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**MULTIDIMENSIONAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF YAZIDI
WOMEN'S IDENTITY IN THE DAILY MAIL AND PERSONAL
NARRATIVES: SENSATIONALISATION vs. SELF-
REPRESENTATION**

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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA
2025**



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Abstrak

Bermula daripada era kewartawanan cetakan awal sehinggalah ke era kewartawanan penyiaran dan digital, sensasionalisme secara konsistennya muncul sebagai teknik lazim untuk menarik perhatian khalayak dan membentuk persepsi awam. Penyelidikan mengenai sensasionalisme dalam wacana media bukan sekadar satu bentuk kepuasan intelektual, tetapi satu keperluan mutlak untuk memahami kuasa media. Kajian ini menggunakan strategi sensasionalisme dalam representasi wanita Yazidi untuk melihat bagaimana ciri-ciri linguistik khusus dalam wacana media mengenai minoriti membentuk dan kadangkala memutarbelitkan realiti semasa konflik. Walaupun penyelidikan sedia ada telah mengkaji pembinaan identiti wanita Yazidi, namun hanya sebilangan yang kajian telah mengkaji secara kritis kehalusan linguistik yang menyumbang kepada sensasionalisme dalam perwakilan media. Untuk menangani jurang kajian, tesis ini menjalankan analisis komprehensif yang memfokuskan pada pilihan leksikal, struktur sintaksis, dan keutamaan tematik dalam pelaporan berita. Ia menggunakan rangka kerja metodologi yang menyepadukan analisis wacana kritis dengan pandangan daripada linguistik berfungsi sistemik, teori feminis pascakolonial, dan teori naratif dan identiti sosial. Pendekatan ini membolehkan analisis tekstual dan kontekstual yang mendalam untuk mendedahkan faktor yang menyumbang kepada kualiti sensasi perwakilan media. Kajian ini menggunakan analisis wacana berteraskan korpus bagi berita yang diterbitkan oleh Mail Online dari 2014 hingga 2020, menggunakan alatan seperti NVivo 12, Alat UAM Corpus dan penanda XML untuk anotasi corak linguistik yang terperinci. Selain itu, temu bual dengan wanita yang terselamat daripada serangan 2014 telah melengkapkan analisis. Hasil kajian memperlihatkan strategi rujukan lazim dan kata kerja proses yang mengukuhkan stereotaip, menggambarkan wanita Yazidi sebagai mangsa kekal tanpa agensi. Sebaliknya, temu bual menyerlahkan daya tahan dan agensi mereka, sekali gus mendedahkan jurang yang ketara antara gambaran media dan pengalaman sebenar mereka. Penyelidikan ini menggariskan keperluan untuk alat dan metodologi yang canggih dalam kajian wacana, menggesa penilaian semula kritikal tentang cara media membentuk perspektif masyarakat tentang minoriti yang terjejas oleh konflik. Kesimpulannya, kajian ini menyokong pertimbangan semula pendekatan bercerita dalam kewartawanan konflik dan bahasa yang digunakan dalam penggambaran media, bertujuan untuk memupuk perwakilan yang lebih bernuansa dan bertanggungjawab.

Kata Kunci: Analisis wacana kritikal, Perwakilan media, Sensasionalisme, Linguistik fungsian sistemik, Identiti wanita Yazidi.

Abstract

Spanning from early print journalism to the era of broadcast and digital journalism, sensationalism has consistently emerged as a prevalent technique to attract audiences and shape public perception. Research into sensationalism in media discourse is no longer an intellectual indulgence but an absolute necessity for understanding media power. This research, drawing on sensationalist strategies with respect to the representation of Yazidi women, aims to reflect how specific choices in certain linguistic features of media discourse regarding minorities shape and sometimes distort reality during a conflict. While many of such works have addressed the construction of Yazidi women's identities, few have critically analysed the linguistic subtleties that make up the sensationalism of these constructions in the media. To bridge this gap, the thesis conducts a comprehensive analysis that examines lexical choices, syntactic structures, and thematic prioritisation across both media reports and interview data. Grounded in critical discourse analysis and informed by systemic functional linguistics, postcolonial feminist theory, and narrative and social identity theories, this study allows for in-depth textual and contextual analysis of the linguistic and discursive factors underpinning the sensational quality of both media representations and survivors' narratives. Using NVivo 12, the UAM Corpus Tool, and XML markup, the research employs a corpus-based discourse analysis of news stories from Mail Online (2014-2020) alongside interviews with Yazidi women survivors of the 2014 attack. The analysis drew on the frequency and distribution of referential strategies and transitivity patterns to uncover narrative strategies that help build up the potential for the sensational framing of these women. The findings revealed that media framed Yazidi women as passive victims, reinforcing sensationalist stereotypes. In contrast, interviews highlighted their resilience and agency, exposing a stark disparity between media portrayals and their lived experiences. This research calls for complex tools and methodologies in the field of discourse studies to critically reassess issues associated with how the media shapes society's perspective on conflict-affected minorities. In other words, the findings call for a review of reporting approaches within conflict journalism and the language used in media portrayal.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis, Media representation, Sensationalism, Systemic functional linguistics, Yazidi women's identity.

Acknowledgement

All acclaim is due to God for guiding me through the composition of this priceless thesis. I extol the name of the Almighty. During my doctoral journey, I have been blessed with the love and support of many wonderful people, many of whom I may not mention. Still, anyone who has completed doctoral work understands the necessity of having a strong support team.

Using this medium, I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to my exceptional mentors, namely my former supervisor, Dr. Sharifah Fazliyatun binti Shaik Ismail, and my current supervisor, Prof. Madya Dr. Manvender Kaur a/p Sarjit Singh. The magnitude of my appreciation for your collective endeavors is likely to remain beyond your comprehension at some point in time. Indeed, no more exceptional cohort of academics could have guided me through my doctoral studies. When I was lost, I appreciate your both pressing me at various angles and guiding me back on course. I am extremely grateful to you both for introducing me to things that continue to inspire and fascinate me. My current situation would not exist without you. Your presence truly motivates those who have the beneficial fortune to come into contact with you. I also owe gratitude to Professor Johanna E. Foster, Mrs. Sherizaan Minwalla, and Dr. Busra Nisa Sar for all the support rendered as I was searching for a way forward on my Ph.D. journey. Those scenarios still exist in me.

Furthermore, I am indebted to the participants (Yazidi women) for their invaluable assistance and for graciously dedicating their valuable time to me. Despite the challenges they have faced, their dedication to academic pursuits that aim to bring attention to their concerns is praiseworthy. As a result, I am extremely grateful to these participants for agreeing to participate in the interviews. Without your enthusiastic contribution, this research would have still been lingering behind. Thank you so much.

My sincere appreciation is extended to my beloved spouse, Dr. Omar Farouk Al Mashhour. He has unquestionably provided the bedrock since he entered my life during my doctoral journey with his steadfast encouragement, affection, and patience.

The fact that he can tolerate my sporadic outbursts demonstrates his unwavering devotion and affection. In addition, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my entire family, and the side of the family that belonged to my spouse, for their unwavering support, encouragement, and prayers. I would not even contemplate pursuing my ambitions overseas without their support.

Furthermore, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my remarkable and supportive family and friends, including Dr. Rebaz Ali, who stood by my side during my most trying moments and remained that way even as I laboured on my thesis. We have contributed so much to the world collectively, and for that, we will be eternally grateful. Those who have assisted, encouraged, and supported me along the way, including the faculty and students at UUM in Malaysia, especially Prof. Mina Harun, who has been an incredible support system, and my acquaintances from Jordan, Nigeria, Indonesia, Thailand, and Iraq, merit my deepest appreciation



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List of Abbreviations

AAVE	African American Vernacular English
APA	American Psychological Association
AWID	The Association for Women's Rights In Development
CACA	Computer-Assisted Corpus Approach
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CIF	Corpus-Integrated Framework
CL	Corpus Linguistics
COYWN	CORpus of Yazidi Women Narratives
COYWRONA	CORpus of Yazidi Women Representation in Online News Articles Corpus
DA	Discourse analysis
DIY	Do It Yourself
DRA	Dialectical-Relational Approach
ESP	English for specific purposes
GMMP	Global Media Monitoring Project
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham
KWIC	Key-Word-In-Context
MDA	Multimodal Discourse Analysis
NAC	The National Advisory Committee
NIT	Narrative Identity Theory
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PAO	Public Aid Organisation
PFT	Postcolonial Feminist Theories
SFL	Systemic Functional Linguistics
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SVAC	Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict
UN	United Nations

UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WAB	Women's Advisory Board
WHO	World Health Organisation
XML	Extensible Markup Language



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The subsequent sections explore the evolution of the media's trend in addressing women's oppression and examine how gender norms and prejudice against women influence views. Moreover, it will encompass the ongoing sexualisation, distortion, and marginalisation of women in media, compounded by conflict reporting and violations of women's rights. Further, this discussion facilitates the examination of the interaction between media portrayal, language, and gender inequality, endorsing the challenges and opportunities for change.

1.1.1 Evolving Trends and Media's Role in Combating Women's Oppression

The enhanced consciousness about the oppression and exploitation of women around the world has led to the emergence of revolutionary movements like MeToo and Break the Bias, which are meant to bring down the structures that uphold oppression by outing workplace harassers and fighting for gender equality policies (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Gender-based oppression has significant economic growth and public health implications: the World Economic Forum (2022) calculates that closing labour force participation gaps for both genders could bring trillions of dollars to global Gross Domestic Product, while the World Bank (2021) reports that gender inequality in health and education leads to lower productivity and higher healthcare costs. Indeed, global campaigns like UN Women's HeForShe, which engages men and boys in the struggle for gender equality, and the International Labour Organisation Violence and Harassment Convention, adopted in 2019, dealing with violence against women at

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APPENDICES A: Script to recruit community members

Hello. How are you? My name is (the researcher's name). (The name of the mediator) has told me that you may be someone who is interested in participating in a research study I am doing. This research is done to achieve the degree of Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics at the University of Utara Malaysia. I am interested in knowing what members of the Yazidi community think about themselves after the ISIS attack and the media coverage of Yazidis who have returned from ISIS captivity.

Just to clarify, I do not want to talk to women about their personal and traumatic experiences with ISIS. Instead, I want to talk to Yazidi community members about how they think about the concept of being Yazidi in everyday life and news coverage.

The interview takes between 30 minutes and an hour and involves me asking you questions that will be all visual or audio-recorded. The interview is completely voluntary. The participant will not receive money or other gifts in exchange for participation. You don't have to participate and can end the interview anytime. Also, we can assure you that we will not identify you by name, nor will I use any other information, including pictures of your children or your home, that could identify you. Moreover, while we do not wish to interview people in their homes, you may choose a place and time for the interview that is still private enough and comfortable for you.

I hope that this research will help raise awareness around the world about the media treatment of women and girls in the Yazidi community and promote ethical reporting in situations of conflict.

What do you think? Do you have any questions about my project? Would you be willing to schedule an interview?



APPENDICES B: Informed Consent for Yazidi Women Participants

Dear participant

We cordially invite you to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to explore the Yazidi women's perceptions of themselves after the ISIS attack and the media coverage of Yazidi women and girls who have returned to ISIS captivity. To help gain further insights into this topic, the researcher will ask you some open-ended interview questions. The interview will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete. The answers you provide to these questions will be recorded using the Zoom application. The researcher will hold your answers in strictest confidence. Only the researcher will have access to the audio and video files, which they will store in secure locations.

By research protocol, this informed consent statement will be shown to you without your name or signature requested, and the form will be returned to the researcher after you have verbally agreed to participate. Your participation in the studies is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to answer any questions or skip to answer another question without consequences or prejudice. You are also free to stop the interview at any time without consequence or prejudice. This study may benefit you by giving you the opportunity to share the information that you feel is important for people inside and outside the Yazidi community to know, and we also offer you the opportunity to share your opinion with people who value your perspective.

Any time during the interview, you can ask the researcher about the research or your role as a participant. You are also free to contact a researcher (Arazoo Rasool Ahmed;

07501387317; arezurasili@gmail.com) at any time after the interview. Moreover, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Dr. Manvender Kaur A/P Sarjit Singh (manvender@uum.edu.my; 0060125465304; UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA).

Although immediate risks are not anticipated, it is possible that some participants may experience discomfort when contemplating the actions of ISIS as well as one's own role in reporting on or assisting in the human rights crisis. It is also possible that some participants may experience some resistance from colleagues or community members as a result of their willingness to speak with the researcher. If your participation in the research causes you to feel uncomfortable in any way, or if our research prompts you to consider personal matters about which you are concerned, we encourage you to take advantage of the counseling and support service available and the Public Aid Organization (PAO) in Erbil (Director: Alwand Talaat; 07516396010; alwandtalaat@gmail.com or program@pao-iq.org).

Consent

The reader will be considered to have given informed consent to participate voluntarily in this study by taking the following actions: The reader must 1) read this letter in full; 2) verbally indicate to the researcher that they understand its contents; 3) verbally agree to participate; and 3) hand this consent letter back to the researcher to initiate the interview.

APPENDICES C: Yazidi Women Interview Questions' Script

Orienting Questions

- 1- In your experience, how have the ISIS attacks impacted the Yazidi community (men, women, children, etc.) as a whole? (Probe on ease/ difficulty of life post displacement- e.g. access to resources, stigmatisation, etc.)
- 2- How is honor defined in your community? What types of events/ experiences might elicit shame?
- 3- How has the definition of honor changed as a result of the attacks on Mt. Sinjar? Has your personal opinion or perception of honor has changed? Why or why not?

View of women/girls

- 4- How do you, yourself, view women and girls in your community who have returned from captivity? In what ways do you feel your view is similar to and/ or different from others in your community? Why?
- 5- What social and economic resources are currently available for women and children in your community? (mental health, education, protection, etc.)
- 6- How do you evaluate the progress of women after the ISIS attack? What do you feel is needed to improve the well-being of women and girls in the community at the moment?
- 7- What are the strengths of the Yazidi women at large (values, skills, religious beliefs, etc.)? how do you feel these strengths could be used to improve their conditions?

Media Coverage

[before asking these questions, the researcher will explain that these are about any news coverage that has done on the ISIS crisis toward the Yazidi community]

- 8- How do you see women and girls in news coverage that has been done on the attacks of Mt. Sinjar and afterward? Does the picture represented in news say the whole story about Yazidi women? If yes/no How? Do you know any cases that the story rendered by news media that is similar or unlike what you see or have heard in reality?
- 9- From what you have witnessed or heard from others how have journalists been successful in rendering the stories on the experiences of women and girls in the captivation of ISIS? If not, why?
- 10- In what way, if any, do you feel the lives of women and girls have changed after news coverage of Yazidi women and girls?
- 11- Do you know any stories to add to available news coverage of the Yazidi women and girls? If yes, can you describe it?
- 12- What concerns, if any, do you have about the ways the news reports have been covering the ISIS attack against the Yazidi people?
- 13- Additional comments or thoughts?

APPENDICES D: Sample XML Markup for Corpus Annotation

UAMCT 6.2e: Pilot study UAM

UAM CT Files Layers **Annotation** Search Statistics Lexis Help

Annotation Edit View Help

Subcorp: Texts Filename: RCDMA13.txt Layer: Social-Actor-Analysis Change

//Dozens of ISIS sex slaves have killed themselves//to escape rape and torture//reveals 'smuggler' who's devoted her life to rescuing girls 'sold like animals'//Dozens of Yazidis

Social-actor-analysis Reflexive Genitive-possessive Accusative

//MailOnline spoke to Aameena Saeed Hasan//a Yazidi mother -of-one who runs a 'smuggling operation' to rescue ISIS's sex slaves out of her apartment, and businessman Abu Shujaa who

Accusative Nominative Nominative Accusative

//They claim the girls who fail to escape//are killing themselves//so //they do not have to endure a single more day of rape, torture and beatings at the hands of their captors//

Nominative Reflexive Genitive-possessive

//Many girls lose hope when they are with ISIS//and //choose suicide//if they cannot find a way back//Aameena Saeed Hasan, a former Iraqi lawmaker, told MailOnline//

Nominative Nominative Nominative

Rescuer: //Mother-of-one Aameena Saeed Hasan, who runs a 'smuggling operation' to rescue Yazidis from her apartment, claims//dozens of them are committing suicide while in ISIS captivity//Loc

Nominative Nominative Nominative

Nicknamed the 'father of courage', Abu Shujaa has risked his life to rescue nearly 400 Yazidis (pictured) from ISIS Connected: Shujaa claims to have a vast 'underground network' of helpers who help

// 'We have lost contact with many girls //and I am sure//they have killed themselves, 'Aameena told MailOnline//

Nominative Accusative Nominative Nominative Reflexive Nominative

//I have some pictures of the girls who have committed suicide//she said//although //she refuses to share the pictures of the dead girls with anyone//

Nominative Accusative Nominative Nominative Accusative

//More than 500 Yazidi women and young girls were abducted by ISIS fighters//when they stormed the Sinjar region last August and slaughtered more than 5,000 of their men.

//Her daughter was only one year and five-months-old//and he killed her right in front of her eyes//Aameena Saeed Hasan //Those who were lucky enough to escape have told

Genitive-possessive Accusative Genitive-possessive

The girls who contact Aameena for help are no different.

//Ten days ago we helped one girl escape with her children, '//Aameena said//, pausing to steady her emotions, '//But the ISIS fighter who abused her//also//killed her c

Selected	To Choose	Fields	Comment
social-actor-analysis	nominative accusative genitive-possessive reflexive (add feature)		