysis of news discourse (Fowler, 1991; Richardson, 2007).

The first two points about the disciplinary origins of the concept and how it has been treated outside its own discipline bring home not only the importance of interdisciplinary research, but also its challenging nature. As is well known, critical linguistic approaches (realist or not) take a constructivist approach to social reality. For example, social concepts such as gender are clearly regarded in CDA as being discursively constructed, rather than being properties of individuals. Given this constructivist stance, why do critical linguists not also take such an approach to news values, regarding them as values that are mediated through discourse?<sup>1</sup> The answer may well be that it is more difficult to reconceptualize concepts that originate from outside one's own discipline and that one will tend to adopt rather than reconfigure them. The final point – the lack of an appropriate systematic analytical framework for the linguistic analysis of news values – is what we want to address in this article. Drawing and building on previous work by Bednarek and Caple (2012a, 2012b), we introduce such a framework below. This is not meant to replace existing CDA tools such as transitivity analysis, but rather to be added to the toolbox.

The aim of this study is focus on the news values regarding the significance of water consumption in the news according to the direct expressions made by the Iranian governmental officials regarding the issue. To this end a simple form of corpus analysis was used instead of case study of a single news according to multimodal analysis of CDA.

### **Methodology**

#### **Corpus**

A corpus of the news published in English in an international newspaper in Iran, Tehran Times was formed. This corpus consisted 15 news pieces including 3460 words. All the news pieces were selected based on their content which was covering the news regarding water consumption in Iran or any other aspects regarding water resources in Iran. The corpus is then saved to be electronically investigated for further analysis.

#### **Procedure**

The analysis however, started by covering the news pieces gathered as a single whole corpus. The text was only inserted into a single file and the pictures or any other non-textual clues were removed. Then the, corpus text which consisted the whole news pieces were analyzed for the word "water". The related excerpts were then extracted to be analyzed according to the principles of CDA. The results were then reported in the following section. It is worth mentioning that the news for the corpus are gathered from the news published in 2017 only.

#### **Results**

The following excerpts were directly drawn from the corpus of the news regarding the water. According to the corpus of the study consisting 15 pieces of news, the frequency of the word water was 17. All the excerpts are then analyzed in this study and thematic critical value of the news are then discussed

#### **The worried officials**

In the following excerpt, the official is echoing the voices of environmentalists who are worried about environment and from all natural resources the word water is mentioned equal to the word environment in this pieces. Which shows that the worries of the the officials for the environment is rather equal to water.

**1- Teaching environmental courses at schools, promoting tourism industry, stopping groundwater resources depletion, developing bicycle lanes, establishing department of environment at all ministries, and adopting animal welfare law** are of the demands environmentalist have put forward over the past years, he said.

The concern and worry of the officials are directly mentioned and bold words show the depth of their attitude to the issue of the water scarcity and lack of managerial options for keeping water resources in Iran.

2- TEHRAN — Water scarcity is Iran’s **major concern** and the **situation is ‘disastrous’**, the newly-appointed environment Chief Isa Kalantari said on Monday.

The official is directly stating the water resource condition in Iran, away from any political hedging which shows the deepest concern regarding the issues. Moreover, the words are strongest possible for description of the situation. The words such as "disastrous" and "major"

3- In his inaugural speech on August 14 he said that **water scarcity is Iran’s major concern** and the **situation is ‘disastrous’**.

The official is showing his hopelessness via blaming tone of voice and highlights lack of sufficient water resources as one of the major problems.

4- “Had Mr. Bitaraf taken a scientific approach during his tenure, today we would not have been grappling with dust storms and **water shortage**,” said Jalil Mokhtar, who represents Abadan in the parliament.

The official is worrying the concern and believes that the other side effects and consequences of the issue is still unknown to the officials. They are seemingly extremely worried about the issue of water resources in Iran.

5- Building numerous dams and digging wells resulting in wetlands total dryness and **severe water scarcity**, deforestation partially caused by executing development projects in forests, poor land-use planning, unsustainable agriculture **depleting underground resources** and leading to rapid land subsidence, unsafe waste disposal and leachate produced as waste decomposes, **marine pollution**, loss of biodiversity attributed to the influence of human beings on the ecosystem by deeply altering the environment, etc. **are only tip of the iceberg**.

The official is showing his dissatisfaction of the current status of water resources in Iran and calls attention for the side effects and social changes it may lead to.

6- He has warned if the current **extravagant use of water** is not revised millions of people in the country will be forced to migrate.

The openness of the officials regarding the issue of lack of enough water resources are now openly reported and emphasized by the officials.

7- Kalantari has **openly voiced serious concerns** about water scarcity in Iran.

Unlike other examples quoted here, this excerpt is rather mild and showing the political hedging of the news regarding the demonstration of concern regarding water resources.

8- He elsewhere called for the government to provide domestic agricultural sector with enough facilities as well as **making investments in water** and soil infrastructure and insurance.

It shows that water shortage is considered as important as economic problem and is voiced to be equally strategic for the government. This fact shows the deep concern of the government regarding the issue of water scarcity.

9- Elsewhere, Rouhani said that the issue of **water shortage** and economic problems are among the other issues that the 12th government will prioritize.

#### **Calling for action through criticisms**

The following excerpt shows how an official is calling for taking the responsibility regarding the water resource management issues and the need for it by using the strongest word possible for showing the concern "catastrophic". Moreover, he believes that the lack of managerial unity or strategy has led to this and the officials are needed to take an action.

1- Today’s environmental issues cannot be attributed to the Pahlavi era as **they all have occurred after the Islamic Revolution**, Kalantari noted, adding, closing schools and offices for two days may help to mitigate air pollution but **water-related issues are catastrophic**.

The official is emphasizing the role of water in strategic development of the country and sees the current plans inefficient while calling for more comprehensive action plans. Accordingly, there is a need to take an action regarding the water resources to keep water resources as the fundamental part of the development in agriculture.

2- “In order to become self-sufficient in wheat we’ve lost sustainable water and soil resources through **sentimental decision making**,” the former agriculture minister lamented.

Accordingly, again the criticizing voice is echoed in this official's expression regarding the all the irresponsibility occurred regarding the water resource management in Iran. He regrets the chances lost and he tries to be honored by confessing the lack of appropriate water management plans in Iran.

3- However, Akhaneh said, being head of Lake Urmia restoration program for three years and saving the lake from total dryness has certainly **changed him; he now criticizes** the country’s water policies.

According to this piece, water resource management is certainly accompanied by criticism for losing the constructive chances and the terrible current situation and lack of enough opportunities to save the resources.

4- Bitaraf, energy minister for eight years under the Khatami administration, came **under attack by lawmakers for wrong water management policies** in his previous tenures.

The direct tone of the officials are considerable in this piece of news. Similar to other excerpts in this section the policies of the past managers are considered totally full of flaws and now the managers are blaming all the past policies taken for managing water resources.

5- Desertification, **water shortage, drying wetlands**, persisting air pollution, sand and dust storms, etc. are all the outcomes of **flawed policies** adopted regardless of their environmental ramifications.

#### **Hopeless officials**

The following excerpt shows that the officials are trying or doing their best to keep the last chances of saving water resources in Iran. However, they are not hopeful considering the last line of the news.

1- The administration should put an end to numerous dam building projects and instead focus on improving water-use efficiency in agriculture sector, recycling water, reconstructing Qanats [old system of water supply from a deep well with a series of vertical access shafts] **and in case none worked they can set up desalination plants as a last resort, he explained.**

Considering the following pieces, the official expresses his hopelessness regarding the restoration of natural water resources and directly expresses his hopelessness using the words such as "impossible" and so on.

2- Chairman of Lake Urmia restoration committee further explained that **flawed policies** perused in 80s and 90s are now incurring substantial costs; "although some environmental issues such as air pollution can be resolved it's almost **impossible to reverse harms** inflicted upon exhausted and depleted soil and water resources."

**Discussion and conclusion.** This paper, covered the news published in one international news-paper in Iran regarding the water scarcity issue and lack of water resource management policies in Iran that can save water as an strategic resource. A corpus-based approach was taken as the basis for data collection and critical discourse analysis framework was used to see how the news values regarding water resources are met in the news in 2017 in Iran.

The analysis showed that in all cases water problems are stated with concern. This was the minimum level of official expressions. The programs and the action plans of the past were criticized regretfully and the officials were calling for taking actions. Moreover, some officials were hopeless regarding the future actions regarding saving water resources.

It seems that the water scarcity is a major concern in Iran and now is echoed directly away from political hedging in Iran. There is a need for calling attention to the problem, taking responsibility, developing action plan, and may other issues that are all directly reflected in officials' expressions.

It is worth mentioning that this study was developed on a single corpus of an international journal in Iran. And more is needed to be done regarding developing a bigger corpose consisting Persian papers as well. Further studies are needed with a diachronic approach to see how this issue is echoed in the officials' languages in past years.

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