



Framing the Iraqi Refugee Crisis: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Media Narratives

Enmarcando la crisis de los refugiados iraquíes: Un análisis crítico de las narrativas de los medios de comunicación

AHMED NAJM ABED¹
UNIVERSITAT POLITÈCNICA DE VALÈNCIA
<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6539-6044>

LORENA BORT-MIR
UNIVERSITAT POLITÈCNICA DE VALÈNCIA
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0067-6492>

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RESUMEN: Los titulares en medios digitales, según Abdel-Raheem y Alkhammash (2022), ejercen una influencia notable en la configuración de las percepciones sociopolíticas de los lectores. Esta afirmación, que encuentra eco en las teorías de Van Dijk (1988), quien sostiene que la construcción de titulares trasciende la mera sintaxis, ha sido el punto de partida de nuestro estudio. A través de un análisis crítico del discurso y del encuadre, centrado en la representación de los iraquíes en *The Guardian* y *Deutsche Welle*, hemos evidenciado cómo los titulares se utilizan como herramientas estratégicas para construir narrativas específicas y orientar la interpretación de los acontecimientos. Los resultados obtenidos respaldan la idea de que, si bien ambos medios cubren la crisis de los refugiados iraquíes, sus enfoques difieren significativamente, lo que refleja las agendas políticas y culturales de cada medio, tal como sugieren las teorías de Entman (1991, 1993) sobre el encuadre.

¹ Author1, Ahmed Najm Abed, is responsible for the analysis, methodology and results. Author2, Lorena Bort Mir, is responsible for the theoretical context, discussion, and conclusions, as well as submitting and reviewing the article.

Palabras clave: Refugiados iraquíes, titulares, Estructura macrosemántica, *The Guardian*, *Deutsche Welle*, Análisis de marcos, CDA

ABSTRACT: Headlines in digital media, according to Abdel-Raheem and Alkhamash (2022), exert a remarkable influence in shaping readers' sociopolitical perceptions. This statement, which finds an echo in the theories of Van Dijk (1988), who argues that the construction of headlines transcends mere syntax, has been the starting point of our study. Through a critical analysis of discourse and framing, focusing on the representation of Iraqis in *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle*, we have evidenced how headlines are used as strategic tools to construct specific narratives and guide the interpretation of events. The results obtained support the idea that, although both media outlets cover the Iraqi refugee crisis, their approaches differ significantly, reflecting the political and cultural agendas of each media outlet, as suggested by Entman's (1991, 1993) theories on framing.

Key words: Iraqi refugees, headlines, Macro-semantic structure, *The Guardian*, *Deutsche Welle*, Framing analysis, CDA

1. INTRODUCTION

Research topics concerning media discourse and deconstructing identities—especially, refugees, have dramatically risen over the last decades in social sciences, particularly, in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) (Caballero-Mengíbar, 2015; Zotzmann & O'Regan, 2016; Junuzi, 2019). With the war in the Middle East, especially in Syria and Iraq, refugees have been depicted on different platforms, including newspapers, social media, and TV, with different frames—interpretive structures that shape how information is presented and understood (Entman, 1993)—contributing to showing them in terms of solidarity, discrimination, sympathy, and positive or negative discourse, contributing to showing them in terms of solidarity, discrimination, sympathy, and positive or negative discourse. In 2014, the Iraqi government faced its biggest humanitarian crisis, with 3 million refugees (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2015). Most displaced refugees were victims of conflicts in Northwest Iraq, resulting in Iraq's largest refugee crisis in decades. As a result, the increase in violence, which led to the capture of Mosul by ISIL militants in early June 2014, resulted in a huge displacement and a hot crisis in Iraq (Soave, 2015). Increasing violence and worsening living conditions in Iraq, coupled with the deterioration of security in the Middle East, pushed more Iraqis to see Europe as a good destination as the only possible option (Fusco, 2023). Such actions are a driving force for asylum seekers in Europe (Riordan, 2016). Based on Frontex² data, Iraq was among the top ten countries of origin for irregular arrivals in Europe fleeing via the Eastern Mediterranean Sea in 2009, and one of the highest three between 2014 and 2017 (Fusco, 2023).

Topics encircling refugees have been at the leading forefront of the social, cultural, and political arguments globally in the last decades, steering up the media, which plays a crucial role in side-tracking public opinion on refugees. In 2015, the media placed an extensive focus on refugees and their plight, especially those people who escaped from

² The European Border and Coast Guard Agency, <https://www.frontex.europa.eu/>

the Middle East and Africa into Europe. The media has played a notable role in influencing and redirecting public opinion and in shaping collective knowledge about social movements, events, and identities (Happer & Philo, 2013; McCombs & Valenzuela, 2020; Ausat, 2023). The way people can perceive knowledge from the basis of common sense of ideologies is the underlying foundation of truths about the social world they live in and the social system that guides their actions in it (Van Dijk, 2006). Speaking about the particular features of the media, former research works proved that news headlines can even have an influential effect on people's attitudes to these items of news (Tymbay, 2022). By constructing informative assumptions, headlines typically tend to create an interactive structure with the reader, and most headlines, especially those of a normative nature, can thus be perceived as communicative acts, and not only a summary of the text (Van Dijk, 1988). Headlines use specific cognitive strategies to frame news issues by emphasizing certain aspects of a story while omitting others. This process highlights key elements of reality to make headlines more noticeable and impactful in a text (Hellsten et al., 2010). Because people are more inclined to obtain more information from the media by simply skimming the headlines, it is possible to effectively shape readers by employing attention-grabbing headlines. The fact remains that news headlines, particularly in an online setting, always play a more structural role in today's fast-paced and entertaining readers. Typically, headlines serve as the audience's hook in traditional and online news (Molek-Kozakowska, 2013). One could argue that headlines establish the content's initial focus; readers initially skim brief sentences before turning to the body of the text (Dor, 2003). Because of this, the media frequently publishes attention-grabbing sentence-level frames.

As Van Dijk (1988) sees it, headlines always tend to have a crucial role in providing the information readers perceive first and show a macro-position, as they provide a concise summary of the news article. According to Van Dijk (1988), headlines serve three crucial functions: First, they create the basic overview of the news article. Second, they simply attract the readers by employing different font sizes as well as via the language used. Third, they reflect the first indicator of the content and style of the newspaper's value. According to Bednared and Caple (2012), in the news, headlines are crafted using a distinct language style and specific linguistic features that set them apart from other forms of news discourse. Such an action in the news may include the deletion of function words, untensed phrases instead of clauses, the use of evaluative/ marked/ emotional words, and specific patterns of idioms and proverbs. However, such headlines in the news tend to be more and more creative than reproductive. Based on the communication perspective, frames are exposed to be crucial devices in framing the article's content and ultimately framing public opinion on different matters (Hart, 2023).

As the editors of the headlines often utilize various expressions regarding the article's content, the implications they present can be interpreted as possible methods of manipulation. Headlines and titles in news pieces resemble the top of a massive iceberg, typically encompassing information, allusions, and deeper significances regarding occurrences, such as refugees and their circumstances (Van Dijk, 2024). In the news, headlines likely have a strong impact on readers since the language characteristics of the titles often enhance their effectiveness and memorability. Headlines serve as a valuable source of information, particularly in cultural references. This is accurate as the headlines exist independently without further clarification; they require readers to rely on their cultural knowledge to grasp the material (Develotte & Rechniewski, 2001).

This research paper investigates the examination of news headlines in two prominent Western media outlets, the left-leaning *The Guardian* and the German conservative state-run media *Deutsche Welle*. These two platforms portrayed the Iraq crisis and refugees, influencing their audience's perspective on global occurrences, including the refugee situation in the Middle East and Europe. We were particularly keen to see if we could detect any alterations in the portrayal of Iraqi refugees in these two outlets that might align with the noticeable change in media perspectives and government policies. This represents a transition from being more supportive of the state to being less supportive of his specific topic. Accordingly, this paper aims to investigate the dynamics of news headlines concerning refugees, particularly Iraqi refugees in these two Western news outlets, during what became known as 'the refugee crisis in Europe'. To accomplish the purpose of this research, the following goals are established: (a) to investigate the representation of news headline creation in media through the lens of communication and discourse theories; (b) to develop a methodological approach for analyzing the representation of Iraqi refugees in news headlines using assessed discourse frameworks; (c) to illustrate, grounded in theoretical models and the established methodology, the keyframes of the headlines that assist readers in deriving overarching meaning while engaging with news events. The paper emphasizes headlines because they encapsulate overarching meanings and semantic frameworks that activate our emotional responses, thereby influencing our interpretation of the reported events (Van Dijk, 2000). We also examine how headline representations are integral to global cultural frameworks present in media content, thereby aiding in the reproduction of prevalent ideologies by 'dominant entities' including the media (Van Dijk, 2006: 139).

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The selection of approaches in this study is guided by their unique analytical perspectives for understanding the interplay between discourse, cognition, and society. The Critical Discourse Approach (CDA) is integral to this research, as it provides tools to uncover the ways discourse reflects, reproduces, and challenges power dynamics, ideologies, and social inequalities. By focusing on the interplay between language and social structures, CDA enables an in-depth exploration of how media discourse constructs and legitimizes social practices, particularly in the representation of marginalized groups.

The Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA) complements this by examining the cognitive processes underlying discourse production and interpretation, particularly in contexts involving power dynamics and inequality. Framing Theory is included to analyze how certain aspects of reality are highlighted or omitted in media narratives, revealing mechanisms through which public perception and interpretation of social events are shaped. Lastly, the Discourse of Headlines approach is vital for understanding the structural and linguistic strategies used in headlines, which often act as powerful framing devices influencing audience perception.

These approaches were selected for their complementary focus on cognitive, textual, and social dimensions of discourse. Together, they provide a robust framework for analyzing how media constructs and communicates meaning, making them particularly relevant to the study's objectives. Integrating CDA with SCA and Framing Theory offers a holistic perspective that addresses both the macro-level societal implications and the micro-level linguistic and cognitive mechanisms of media discourse.

2.1. THE CRITICAL DISCOURSE APPROACH

The Critical Discourse Approach (CDA), a framework pioneered by scholars such as Fairclough (2013) and Van Dijk (2001), focuses on the ways discourse shapes and is shaped by social power structures. CDA is grounded in the belief that language is a form of social practice, and it investigates how texts and talk contribute to the maintenance and transformation of social hierarchies. Particularly, CDA seeks to uncover the underlying ideologies that influence the production and reception of discourse, as well as how discourse constructs identities, relationships, and power dynamics. CDA assumes that discourse does not merely reflect reality but actively constructs and mediates it. As a critical approach, it challenges the status quo, examining how language is used to perpetuate inequality, marginalization, and social injustice (Fairclough, 2013). This perspective is particularly valuable for studying media discourse, as it allows for an analysis of how news texts may subtly reinforce dominant ideologies through language. By focusing on the socio-political implications of discourse, CDA identifies the roles that power, domination, and resistance play in shaping societal perceptions of social events and groups.

One key component of CDA is its multi-layered approach to analyzing texts. It integrates micro-level linguistic features (such as word choice, grammar, and sentence structure) with macro-level social structures, including social norms, values, and historical contexts (Van Dijk, 2001). This dual focus on both language and society enables CDA to explore how individual instances of discourse contribute to broader social processes. For instance, in the context of news media, CDA can reveal how certain topics, such as refugees or political movements, are framed in ways that may influence public opinion and political action. In CDA, the notion of ideology is crucial. Fairclough (2003) argues that ideologies are embedded in discourse and are often hidden, making them naturalized and difficult to challenge. By analyzing how ideologies are reproduced through language, CDA helps to uncover the power relations that underlie social interactions. Additionally, CDA employs a critical stance to examine the role of hegemony—the dominance of certain cultural and political norms that serve the interests of powerful groups—within discourse.

CDA's integrative perspective makes it highly compatible with the other approaches to discourse analysis used in this research. For example, when combined with the Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA), CDA can provide insights into how shared knowledge and cognitive processes shape the interpretation of texts in a social context (Van Dijk, 2014). Similarly, when paired with Framing Theory, CDA helps to analyze the mechanisms by which media frames influence the salience of specific issues, thereby guiding audience interpretation and reinforcing or challenging social ideologies (Entman, 1993).

2.2. THE SOCIO-COGNITIVE APPROACH

The socio-cognitive approach (SCA) (Hart, 2010) is a framework for discourse studies that integrates the cognitive, textual, and social structures as grounded in the description involved in producing a unified model of analysis. Primarily, SCA offers an inclusive understanding of the discursive construction of social inequality and discrimination using a model that connects society and text through cognition. Accordingly, such social cognition serves as the interface between social structure and

textual structure (Hart, 2010). Also, such a cognitive-affective analysis, according to Van Dijk (2024:11) may include descriptions and explanations of discourse in terms of “underlying mental models of personal experience, including emotions and socially shared knowledge, norms values, goals, and ideologies.” Based on Van Dijk’s (2014) argument, SCA is neither a single method nor a prescribed bit-by-bit process for discourse analysis. Rather, it can, therefore, be operationalized on different concepts and methods from wide-cut varying disciplines, such as sociolinguistics, social psychology, anthropology, cognitive psychology, and sociology. That is to say, the former disciplines are manifested as instrumental in understanding the role of social knowledge in discourse comprehension and production as well as in society (Van Dijk, 2014). Additionally, Van Dijk (2001) emphasizes that a theory of discourse must include a cognitive aspect that takes into consideration the complexity of the connections between discourse and society as well as the cognitive processes involved in the production and understanding of news texts. As a result, such a construction between discourse, cognition, and society is best examined by employing the Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA). Although discourse is socially and cognitively governed by shared knowledge, the mental model both “controls and defines our everyday perception and interaction in general and the production and comprehension of discourse in particular” (Van Dijk, 2014:49).

Analytically, the SCA integrates the description of social interactions and text at micro and macro levels through the lens of social cognition (Van Dijk, 1993b: 280, cited in Hart, 2010). The macro-level relates discourse structures concerning the global meaning and organizational structure of the text, whereas the micro-level relates discourse structures concerning the linguistic components of the text (Van Dijk, 1988). Besides, macrostructures are assigned to account for the ‘global meaning’; they are cognitively labeled in terms of the ‘theme’ or ‘topic’ in discourse and practice (Van Dijk, 2013). In this sense, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) bridges these two levels, connecting them into a wide range of descriptions (Van Dijk, 2015; Floyd, 2017).

In general, the SCA’s framework aims to identify knowledge, biases, viewpoints, and convictions that are directly and indirectly activated by the speakers or authors when analyzing and creating discourse segments. It further elucidates how to implement discourse structures and their interpretations within a particular communication context and social cognition (Gyollai, 2022). Considering these assertions, SCA would like to explore how newspaper editors articulate their backing of a specific topic or event, and how the public interprets such news discussions. SCA is often employed by critical discourse researchers due to its comprehensive viewpoint.

2.3. FRAMING THEORY

Framing and frames are two significant concepts that are frequently associated with various methodologies in social science, where they are applied in distinct manners (Hart, 2023). Most notably, the sociologist Goffman (1974: 21) described frames as ‘interpretive schemata’ that enable individuals to “identify, label, locate, and perceive” the global events occurring around them. According to research in mass media, frames are crafted to serve as essential strategic instruments for altering the content of news articles. Following the classic definition of framing, Entman (1993: 52) states that to frame is “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal

interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.”

The idea of framing also encompasses a prevailing meaning in media; it, therefore, involves certain cognitive processes, particularly when choosing particular elements of the news topics. In summary, framing is a media journalistic method used to convey a prevailing significance within the communicative text (Entman, 1993), comprising two primary processes: selection and salience (1993). This indicates that enhancing the text's prominence in the interactive format involves crafting a portion of information to become more notable, significant, and memorable. Nonetheless, these frames in news are crafted through metaphors, concepts, keywords, or symbols, enhancing the visibility of the communicative text (Entman, 1991).

Moreover, framing is essential in the exercise of political power. It can be argued that in political news, framing is a hallmark of power because it emphasizes the social actor and its identity within the communicative text. Additionally, it emphasizes certain facets of reality, while concurrently overlooking other matters that might provoke varied responses from the readers/viewers (Entman, 1993).

Van Dijk (2023) and Entman (1993) describe frames as mental models representing an individual's subjective interpretation of specific social situations, rooted in the socio-cognitive perspective. Similarly, Reese (2001) argues that framing provides a bridge between cognition and culture, demonstrating its utility in examining how shared meanings are constructed across different social contexts. Frames are tools for organizing and making sense of experiences by connecting discourse, cognition, and society. Although Van Dijk points out challenges in framing studies, such as the lack of clarity in empirical research regarding the theoretical and methodological aspects of frames and their expression in discourse, these limitations also highlight opportunities for further refinement and exploration.

In addition, scholars like Chong and Druckman (2007) underline the dynamic nature of framing, showing how frames evolve and adapt to different social contexts and actors. This perspective aligns with Van Dijk's (2023) emphasis on the role of context, suggesting that variations in framing reflect the diversity of social situations and actors' experiences. Together, these contributions position framing theory as a robust and versatile framework for analyzing discourse and its impact on society.

The fundamental aim of this theoretical framework is to establish a critical viewpoint on how frames interact within the critical approach in communicative texts to generate a prominent meaning in a text. Since framing analysis includes several foundational elements from CDA, it maintains the notion that discourse can influence actions extending beyond the text and aligns with similar principles related to meaning construction in discourse, while retaining its methodological origins in thorough linguistic examination (Hope, 2010). Moreover, since the cognitive approach to CDA draws on some concepts from cognitive linguistics (such as frame and framing, metaphor, schemas, or mental models) to explore the correlations between social action, language, and cognition in political contexts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Entman, 1993; Hart, 2014), both frames and framing have come to be vital in cognitive processes of meaning construction in discourse and its practice (Belmonte & Porto, 2020; Filardo-Llamas et al., 2021; Romano & Porto, 2021; Hart, 2023).

2.4. THE DISCOURSE OF HEADLINES

The creation of headlines in newspapers represents the most influential subgenre of news, as they comprise a distinct form of text serving various purposes. Reah (1998: 4) characterizes a news item as information regarding a 'recent occurrence,' while headlines serve as the initial notable signal encountered when creating a news item. Dor (2003: 696) states that headlines serve both textual and functional purposes. They act as a 'mediator' between the narrative and its audience. Dor (2003: 696) claims that headlines serve this function, defining them as news elements that shape and maintain readers' perceptions of the text while effectively acting as a relevance enhancer. Dor suggests that this function indicates "they aim to enhance the significance of their narratives for their audience." (2003: 696). The significance of newspaper headlines should also be considered, as they often possess the ability to grab the reader's attention while conveying information, thereby affecting the audience in a particular manner. Gomis (1992: 59) contends that "a headline's purpose is to ignite interest, capture attention, create an impact, and ensure that the reader forms and considers their viewpoint." For this reason, editors frequently aim to craft engaging content in news headlines as a journalistic strategy to seem more impressive to the audience.

The details in the news headlines can cleverly direct readers to consider the overall significance of an article, as the headlines present themselves as brief structures or frames within a news piece (Scott, 2023). While the content of headlines may differ in terms of low news value, their overall newsworthiness typically includes greater news value (Bednarek & Caple, 2012). Overall, the journalistic discourse of newspaper titles has been thoroughly examined from various angles. Much research has studied the communicative function of newspaper headlines as well as their linguistic form (e.g., Van Dijk, 1988; Bell, 1991; Dor, 2003). Additionally, numerous studies have explored their significance in journalistic discourse as a strategic tool, with various researchers examining headlines as a sub-genre of news segments, encompassing cultural and ideological ramifications (e.g., Shie, 2011; Molek-Kozakowska, 2013; Montgomery & Feng, 2016; Kharbach, 2020; Tymbay, 2022). Additional research examines media headlines, indicating that striking, imaginative, inventive, and unique headlines are crucial for capturing readers' interest (Wu & Pan, 2022). Drawing from previous studies, there has been significant emphasis on the critical role of news headlines as keyframes to attract the audience's attention.

In this regard, though, limited emphasis or attention has been placed in the research literature on the editorial headlines in media as overarching frameworks that precede the news story. Due to their spatial positioning in digital design, they can select various news frames to read (Dor, 2003), meaning their interaction with readers might convey different interpretations of the subjects being discussed. Consequently, this research seeks to reveal the broad resources employed by headline editors to proficiently convey, for example, humanizing and dehumanizing biased behaviors toward particular social figures they report on. The concepts of humanizing and dehumanizing are essential in understanding the editorial strategies employed in media headlines, as they significantly influence audience perceptions of social actors and events. These concepts align with Van Dijk's (2006) assertion that discourse not only reflects but also reinforces societal power structures and ideologies. Humanization and dehumanization operate as cognitive and discursive mechanisms through which media frames construct empathy or hostility toward specific groups. According to Chouliaraki (2006), such representations

are not neutral; they are imbued with power relations that shape how audiences engage with and interpret news stories.

In the context of headlines, which serve as macro frames (Van Dijk, 1991), these mechanisms can subtly embed bias. Humanizing language often highlights the individuality, emotions, and dignity of a social actor, while dehumanizing language can reduce them to stereotypes or abstract entities (Haslam, 2006). For example, describing refugees as “families seeking safety” versus “waves of migrants” invokes different emotional and cognitive responses. As headlines are spatially and cognitively prominent, they play a critical role in activating relevant schema and framing public perception of events (Van Dijk, 2014). Thus, analyzing humanization and dehumanization in headlines is vital to understanding how media discourse perpetuates or challenges societal inequalities and biases.

In general, the data presented in the headlines can alter how readers comprehend an event. This implies that editors typically filter or summarize the key events in headlines according to an agenda-setting choice (Van Dijk, 1991). The socio-cognitive approach emphasizes knowledge's significance in discourse creation; for example, the way an event is framed in news headlines can significantly affect how readers perceive the crisis concerning macrostructures (Van Dijk, 2001). Thus, the discourse of news headlines involves not only linguistic structures but also macro-level elements such as socially shared knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, and values. These factors are critical when analyzing headlines because they influence how events, like the portrayal of refugees, are framed in the media. According to Van Dijk (2009), these cognitive and social elements shape how information is processed and interpreted. When we deconstruct headlines, we rely on our mental models, which guide how we perceive and understand the policies, actions, and narratives surrounding social events.

The primary objective of this paper is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the macrostructures in news headlines, focusing on how these elements consistently manifest in the discourse. Through this analysis, it becomes clear that headlines reflect specific language frames that are characteristic of news discourse. These frames help to reinforce certain interpretations of events by activating knowledge, ideologies, and values in readers' minds. However, it is important to recognize that achieving complete objectivity in news framing is challenging. News headlines inherently carry macro themes and underlying meanings, shaped by cultural and political factors, which influence how issues like the refugee crisis are framed and understood.

Particularly, our study will focus on both the micro-level and macro-level structures of the headlines, drawing on the following frameworks provided by Van Dijk (2015) and Entman (1993):

(i) Framing Strategies:

- Selection and salience: Certain aspects of a news story will be selected and emphasized over others to highlight particular interpretations of events. For instance, headlines may focus on the victims (e.g., refugees) or the actions of specific actors (e.g., ISIS, governments).
- Causal framing: Identifying the causes and effects attributed to events, such as depicting violence as the direct consequence of political actions.
- Evaluation framing: This includes framing actors or events positively or negatively, based on language choices that either humanize or

dehumanize the subjects (e.g., referring to refugees as "victims" or "illegals").

- Moral framing: Framing that invokes moral judgment about the actions or conditions of actors involved in the news stories, often using terms that imply guilt, responsibility, or victimhood (e.g., "genocide," "suffering").

(ii) Linguistic Elements:

- Verb choices: The verbs used in headlines (e.g., "flee," "escape," and "confront") can heavily influence how action is perceived and can either empower or diminish the agency of those involved.
- Quantification: Headlines may use numerical references (e.g., "Thousands" or "Hundreds") to frame the scale of the issue, which can affect the perceived urgency or significance of the story.
- Adjectives used for emphasis: Words like "devastating," "catastrophic," or "urgent" can add emotional weight and guide the reader's reaction to the information.

By combining these framing strategies with linguistic elements such as verbs, adjectives, and numerals, this study will examine how headlines in both *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle* construct meaning about refugees, war, and political conflict.

3. METHOD

In this study, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA), Framing Theory, and the discourse of headlines are utilized to examine the linguistic structures of news headlines and their role in shaping readers' understanding. CDA, as outlined by Van Dijk (1998), is a systematic approach to studying discursive texts that seek to uncover the implicit power structures and ideologies embedded within the discourse. By analyzing the macro and microstructures of news headlines, CDA helps explore how headlines function as sites of ideological struggle, framing issues in particular ways that align with broader social and political agendas.

Building on this, the Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA) provides a framework for understanding how language reflects and constructs social cognition, such as shared knowledge, values, and ideologies. Van Dijk (2009) argues that SCA allows for the analysis of the mental representations of social actors and events, linking cognitive processes with linguistic structures. By focusing on both micro-level linguistic elements and macro-level discursive structures, the SCA enables a nuanced exploration of how headlines contribute to constructing meaning and shaping public perceptions of social issues. In this study, SCA is used to analyze the cognitive and social elements embedded in the news headlines, allowing for a detailed examination of how linguistic resources construct the representation of topics like the refugee crisis (Van Dijk, 2015).

Additionally, Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) is applied to further understand the role of headlines in constructing reality. Framing involves selecting certain aspects of a perceived reality and highlighting them in a way that influences how the audience interprets and evaluates the situation. This theory is especially useful in identifying how specific frames are constructed in headlines, such as the moral evaluation, causal interpretation, and problem identification associated with social issues like the refugee crisis. By analyzing the lexical and grammatical choices in the headlines, framing analysis

helps uncover the ways in which media discourse shapes public perceptions of the events being reported.

Together, these theoretical approaches provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing how news headlines on online platforms like *Deutsche Welle* and *The Guardian* use linguistic structures to engage readers, construct social meanings, and influence the interpretation of important social issues.

3.1. MATERIALS

Every discourse exists within a specific context (Kress, 2010). The wider societal framework of this examination is the representation of the refugee situation in the Middle East and policy development in Europe. This research examines the coverage of news headlines on these subjects in two distinct media outlets that have varying ideological affiliations. This paper aims to examine how Iraqi refugees are represented in selected news headlines, for which we chose the British left-oriented newspaper *The Guardian* and the German conservative media outlet *Deutsche Welle*. *Deutsche Welle* is a media outlet from Germany, while *The Guardian* represents a left-leaning perspective from the United Kingdom (Brown & Mondon, 2021). These two sources were chosen because they are the top news media outlets in Europe (Cvetkovic & Pantic, 2018), and all their information platforms are accessible for free. For example, *The Guardian* newspaper was chosen due to its significance and respect in the UK (Costa-Sánchez et al., 2020; Majid, 2022). Conversely, the chosen online platform of *Deutsche Welle* is widely accessed and regarded as a reliable news outlet worldwide (Fahim & Islam, 2024).

In essence, Germany and the UK were focal states of Europe during the refugee crisis. These two countries played central roles in the European refugee crisis, largely due to their geographic proximity to conflict zones and their policies regarding asylum seekers. Both countries became key destinations for refugees, with Germany committing to a policy of open borders and the UK engaging in political and social debates regarding immigration and refugee quotas (European Commission, 2015; Ilgit, & Klotz, 2018). These actions positioned them as focal states in the European response to the crisis.

In this regard, this research emphasizes several important aspects concerning the societal significance of the two distinct newspapers. The main reason for the selection criteria was to enable a comparison of the news headlines from two media outlets to further investigate potential similarities and differences. The analysis specifically focuses on news headlines published during a pivotal period of the refugee crisis in Europe, particularly the peak years of 2015-2016, when refugee arrivals were highest. This period is especially relevant for analyzing how news outlets framed the crisis and the decisions made by European leaders, as it marked critical moments of policy debate and public discourse surrounding migration and asylum policies (e.g., the EU's relocation quotas and border control measures). By examining headlines from this time, the study can better capture the framing strategies used to shape public perception of the crisis and the political responses that followed (Entman, 1993; Dor, 2003; Berry et al., 2016).

Recognizing the significance of news headlines as vital framing tools (Pan & Kosicki, 1993), headlines from both sources were chosen depending on whether their frames contained terms related to the Iraqi refugee crisis. The aim of selecting various news media outlets is to understand how different reputable news platforms frame the coverage of significant events, considering the diverse headlines and contextualization of the discourse surrounding policies. Different studies on news headlines (Entman, 1993;

Altheide, 1997; Kuypers, 2002) highlight the multifunctionality of headlines, with the primary aims specified as attracting, summarizing, and framing (Bell, 1991). For this reason, this study emphasizes the importance of framing headlines effectively to create prominent narratives that capture the reader's attention.

3.2. PROCEDURE

The data was collected using the Google News search engine, as the URLs for *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle* each utilized distinct search tools that could manage the search. We chose to use Google News due to its online platform. Additionally, Google News stands out among news aggregators by offering a completely automated scan of worldwide news even in the absence of human editorial oversight (Weaver & Bimber, 2008). We included news headlines from 2015 to 2016 in our study. To ensure the relevance of the headlines to the Iraqi refugee crisis, we employed specific search terms: 'Iraq crisis,' 'Iraqi refugees,' 'displacement in Iraq,' and 'unprotected Iraqis.' These search terms were utilized on two websites, covering a broader timeframe from 2014 to 2017. This extended search period allows us to corroborate the consistency and relevance of our findings, ensuring that the headlines we analyzed were pertinent to the ongoing Iraqi refugee crisis during those years.

The findings produced 330 results for *The Guardian* and 310 for *Deutsche Welle*. Following an initial bottom-up exploration of 640 news headlines, we decided to classify the raw materials according to the recurring linguistic features and primary characteristics identified in the corpus for categorization. The quantity of headlines is substantial, making it impractical to conduct an in-depth analysis of each headline in one paper (Martínez Lirola, 2017). From these raw material findings, it was necessary to manually filter out irrelevant results (Schmolz, 2019), and a targeted selection of 42 headlines was obtained for the analysis. Essentially, the chosen headlines exemplify the features that are most common in the headlines. In line with CDA tradition, the methodology is qualitative; it involves an interpretive analysis where researchers elucidate their observations and insights (Creswell, 2017).

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this section, we delve into a detailed analysis of the headlines related to the Iraqi refugee crisis, focusing on three key themes: the construction of the crisis and displacement, the challenges and difficulties faced by refugees, and the sociopolitical discourses surrounding these issues. By examining how the media frames these topics, we aim to uncover the underlying narratives and representations that shape public perception of the Iraqi refugee experience. This analysis will highlight not only the language and imagery used in the headlines but also the broader implications of these constructions for understanding the complexities of displacement and the ongoing challenges faced by refugees. Through this lens, we will explore how these headlines inform and influence societal attitudes toward the Iraqi refugee crisis.

4.1. HEADLINES: CONSTRUCTING THE IRAQI REFUGEE CRISIS AND DISPLACEMENT

Topicalization of news actions concerning displacement and harsh actions have been the dominating topic in the digital discourse of *The Guardian* (labeled as TG in the

Tables) as compared to *Deutsche Welle* (labeled as DW in the Tables). To this end, Iraqi refugees are topicalized in different ways.

The selected headlines construct a narrative of resilience amidst violence and displacement, showcasing the enduring spirit of those affected by the conflict while also drawing attention to the humanitarian implications of war. They reveal how the persistent threat of violence shapes the experiences of Iraqi refugees, influencing their movement, their options for safety, and their future in a war-torn region. The first group of headlines (TG) illustrates the direct consequences of war, with reports of thousands of refugees remaining at risk and families being forcibly displaced. For instance, the mention of “1,500 Iraqi families” being marched to Mosul underscores the urgency and peril of their situation. Additionally, headlines detailing the besiegement of tens of thousands of Iraqis on Mount Sinjar reveal the critical and life-threatening circumstances that arose during this period. The reference to the rising civilian death toll further emphasizes the immediate, devastating impact of conflict on the population. The second group of headlines (DW) highlights the ongoing challenges faced by refugees as they seek safety. These headlines reflect a persistent struggle for survival, as Iraqi Christians and Yazidis are forced to flee their homes, indicating the broader humanitarian crises exacerbated by violent acts. Furthermore, the desperate journeys towards safer regions in Kurdistan illustrate the continuous search for refuge amid chaos.

Thus, we could state that the headlines below summarize topics referring to actions in terms of violence, war, and persistence.

Table 1. Headlines with actions in terms of violence, war, and persistence

TG. H1 Thousands of Iraqi refugees ‘still at risk’ despite ending of Mount Sinjar siege.
TG. H2 ISIS forces 1,500 Iraqi families to march to Mosul.
TG. H3 20,000 Iraqis besieged by ISIS escape from mountain after US air strikes.
TG. H4 Iraqi civilian death toll passes 5,500 in wake of Isis offensive.
TG.H5 40,000 Iraqis stranded on mountain as Isis jihadists threaten death
TG.H6 Hundreds of people flee Iraq’s Fallujah area
TG.H7 Tens of thousands pour into Iraq's Kurdish north as US jets bomb Isis
DW. H1 Iraqi refugees find temporary haven in Erbil.
DW. H2 Fearing ISIS, Iraqi Christians flee.
DW. H3 Yazidis see fleeing Middle East as only option for survival.
DW. H4 Fleeing residents of Mosul take refuge in Kurdistan.
DW. H5 Refugees in Iraq caught between soldiers and jihadists.
DW. H6 Refugees are pouring into Iraq’s Kurdistan region as thousands flee militant fighters of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The headlines depicted in the British digital newspaper use a more general frame of numbers at the initial sentence level. This shows that the headlines about refugees frequently utilize frame functions, such as numbers and quantities, which may serve a

rhetorical purpose by emphasizing the scale or severity of the crisis. This rhetorical aspect involves the strategic use of numerical data to evoke emotional responses, shape public perceptions, or legitimize policy decisions regarding refugees. Such portrayal in newspapers, according to Van Dijk (1991), is called the 'Number Game.' In this context, macro-propositions—broad generalizations that encapsulate the overall meaning of a news story—are no longer explicitly expressed in the discourse. Instead, they are used to construct abstracts, which serve as condensed summaries or overarching themes of the text. These abstracts help distill complex information into a more accessible format, making precise and concise information available to readers while guiding their interpretation of the event. These structures are, however, important in cognitive information, and allow the audience to remember, store, and organize textual information in mind (Van Dijk, 1991).

Headline TG. H1 ("Thousands of Iraqi refugees 'still at risk' despite ending of Mount Sinjar siege") connects to violence, war, and persistence in several ways. The phrase *"still at risk"* reflects the enduring dangers that refugees face even after the siege's resolution, emphasizing the persistence of threats tied to the broader context of violence and war. The reference to the "Mount Sinjar siege" underscores the backdrop of military aggression and humanitarian crises, framing the story within the ongoing conflict involving ISIS forces. Headline TG. H4 ("Iraqi civilian death toll passes 5,500 in wake of ISIS offensive") explicitly relates to violence and war by quantifying the civilian toll of the conflict. The mention of "death toll" and "ISIS offensive" highlights the scale and direct impact of violence on civilians, illustrating the devastating consequences of armed conflict. The focus on numbers also contributes to the *persistence* narrative, as it implies ongoing harm and loss resulting from sustained violence.

Clearly, in understanding news, readers must initially employ particular frames that are not merely pieces of knowledge but components of interpretation that involve the assignment of "inferences and global meaning" (Van Dijk, 2013: 7) and based on which "expectations and interactions" are coordinated (Van Dijk, 1977, as referenced in Abdel-Raheem, 2023). In this regard, the information presented at the top of the mental model aids readers in interpreting these actions by grasping the overall significance. As a result, what is illustrated in the headline TG. H4 not only highlights the issue of civilian deaths during migration but also instills a feeling of violence or fear in the audience. In summary, when examining the chosen headlines in *The Guardian*, there is a notable inclination to portray Iraqi refugees through numerical topics at the micro-discourse level, as seen in headlines TG. H2, TG. H3, TG.H5, and therefore, concentrating on significant non-specific figures, like TG.H6 and TG.H7.

When it comes to the German digital news source, the headlines selected tend to focus on Iraqi refugees using different topics when constructing the overall meaning. For instance, the headline DW. H3 highlights the plight of minorities in Iraq, especially Yazidis, and their voices. Furthermore, Yazidis are depicted as being the main topic by exposing their voice as the most depressed group in Iraq. Since topics are theoretically labeled as semantic macrostructure, they formulate the macro-proposition of the headline that semantically controls the lower level of the headline. Such a topic is usually expressed in the headline of a news report (Van Dijk, 2018). For instance, let us consider the specific framing elements in headline DW. H3: *"Yazidis see fleeing Middle East as only option for survival."* The term "Yazidis" is a prominent keyword that immediately focuses the audience's attention on a specific ethnic and religious group known to be marginalized and victimized. The phrase *"only option for survival"* evokes a sense of

urgency and desperation, framing the Yazidis as facing an existential threat. This framing choice influences readers by presenting the Yazidis' plight as dire and unavoidable, thereby emphasizing the severity of their situation. The newspaper's use of this frame reflects a belief system that prioritizes humanitarian crises and amplifies the vulnerability of this group to guide readers toward a specific moral evaluation and interpretation of the event. This aligns with Entman's (1993) explanation that frames organize beliefs and guide audience perception through selective emphasis on keywords and themes.

These frames are deliberately chosen in the headlines, which, according to Entman, render that part of the discourse more prominent. As readers usually begin with news headlines, these titles are designed to trigger the 'relevant knowledge' within the audience's mind for comprehending such news articles (Van Dijk, 1991). Topics in news reports are usually emphasized in the headline and formed as semantic macrostructures, comprising macro-propositions that semantically encompass and govern the lower levels of the micro-structure within the sentence (Van Dijk, 1980; 2017). Once more, while examining the headline DW. H3, the general significance of the subject presents Yazidis as though they have been fighting to survive in the Middle East. Consequently, the framing of DW. H3 suggests that Yazidis in the Middle East face extreme threats to their safety, presenting migration as their only viable option for survival. While the headline does not explicitly mention ISIS, the context of the Iraqi conflict during the period under analysis highlights the Yazidis' persecution, primarily by ISIS militants. Similarly, DW. H2 frames Christians as another religious group forced to flee due to existential threats, aligning with reports of systematic violence against minorities during the conflict. These headlines rely on implicit references to the broader situation in Iraq, where the persecution of religious minorities was widely attributed to ISIS's actions, reinforcing their vulnerability through the lens of religious identity.

Based on these headlines, the word 'fleeing' is an action verb attributed to the group of Christians and Yazidis. While it denotes an active movement, the broader framing positions them as passive actors in the discourse, as their actions are depicted as reactions to external forces—namely, the threats to their survival. This portrayal emphasizes their vulnerability and lack of agency in the face of persecution, framing them as victims of circumstances beyond their control. *Deutsche Welle's* framing not only highlights their precarious situation but also acknowledges them as a marginalized and oppressed ethnic group within the narrative of the conflict. Ultimately, the chosen headlines communicate a general message to the audience; they imply details that assist readers in recalling their understanding of the article's overall meaning. The title DW.H6 employs the verb 'pouring' to illustrate swift and energetic activities. The verb signifies flowing rapidly, suggesting metaphorically escaping quickly in this context. Additionally, it serves to represent the large influx of refugees and creates a portrayal of their departure, emphasizing the magnitude of the dislocation in Iraq.

In general, *Deutsche Welle's* headlines, such as DW. H6, DW. H1, and DW. H4 commonly depicts Iraqi refugees through discourse topics centered on actions of fleeing and relocation. This portrayal emphasizes the immediate and urgent circumstances faced by these refugees. For instance, the recurrent use of action verbs like *fleeing* and references to specific geographic relocations highlight forced movement as a survival strategy. While not all readers may automatically associate these headlines with forced displacement caused by ISIS, the broader context of the refugee crisis in Iraq—widely covered in international media—helps frame these actions within that narrative. Readers

familiar with this crisis are likely to draw on their prior knowledge of events in Iraq, including ISIS's violent campaigns, to interpret these headlines as part of that larger story.

4.2. HEADLINES: CONSTRUCTING CHALLENGES AND DIFFICULTIES THE REFUGEES FACE

The narratives reflected in the headlines from Table 2 are presented as compassionate statements that concern the struggles faced by the refugees in Iraq. According to the headlines shown, *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle* often highlight displaced individuals as experiencing disastrous circumstances, which conveys to the audience that refugees encounter genuine dangers, despair, and subjugation, as illustrated in the headline TG. H9 and DW.H7.

Table 2. Headlines constructing the challenges

TG. H8 Winter brings fresh threat to Iraq's refugees who fled the ISIS advance.
TG. H9 Iraqi refugees 'facing genocide' to receive UK airdrop of aid.
TG. H10 Mosul's children were shouting beneath the rubble. Nobody came.
TG. H11 Hundreds at Iraq refugee camp ill from contaminated food.
TG. H12 Millions of Iraqi children repeatedly and relentlessly targeted, says UN.
TG. H12 UN says civilians at extreme risk as west Mosul offensive begins.
TG. H14 Fight against Isis in Iraq could displace millions more people, UN says.
TG. H15 Iraq humanitarian crisis has reached highest level, UN aid officials warn.
TG. H16 Iraqis are fleeing violence in Anbar at rate not seen since civil war, says UN.
DW. H7 Iraqi refugees face 'catastrophic' conditions.
DW. H8 Fleeing from 'IS', Iraqis left in limbo.
DW. H9 UN: Not enough money for refugees in Iraq.
DW. H10 Mosul offensive to displace a million people, UNHCR warns.
DW. H11 UN: Not enough money for refugees in Iraq.
DW.H12 UN: Civilians 'trapped' inside Iraq's Fallujah
DW.H13 UN: Nearly half a million Iraqis flee Mosul fighting

The Guardian's narrative clearly illustrates the circumstances of the refugees and the supportive role of the UK. In this regard, the title TG. H9 suggests a perspective on the UK's role in the crisis. As *The Guardian* is a UK-based newspaper, one might infer that it often backs campaigns for sociopolitical reasons, particularly concerning minorities, or it may aim to inform readers about this assistance. Regarding the German perspective, for example, the headline DW.H7 indicates that Iraqi refugees faced harsh conditions, since the term 'catastrophic' implies evidence of unfortunate situations, thus it assumes knowledge that aids readers in understanding the general significance of the article. Additionally, the title TG. H8 focuses on the term 'winter' as the central theme regarding the urgent plight of refugees. While the details regarding the Iraqi refugee crisis

may linger in the reader's mind, the headline provides clear and abundant information indicating that numerous factors contribute to an additional threat. Conversely, the headline DW.H8 from Germany suggests that Iraqi refugees have been overlooked for an extended period. The term 'limbo' indicates that the refugees find themselves in a state of uncertainty; they are unable to act in circumstances where their lives are not prioritized.

In summary, *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle* generally employ distinct framing discourses when discussing the challenges of the Iraqi refugee crisis, yet they adopt a similar approach regarding the overarching issues at the macro-discourse level. *The Guardian* often evokes emotional responses from readers by presenting children in its news headlines (e.g., TG.H10).

Another prominent subject that emerged as a significant emphasis for *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle* was the portrayal of the UN in the news headlines. From the chosen headlines, there is a trend to regard the UN as a dependable source when highlighting the challenges that refugees encounter. In this context, according to the British and German media outlets, the speech-reporting verbs, says and warns, are directly linked to the UN speakers. This indicates that the employment of these verbs in headlines is current and impartially conveyed to the audience, allowing readers to gain further insights into the subject, emphasizing the significance of these reports, and fostering confidence in the presented headlines. *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle* report on the use of the UN as a framework in headlines to assess the Iraqi refugee crisis and highlight the severe challenges brought about by war and violence. Additionally, the discourse in these headlines suggests that the editors of *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle* aim to present information about refugees in a way that appears impartial and straightforward, reflecting what Yamashita (1998) might describe as a balanced or fair judgment. This notion of 'natural judgment' refers to the presentation of reported facts in a manner that does not overtly align with or promote a specific political agenda. Instead, the headlines are structured to convey the events as objectively as possible, allowing readers to interpret the information without perceiving overt media bias.

Explicitly, *The Guardian* news headlines show more styles of reporting verbs to frame the refugees in a natural approach, which might indicate the way the newspaper attempts to influence readers. For example, in headline TG. H8 "Winter brings fresh threat to Iraq's refugees who fled the ISIS advance", the use of "*brings*" suggests an inevitability or worsening of the refugees' situation, implying that the refugees are caught in an ongoing and worsening crisis. Headline TG. H11 "Hundreds at Iraq refugee camp ill from contaminated food", uses the words "*ill*" and "*contaminated*" focusing on the refugees' vulnerability and the external causes of their suffering, pointing to neglect or failures in aid systems.

The Guardian's coverage of the UN Speech Act often emphasizes these actions by highlighting the UN's appeals as solidarity statements addressing the dire circumstances encountered by Iraqis, particularly minorities. Moreover, the UN is represented in a collection of news headlines regarding discussions as informative subjects. This indicates that *The Guardian* employs informative frames to highlight the UN's involvement in the Iraqi refugee crisis through different actions, statements, and alerts, as shown in Table 2.

Conversely, while reviewing the headlines from *Deutsche Welle*, there exists a common tendency to represent the UN in news narratives using straightforward assertions — meaning that *Deutsche Welle's* coverage of the UN often neglects attribution verbs like 'states,' 'alerts,' 'requests,' and 'requires.' In contrast to *The Guardian's* approach,

there are numerous straightforward assertions about the UN's involvement in news discussions. Additionally, *Deutsche Welle* holds a somewhat distinct viewpoint concerning the UN actor concerning the sentence-level topic — in other words, considering the overall headlines, they can typically be categorized into two segments, according to their structure. The initial aspect is the topicalization of the UN, which is highlighted to attract the reader's attention to the subject. The second aspect is the discursive component of the illustrated theme. This section creates a vivid picture of the difficult circumstances the refugees endure. As shown in the following headline, we observe that the UN is highlighted separately from the micro-structure level. For instance, DW. H11: "UN: Insufficient funds for refugees in Iraq."

Overall, *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle* adopt a similar method in portraying the UN in news headlines yet exhibit minimal variation in how their editors utilize this framework to illustrate the struggles faced by refugees. Furthermore, employing the UN as a framework in both perspectives emphasize the significance of this entity and uncovers the challenges that refugees encounter in Iraq.

4.3. HEADLINES: CONSTRUCTING THE SOCIOPOLITICAL DISCOURSES

The following analysis focuses on specific framing strategies and linguistic elements that contribute to the construction of socio-political discourses. These include the use of action verbs (e.g., "fleeing," "arrest"), evaluative adjectives (e.g., "suspected," "catastrophic"), and nominalized subjects (e.g., "refugees," "migrants") to emphasize or de-emphasize agency and responsibility. Additionally, the study examines micro-structural elements like word choice, syntactic arrangement, and presuppositions embedded in the headlines, as well as macro-structural topics such as the depiction of refugees as either victims or threats. By analyzing these features, the headlines are evaluated in terms of their ability to evoke cognitive frames that influence the readers' perceptions of refugees and socio-political events.

Table 3. Headlines framing refugees concerning socio-political discourses

TG. H17 UK government faces calls to shelter Yazidi refugees persecuted by Isis.
TG. H18 MPs urge home secretary to extend resettlement scheme to members of Iraq's Yazidi community, many of whom have suffered rape, torture and sexual slavery
TG.H19 MPs unanimously declare Yazidis and Christians victims of Isis genocide
TG.H20 David Cameron cuts holiday short by a day over Iraq crisis
TG.H21 UK steps up role in Iraq with move to aid Kurds and Yazidis against Isis
TG.H22 British forces drop humanitarian supplies to Yazidi refugees in Iraq
TG.H23 Iraq: Britain will 'play role' in arms transport, says David Cameron: David Cameron says Britain will help to transport ammunition and arms to Kurdish forces on the ground in Iraq, but will not supply weapons directly
TG.H24 British SAS sent to Iraq on 'intelligence' mission before airlift of Yazidi refugees

DW.H14 Trial of Iraqi suspect in murder of German teen gets underway:
DW.H15 German police arrest 3 Iraqi refugees suspected of planning terror attack:
DW.H16 Iraqi migrant detained on suspected rape charges in Bochum
DW.H17 Iraqi refugees seek family reunion in Germany:
DW.H18: Iraqi refugee shares his success story as an entrepreneur in Germany.
DW.H19: Germany turning away more Yazidi refugees.
DW.H20: Germany wants to facilitate repatriation of thousands of Iraqis.
DW.H21: German minister in Iraq to promote repatriation

Based on the headlines selected, *Deutsche Welle* depicts Iraqi refugees by using two approaches: positive and negative discourse. When looking at the headlines below, for instance,

DW.H14: Trial of Iraqi suspect in murder of German teen gets underway:
DW.H15: German police arrest 3 Iraqi refugees suspected of planning terror attack:
DW.H16: Iraqi migrant detained on suspected rape charges in Bochum
we can observe, on the one hand, that they consist of comparable topics expressing a related meaning of underlying propositions about the negative discourse of Iraqi refugees in Germany, highlighting the illegal actions of those refugees. On the other hand, however, the adjective ‘suspected’ suggests that the inference drawn from the German authority is uncertain since the adjective connotes meanings that refugees may have committed a crime or illegal action, but it is not for sure. The word “suspected” in the phrase “suspected refugees” implies that there is uncertainty about whether the refugees have committed a crime or illegal act. The use of “suspected” suggests that the authorities have reason to believe something, but they do not have enough evidence to confirm it as fact. The adjective introduces an element of doubt, indicating that the inference is based on suspicion rather than certainty. This cautious framing could be used to avoid making definitive accusations or judgments without concrete evidence. It allows for the possibility that the refugees might not be involved in any illegal activity, hence maintaining a level of ambiguity in the discourse.

In this regard, this framing could encompass unfavorable actions by the primary dominant group (Van Dijk, 2018), such as seen in the headline DW.H15 “German police detain 3 Iraqi refugees believed to be plotting a terror attack.” Additionally, choosing frames like ‘planning a terrorist act,’ ‘homicide,’ or ‘alleged sexual assault charges’ at the micro-structure level enhances the visibility of the discourse for the readers.

Such phrases give readers a hint that connects these frameworks to an overarching meaning, enabling them to grasp the full message of an article. Utilizing these words as frameworks at the sentence-structure level implies information that aids the audience in tapping into their general knowledge related to the context of news articles concerning the migration dilemma in Germany, as it is an essential aspect of the readers' cultural and social awareness. Given that propositions are often expressed either explicitly or implicitly in news discourse, readers/recipients can comprehend such topics by drawing on their shared knowledge of the world (Van Dijk, 2018). In this sense, the recipients consider assumptions or expectations of information that may be accurate or

inaccurate, but in general, they apply to the situation in Germany. As a result, readers' mental representations, incorporating semantic elements like entailments, references, and lexical terms, assist them in comprehending and inferring details about the situation in Germany. In other terms, the addition of coverage regarding Iraqi refugees by *Deutsche Welle*, a media outlet from Germany, appears to be somewhat hostile towards Iraqi refugees in Germany, fostering a negative narrative in the reader's perception. Conversely, the term 'Germany' is framed as the central subject in news titles, for example, DW.H19: Germany rejecting more Yazidi refugees.

DW.H20: Germany wants to facilitate repatriation of thousands of Iraqis.

DW.H21: German minister in Iraq to promote repatriation

The general implication of the headlines above creates the issue of migration in Germany due to the influx of undocumented Iraqis. Therefore, *Deutsche Welle* often portrays the term 'Germany' as experiencing a political dilemma — and the nation is depicted as being in the most challenging situation as *Deutsche Welle* presents Iraqi refugees concerning particular accusations such as violent acts, terrorism, and sexual assault, as shown in the previously analyzed headlines. Conversely, the meanings in headlines like DW.H19, DW.H20, and DW.H21 entail a linguistic presupposition, as the micro-structures in these headlines are activated by factive verbs employing particular discourse structures, such as to enhance, to advocate. Such assumptions in newspapers can influence the interpretation process, or the mental frameworks of the audiences, particularly in political and media contexts. This might relate to 'the criminality of migrants', implying that the Iraqi refugees featured in the headlines are accountable for criminal behavior in Germany (Van Dijk, 2018). Given that presuppositions generally reflect the shared knowledge of the recipients and speaker concerning what is deemed as 'common ground,' this pertinent knowledge can be recognized in both the comprehension and creation of a portion of discourse (Van Dijk, 2018). Consequently, the macro-propositions of the headlines presented in *Deutsche Welle* are, in some way, employed to influence understanding as well as the interpretation by the audience. In this regard, the headlines provide readers with a clear indication that will connect these headlines to the perspective that readers will ultimately explore such subjects. Conversely, refugees are portrayed positively in discussions, like in DW.H17 "Iraqi refugees pursue family reunification in Germany" or DW.H18 "Iraqi refugee recounts his journey as a successful entrepreneur in Germany."

These headlines subsequently frame the term 'Germany' as the central theme of the underlying ideas regarding the actions of Iraqi refugees in Germany. In this context, the term 'Germany' is presented in headlines as a permissive nation for providing asylum, as the discourse framework 'seek family reunion' carries implications that are taken to be either true or false for another discourse framework to hold significance. Additionally, the headline DW.H17 implies that Iraqi refugees are likely to find employment in Germany — and this assumption can be evidenced in the headline through the particular discourse structure, like an entrepreneur in Germany. Consequently, the general implication of the headline suggests that Iraqi refugees are portrayed as proactive participants in business activities in Germany.

In *The Guardian's* sociopolitical discussions, the term 'UK' appears in headlines that highlight the nation's significant efforts to address the Iraqi refugee crisis, particularly concerning the Yazidis in Iraq. The title, TG.H21 "UK increases involvement in Iraq by aiding Kurds and Yazidis against ISIS", emphasizes the UK's active participation in the crisis, leveraging its resources and influence to support Yazidis and Kurds in their fight

against ISIS. It similarly emphasizes the UK as the primary subject of the proposal, as the phrasal verb 'steps up' implies that the UK has acted in response to the Iraqi refugee crisis. Another measure associated with Iraqi refugees, particularly Yazidis in UK media, involves political appeals for their protection highlighted in reports like TG. H17 "The UK government is urged to protect Yazidi refugees targeted by Isis."

Implicitly, this kind of coverage highlights the political actions while at the same time creating the presupposition that the UK government is making decisions to protect Yazidis. And yet, besides the political calls expressed in the headline, there is a focus on the religious identity, especially Yazidis. This suggests that *The Guardian* is likely to take a political stance regarding the efforts of the UK government. Conversely, there exists a significant discourse and semantic framework, like TG. H18: 'MPs call on the home secretary to broaden resettlement initiative for Iraq's Yazidi community' from the headline, outlines a speech in which a UK member of parliament is pressing the British home secretary to act concerning the Yazidis in Iraq. This request is essential because the home secretary leads the home office and therefore has access to decision-making. Additionally, when examining the headlines presented in *The Guardian*, there is a strong emphasis on minorities concerning the Iraqi refugee crisis within the British sociopolitical narrative, as illustrated in TG.H19 "MPs unanimously recognize Yazidis and Christians as victims of Isis genocide." This dialogue follows the intense political pressures from MPs, prompting the UK government to take action against the ISIS genocide of Yazidis and Christians in Iraq.

By emphasizing the British MPs who have responded to the criminal acts against Yazidis and Christians, such headlines aim to influence readers' perspectives on these policies. In this regard, the overall structure of the headlines indicates that *The Guardian's* discourse often highlights the UK's involvement in supporting the trapped Yazidis in the mountains and the displaced Christians. Moreover, the chosen frames in headlines may indicate a form of endorsement by emphasizing the concrete actions of British politicians in handling the Iraqi refugee crisis, a role that has been framed as a political position. It can also serve as a social and political viewpoint for achieving attitudes and political objectives (e.g., headline TG.H20 "David Cameron shortens vacation by a day due to Iraq crisis.").

More explicitly, in the following headline, TG.H23: Iraq: Britain will 'play a role' in arms transport, says David Cameron: David Cameron says Britain will help to transport ammunition and arms to Kurdish forces on the ground in Iraq, but will not supply weapons directly. The general meaning of the proposition reveals that the word 'Britain' serves as the central topic in the discourse segment. Topics are often associated with macrostructures that guide and influence the meanings of the sentences within the discourse's microstructures (Van Dijk, 1980). This suggestion, therefore, conveys significance as the title regarding Iraq can be articulated through dynamic modality due to the modal auxiliary 'will' indicating capability or readiness (Palmer, 2001). In this regard, both the noun Britain and the auxiliary model will indicate that the statement originates from British Prime Minister David Cameron and is grounded in the idea of some commitment. This indicates that *The Guardian* often depicts the UK's involvement in Iraq by utilizing information that readers might accept regarding these occurrences or actions, emphasizing pertinent elements in which the newspaper employs such modalities in its discourse. The semantic macrostructure in headline TG.H21 indicates that *The Guardian* employs the term 'UK' as a framing device concerning the intervention in Iraq by pursuing a long-term strategy to supply military equipment to the forces of the Iraqi

Kurds. This also indicates that the headline suggests Britain is actively involved in providing arms to combat ISIS, thus, the nation will be utilizing its military assets to assist the displaced individuals, particularly Yazidis in northern Iraq. And still, in addition to the arms transfer policy, the phrase ‘play role’ is employed metaphorically to signify the clear act of engagement concerning the Iraqi refugee crisis.

Furthermore, regarding the headline, TG.H24: British SAS dispatched to Iraq on an ‘intelligence’ mission prior to the evacuation of Yazidi refugees, it is notable that the headline employs military action as the central theme of the statement. Specifically, the main interpretation of this statement reveals two prominent subjects in this title: (1) Yazidis are portrayed as a non-Muslim minority group encountering a severe plight, and (2) the Special Air Service (SAS), a specialized unit of the British army, intervenes for Yazidi refugees. Nevertheless, in addition to these two perspectives, *The Guardian*, a UK-based newspaper, highlights its own nation as a significant social participant in the Iraqi refugee crisis. As the term Britain has been illustrated as a framing tool, it enhances the visibility of the discourse segment for the readers (Entman, 1993). Thus, the term ‘intelligence’ is emphasized in the micro-structure as a frame segment, consequently, the term embodies the UK’s mission and its function in gathering information or assessments regarding the Yazidi refugees and their circumstances.

Overall, the usage of the term Britain in the context of *The Guardian* serves to enhance the perception that the UK is actively involved in combating ISIS, supplying weapons, and expressing support for ethnic minorities in Iraq. This is evident as *The Guardian* emphasizes the selection of the news segment more prominently in the communicative headline. Because news frames are shaped by choosing, for instance, metaphors, keywords, or terms that are emphasized in conversation (Entman, 1991), these headlines clearly enhance the UK’s role, making it more prominent and evident to the audience. According to Entman’s framing analysis, this framing in political news discourse reflects an exercise of power (Entman, 1993). Consequently, this indicates that *The Guardian* often highlights the UK’s position as a key player to dominate the narrative. Even though headlines play important cognitive roles, such frames in discourse organization are purposefully utilized by readers when interpreting information to formulate the overall meaning or theme of the article by leveraging their relevant knowledge (Van Dijk, 1991).

5. DISCUSSION

The above analysis of the news headlines indicates that *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle* convey the idea that the exodus of Iraqis is a social problem. To this end, the Iraqi refugee crisis in the headlines is analyzed by constructing Entman’s framing analysis and Van Dijk’s Socio-cognitive analysis. The analysis presented in the previous section demonstrates that both *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle* framed the refugee crisis through forced displacement discourses, highlighting Iraqi refugees as central topics within semantic macrostructures. Such framing aligns with Hart’s (2010, 2011) observations on force-dynamics schemas in anti-immigration discourse, where metaphors of movement, threat, and containment often dominate. Similarly, Musolf’s (2011, 2016) studies on migration metaphors underscore how displacement is frequently represented in terms of physical invasion or flow, invoking cognitive schemas of threat and destabilization. While the headlines analyzed here evoke emotional responses by focusing on forced displacement and ISIS, their linguistic strategies may conform to broader

patterns of framing refugees in a manner that could invoke anti-immigration sentiments or reinforce perceptions of refugees as passive victims requiring external intervention (Porto, 2022). Further comparison with Silaški and Đurović's (2019) findings on Balkan migration discourse might reveal parallels in how shared cultural and cognitive schemas shape refugee narratives across different geopolitical contexts. Moreover, such a depiction can thus help increase the reader's engagement as the depicted headlines show more 'salient in the communicative text' (Entman, 1993).

Moral assessment is another element of the framing function. In general, despite the growing worry in the headlines about the suffering of trapped Iraqis. It has been noted that this feature is seldom utilized in *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle* (Abed & Mas, 2023). In other words, moral evaluation is implicitly employed in the headlines to assess the individuals and their impact on the news. This indicates that *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle* utilize headlines that tackle subjects by emphasizing the ethical issues raised by another entity, like the UN. Therefore, this closeness implies that both sources express this frame function simply by highlighting the UN discourses, as making assessments can only occur through trustworthy and ethical actions defined by the perspectives of *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle*. Moreover, the analysis reveals that the main focus in headlines is that writers and editors take no action while expressing concern about refugees when discussing the Iraqi refugee crisis. This leads *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle* to reveal the proposals of other entities, including the presentations from the UN, UK, and German officials; when these figures suggest solutions, they may be chosen, cited, or implemented.

The analysis reveals that *The Guardian's* empathetic narrative regarding Iraqi refugees, particularly Yazidis and other minority groups, is both explicitly and implicitly linked to the socio-political discourse of UK policymakers. In other words, there is an overall inclination to portray Yazidis within semantic macrostructures as the primary central themes related to British socio-political discussions. In other words, the analysis uncovers various discourse practices and highlights certain macrostructures that policymakers employ to establish and demonstrate solidarity with Yazidi refugees, such as British MPs and the UK government. In this regard, the political discussions related to Yazidis often evoke empathetic reactions, emphasizing that Yazidi refugees, whose plight poses an issue for the global community, require assistance. This portrayal in *The Guardian* is employed to regulate, convey, and oversee information to modify views, ideologies, and convictions (Smith, 2019). In summary, crafting the political messages in headlines fosters unity by creating a reality that *The Guardian* aims for the readers to develop, creating support and consensus (Alharbi & Rucker, 2023). It can be stated that the political appeals illustrated in *The Guardian* follow the House of Commons, as Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond announced that Britain would offer humanitarian assistance to Yazidi refugees.

In comparison, *Deutsche Welle's* reporting employs varying depictions of the Iraqi refugee crisis, creating two discourse practices: positive and negative narratives. The most prominent frame of action related to Iraqi refugees in German news headlines pertains to discussions about victimization in Iraq: undergoing severe hardships and disastrous situations while escaping from war and violence within Iraq. The examination further reveals that the framing of refugees as victims can be recognized within the discourse practices of *Deutsche Welle*. This representation suggests that multiple perspectives exist, showing that Iraqi refugees, particularly Yazidis and Christians, are seen as victims suffering from forced displacement, genocide, and demographic changes

in Iraq. The examination shows that *Deutsche Welle* reflects the formation of solidarity with Iraqi refugees in Germany. In other words, the news headlines clearly show that numerous Iraqi refugees are pursuing family reunification and requesting asylum in Germany. The reality is that numerous Iraqis have presented their paperwork to the German authorities to request asylum. Furthermore, the Iraqi ambassador, Hussain M. F. Alkhateeb, stated that the estimated number of refugees applying for asylum in Germany in 2015 was around 122,000 (Ai, 2020). During that period, the open-door policy was among the German strategies that showcased Angela Merkel's principles and choices in policy formulation, "therefore, inherent empathy and associated feelings, like compassion or sympathy, could be included in the personal mental frameworks that shape strategies for forthcoming or current acts of solidarity" (Van Dijk, 2021: 17).

Furthermore, there is a clear inclination to portray Iraqi refugees in the German media narrative as undesirable criminals accountable for terrorist acts in Germany (Abed & Mas, 2023). The portrayal of them in *Deutsche Welle* as executing terror attacks creates the idea of illegality and the challenge of arriving in Germany. The notable anti-refugee attitude observed during various political events, particularly the public elections in Germany, appears to be directly linked to the notion of national sovereignty and the social movement associated with the far-right (Dostal, 2017). The open-door policy leads to significant repercussions for the German government. As a result, Germany's previous chancellor Angela Merkel did not take action concerning refugees wishing to settle in Germany; meanwhile, the right-wing party, the 'Alternative for Germany,' reinforced this stance, and Merkel also consented to enhance border regulations as a compromise initiative (Sola, 2018). Moreover, aside from these activities, the creation of criminal actions and the repatriation of thousands of Iraqis in *Deutsche Welle* can clearly illustrate a political narrative. Discourse topics of this kind usually involve ideologies structured around the idea of the divide between 'good' and 'bad' (Van Dijk, 201), and the act of repatriation politically and overtly implies that illegal Iraqis do not add value to German society. This representation can assist recipients in deducing the frames implying that refugees are required to depart from Germany.

6. CONCLUSION

The research paper arrives at these conclusions: First, traditionally, news headlines typically serve a dual purpose: they summarize what follows and capture interest. Nonetheless, journalistic frames regarding global and social happenings contribute to forming the overall perception of the compelling appeal of a headline. Consequently, it remains rare for a headline to feature varying levels of dimensions, including macro frames, compared to the main text it introduces. Considering this assertion and utilizing the socio-cognitive perspective, macro-structures in news headlines are abstract and cannot be directly expressed; however, certain drawing principles that emphasize the relationship between macrostructure and microstructure levels ought to be acknowledged when interpreting and analyzing news headlines (Van Dijk, 1995). This kind of mapping might lead to the creation of intricate functions and convey overall meaning in discourse (Van Dijk, 1977). Readers rely completely on their overall knowledge, utilizing the broader context to achieve an accurate understanding of the news articles they encounter.

Next, examine how frames interact in the context of the critical approach in both discourse and practice. This paper asserts that the methodological and theoretical

framework of CDA and framing is multidisciplinary. Given that framing entails cognitive processes, particularly within communicative text (Entman, 1993), the social cognitive approach (SCA) to CDA is particularly pertinent for a comprehensive review of framing studies, as it zeroes in on the two primary concepts employed in the framing research paradigm: discourse and cognition (Van Dijk, 2008; Van Dijk, 2023). Conversely, as a method of cognitive CDA, and drawing from Hart's argument (2023), framing constitutes one of the dimensions of construals in cognitive CDA since the framing and structural arrangement in cognitive CDA depends on frames and event frames respectively. They each provide varying degrees of significance in shaping the overall perception of events that the reader is likely to develop in reaction to texts.

The main framing strategies identified in the data from the analysis of headlines in *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle* regarding the Iraqi refugee crisis are the following: (i) emphasis on vulnerability, as both newspapers highlight the plight of ethnic-religious minorities, particularly Yazidis and Christians, framing them as vulnerable and marginalized groups facing existential threats, (ii) humanitarian focus (the headlines often frame the refugee crisis within a humanitarian context, emphasizing the need for compassion and support for those affected), (iii) political contextualization, and (iv) narrative of forced displacement.

Third, the comparative findings lead to these conclusions: firstly, the alterations in *Deutsche Welle*'s news titles indicate that the publication is influenced by political occurrences and the decisions made by policymakers in Germany. Secondly, the employment of empathetic language regarding Iraqi minorities in the British online newspaper reflects how *The Guardian* is politically influenced by those significant appeals. Third, both *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle* adopt a similar strategy in their headlines, identifying ISIS as a key player responsible for the issues. According to Entman (1993), one sentence may serve multiple functions. For *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle*, the initial two functions of problem identification and causal interpretation are often employed for a single headline. In some instances, a single headline might encompass more than one of these four framing functions, yet many headlines in a communicative text may not fulfill any of them. A frame in a particular text might not necessarily include all four functions.

Our analysis reveals a significant interaction between the variables of ideology and culture in shaping framing strategies employed by *The Guardian* and *Deutsche Welle*. *The Guardian*, with its left-leaning ideology, emphasizes a humanitarian and empathetic approach, advocating for the moral obligation to support vulnerable ethnic-religious minorities, which aligns with progressive values. In contrast, *Deutsche Welle* reflects the cultural and political context of Germany, focusing on national policy and public sentiment towards refugees, thus incorporating a more critical examination of the socio-political implications of migration. This interplay influences public perception, as *The Guardian* fosters a compassionate view of refugees deserving support, while *Deutsche Welle* prompts a more nationalistic perspective that considers the challenges of accommodating refugees within Germany. Ultimately, the ideological and cultural contexts of each media outlet significantly shape the narratives constructed around the refugee crisis and the societal attitudes that emerge from them.

The study acknowledges certain limitations that warrant consideration for future research. One significant limitation is the focus on a specific set of media outlets, which may not fully capture the diversity of framing present in other news sources or cultural contexts. Additionally, the analysis primarily centers on textual elements, potentially

overlooking the impact of visual imagery and multimedia components that accompany headlines in digital news. Future research could expand the scope by including a broader range of media platforms and examining how visual framing interacts with textual framing to shape public perceptions of refugees. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could provide insights into how framing evolves over time in response to changing sociopolitical landscapes, thereby enriching our understanding of the dynamic nature of media representation and its implications for social attitudes toward refugees.

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