

The Representation of Egyptian and Syrian Governments in BBC and CNN Texts regarding the Civil Wars in Egypt and Syria

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ABSTRACT:

This research probes the representation of social actors in two prominent Western mass media. The Egyptian and Syrian governments are the focuses of this research. The data of this research were taken from two Western mass media, namely BBC and CNN. This research is descriptive qualitative in nature. The data includes the online news articles published in official sites of BBC and CNN. The analysis examined how social actors are excluded and included in the texts. The findings showed that BBC and CNN mostly represent the Egyptian and Syrian governments negatively. It was discovered from the excessive use of predicate with negative semantic load attached to the Egyptian and Syrian governments. Such excessive use of predicate implicates that BBC and CNN were likely to expose the bad sides of the Egyptian and Syrian governments to the world citizen. This practice appears to reflect how the two media view the two national governments.

Keywords: *Representation, Mass Media, Egyptian and Syrian Governments.*

INTRODUCTION

The rise of Arab Spring started to spread to major countries in the region of Islamic Middle East and North African (MENA) countries. The Arab Spring is such a movement to establish democratic country. The movement was indicated by society's defiance, massive demonstration to streets, and movement calling for democracy (Shirazi, 2002). The movement had evoked the violence where it led to civil wars. The international mass media vie for giving report about the recent situation in civil wars. It means that the mass media represent the civil wars and the actors participated according to their own manner. Such representation may contain ideologies which are hidden in the text. Critical discourse analysis is a helpful tool to delve and unmask representation and ideology of the mass media.

In representing civil wars and actors participated, the mass media must have had disseminated their ideologies into texts. Critical discourse analysis helps to expose and unmask such ideologies because critical discourse analysis is a

study used to unravel implicit and hidden messages in a text (Van Dijk, 2001, in Machin and Mayr, 2012).

Henceforth, this research used critical discourse analysis approach to sniff out the hidden ideologies and messages in the texts containing the information about civil wars in MENA countries and the actors participated.

Texts published by Western mass media are the communication tools to create particular discourse. Van Leeuwen (2001, in Wodak and Meyer, 2001) defines discourse as manners of acknowledging some reality aspects which are socially constructed. Western mass media play a significant role in creating the discourse about civil wars in MENA countries and the actors participated through the texts published. Furthermore, Western mass media disseminate their ideologies to the texts. Therefore, Western mass media have indirectly shaped the world citizens' mindset about the occurrence of civil wars in MENA because the texts published are consumed by world citizens.

This research investigates how the social actors in civil wars in Egypt and Syria (the samples of MENA countries) are represented in online news articles from United Kingdom and United States. The representation was probed to unveil the ideologies behind such representation. The tools exerted in the analysis of representation are critical discourse analysis (Van Leeuwen, 2008) and Transitivity (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004).

There are series of relevant research to this research, namely the political representation (Wenden 2005; Dobson, 2007) and media discourse study (Shirazy, 2012). The research examined different cases with different approaches of critical discourse analysis. Wenden (2005) investigated the representational strategies of Al Aqsaa Intifida in Al Jazeera's special reports through the analysis theme and rheme. Dobson (2007) examined the representational strategies of British political leaders' election manifestos in 1990s through the analysis of intertextuality, metadiscourse, discourse representation (Fairclough, 1992), and presupposition.

Meanwhile, Shirazi (2012) examined the discourse which was created through the use of social media in Middle East and North Africa countries. The research analyzed the arguments posted in various social media. The arguments posted were examined from its validation, namely comprehensibility, truth, legitimacy, sincerity. The gap between the research mentioned earlier and this research is that this research used different methods of analysis from those research, namely the combination of social actor classification (Van Leeuwen, 2008) and Transitivity (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004).

2. Critical discourse analysis and transitivity

Social interaction in society's life has established particular discourses. Discourse is constructed from the social practice which occurs between particular actors. Prominent researchers have made the definition about what discourse is. Fairclough (1992, in Locke, 2004) states that discourse shows the language use as social practice which focuses on linguistic aspects such as paragraphs,

utterance, text and genres. Meanwhile, Paltridge (2006) considers discourse to be a reality which is socially shaped. Such views suggest that doing discourse analysis means to probe and analyze the construction of reality which occurs in the forms of linguistic.

Discourse in a text could be further probed through critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis focuses on three aspects, namely ideology, power, and critique. Such things are the center of the analysis and inseparable because ideology, power, and critique influence one another. Wodak and Meyer (2001: 8) define ideology as “a coherent and relatively stable set of beliefs and values.” Therefore, ideology looks arduous to challenge because it emerges to be the common sense. However, society still has the great chance to challenge ideology because their thought is considered to be ideology (Thomas, Wareingh, Singh, et al, 2004). Another notion which is the center of critical discourse analysis is power. Critical discourse analysis probes on how a discourse will put particular social actors

in power domination and how the groups with minor power will militate against such power domination (Wodak and Meyer, 2001). On the other hand, critique has also become the essential notion because critical discourse analysis is expected to make critique to particular discourse and alter the society (Wodak and Meyer, 2001).

In critical discourse analysis, the analysis of discourse can also be undertaken by scrutinizing the depiction of social actors in the text. The analysis of social actors is usually done through its representational strategies, such as the attributes or associations which are attached to the social actors. Van Leeuwen (2008) considers such representational strategies of social actors could be classified into two categories, namely exclusion and inclusion. Exclusion is one of representational strategies used in the text. It excludes the social actors in a text. Exclusion encompasses suppression and backgrounding. On the other hand, inclusion is another types of representational strategy used in a text. Inclusion includes several categories of

representational strategy, namely role allocation, personalization, and impersonalization (Van Leeuwen, 2008).

The analysis of social actors in a text can be undertaken through Transitivity (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). Transitivity analysis is combined with Van Leeuwen's social actor classification to make the analysis of social actor more accurate. Machin and Mayr (2012) define transitivity as a study which concerns the representation of people from their doing and refers to who does what to whom, and how they do it. Gerot and Wignell (1994: 54) classify the processes of action in transitivity into six types, namely material, mental, behavioural, verbal, relational, and existential (see appendix a). Transitivity analysis is combined with Van Leeuwen's social actor classification (2008) to make the analysis of social actors more accurate. Transitivity appears to be a helpful instrument to conduct critical discourse analysis because Transitivity probes the language choice in representing particular social actors.

METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative in nature. It is qualitative because this research focuses on the description and interpretation. This research is also possible to develop and establish the new concept or theory (Hancock, Ockleford, and Windridge, 2009). The sources of material research is best taken from United Kingdom and United States media with great leverage to international public, not to mention the media are the best representatives of their countries. Therefore, BBC and CNN are taken as the sources of material analysis. Selected articles in year 2013 taken from BBC and CNN which gave the information about the occurrence of civil wars which happened in both of Egypt and Syria.

This research exerted four articles because the research did not only aim at explaining representation of social actors in civil wars in Egypt and Syria, but also comparing such representation. Thus, this research required even number of articles to alleviate the bias of representation.

This research exerted one of critical discourse analysis approaches proposed by Van Leeuwen (2008) and Transitivity (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). Both of those approaches are combined to make the analysis of social actors' representation more detailed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion of this research encompasses social actors' representation in accordance with Van Leeuwen's social actor classification (2008), Transitivity (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004), and ideologies appears in the text.

4.1. Van Leeuwen's social actor

representation and transitivity

In accordance with the analysis, it is discovered that representation of the Egyptian government is more than representation of the Syrian government. It is evidenced by the percentage of the Egyptian government's representation which is more than percentage of Syrian government representation. In BBC and CNN, from a total of 165 clauses, the clauses which contain the representation

of the Egyptian government are 74 clauses (44.85%). Meanwhile, from a total of 156 clauses, the clauses which contain the representation of the Syrian government are 59 clauses (37.82%). The more occurrences of the Egyptian government's representation are the propaganda to show that the Egyptian government has performed the deplorable action. It is aimed at crushing and tainting the image of the Egyptian government in the eyes of global citizen, not to mention helping the Egyptian people to uphold democracy value.

However, there is the same pattern in the representation of both the Egyptian and Syrian governments conducted by BBC and CNN. It is indicated by the use of representational strategies used by both BBC and CNN. This research finds that there is wide gap between the occurrence of exclusion and inclusion in BBC and CNN. The more occurrence of inclusion implies that both the Egyptian and Syrian governments are represented more explicitly rather than implicitly.

In BBC and CNN, inclusion of Egyptian government appears 96 times,

while exclusion Egyptian government does not appear at all (see appendix b). Included Egyptian government is mostly represented in activation-participation-personalization with 65 occurrences (67.71%), followed by pasivation-participation-personalization with 16 occurrences (16.67%) (see appendix c). It indicates that the Egyptian government is likely to play active participant predicated mostly with negative semantic loads. Participation indicates that the Egyptian government is represented in accordance with grammatical participant roles. Meanwhile, the occurrence of personalization means that BBC and CNN are likely to represent the Egyptian government with human features.

In accordance with Transitivity analysis, it is found that BBC and CNN tend to represent social actors in verbal and material process. It means that BBC and CNN are likely to represent social actor in accordance with their utterance and physical action (see appendix d). There are several words containing negative semantic loads attached to the Egyptian government such as *detained*,

fought, strike, banned, and fired. In one clause, it was explained that Egyptian government did the act of firing the protester while they took a break to do prayer. It suggests that the Egyptian government is represented as the side which is ruthless because the Egyptian government has breached human right. On the other side, the Egyptian government is also represented positively. It is evidenced by the fact that the Egyptian government has persuaded its people to rebuilt Egypt along with them.

On the other side, in BBC and CNN included Syrian government appears 56 times and excluded Syrian government six times (see appendix e). Included Syrian government is mostly represented in activation-participation-personalization with 20 occurrences (35.71%), followed by passivation-participation-impersonalization with 14 occurrences (25%) (see appendix f). Similar to the Egyptian government, the Syrian government is also likely to play active role than passive role. Participation of social actor occurs because social actor is represented in

accordance with grammatical participant role. Moreover, BBC and CNN are likely to represent the Syrian government as human being, therefore personalization has more occurrences than impersonalization. Based on Transitivity analysis, social actor is mostly represented sayer and actor (see appendix g).

In accordance with semantic analysis, social actors are mostly predicated with negative semantic load. It can be inferred from how BBC and CNN show that the Syrian government is responsible for the chemical attack killing their people in hundreds. It is evidenced by the use of instrumentalization which implicitly reveals that the Syrian government launched rocket with toxic agent to attack rebel forces. It has created a notion stating that the Syrian's chemical weapon is considered to have jeopardized its people. However, Syrian President al-Assad justifies the possession of chemical weapons by saying that the weapons are needed because the Syrian government is in state of war. Therefore, from this notion it is

deduced that the representation of the Syrian government contains a positive semantic load. Not to mention the text also shows that the Syrian government agrees on the chemical weapon removal proposed by UN.

4.2. Ideologies behind the representation

In accordance with the analysis of social actor representation, it is deduced that both BBC and CNN insert several ideologies into their text. The ideologies that appear in the text are (im)partiality, democracy, and capitalism. (Im)partiality transpires as both BBC and CNN have tendency to represent the Egyptian and Syrian governments in one side, namely the bad side. The partiality is possible to happen in the texts because BBC and CNN as the representatives of Western mass media seemingly attempt to promote the notion of democracy. The epitome of such practice appears as BBC and CNN takes the insurgents' side by representing the government of Egypt and Syria as the callous governments

which have infringed their people's right. Furthermore, (im)partiality in the texts is also signaled by the representation of the Egyptian and Syrian governments which contain mostly negative semantic loads. It is indicated as the Egyptian and Syrian governments are placed in the position of actor in material process with verbs containing negative semantic loads.

Second ideology which appears in texts is democracy. Democracy is defined to be the engagement of mundane citizens in the governing process. Such engagement could be direct or non direct (Morley, 2005). As stated earlier, texts of BBC and CNN seemingly support the forays of the Egyptian and Syrian citizens to uphold the democracy values in their countries. Egypt and Syria are presided by long-standing dictators and elites who gave limit of access to their citizens to take parts in the governing process. Henceforth, the civil wars raged in Egypt and Syria as the epitome of civil defiance. BBC and CNN headquartered in the democratic countries helps the citizens to achieve their goals by

revealing that both the Egyptian and Syrian governments had conducted deplorable actions toward their citizens. It is evidenced by the (im)partiality. The promotion of democracy by BBC and CNN has also created such conventional wisdom stating that dictatorship is never good to apply.

Third ideology which appears in the texts is consumerism. Kolb (2008) states that consumerism is related to demand-side economic theory. It can be inferred as the more consumption of goods or services the more revenue could come to a company's pocket. Therefore, the news articles of BBC and CNN are expected to be consumed by many people to elevate the prestige of the company or to jack up company's revenue. As already known, BBC and CNN are headquartered in United Kingdom and United States, meaning that the consumers of their products or services emanate from Western countries which adhere to democratic values. From this point, it could be assumed that the consumers of BBC and CNN despise the dictatorial Egyptian and Syrian governments for having

infringed their citizens' human right. Henceforth, BBC and CNN partially represent the Egyptian and Syrian governments from one side, namely the bad side. This practice might reflect that BBC and CNN also oppose the dictatorial Egyptian and Syrian governments. It could be assumed that when BBC and CNN disseminate the bad news about the Egyptian and Syrian government, such news articles could be lucrative goods.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be deduced that representation of social actor is a crucial aspect to probe how the media construct the image of particular social actors through the choice of language. Such lexicogrammatical choice causes different effects. Representation itself is the ramification of social construction of reality in linguistic form. The construction of reality must be influenced by the ideologies harbored. Therefore, representation and ideologies are inseparable. Ideology has become one of major component in critical discourse analysis because ideology has

become the life value for particular society.

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