Engagement patterns in the reporting of the Arab-Israeli conflict in Al Jazeera English and the Washington Post

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Abstract

This study examines the portrayal of the Arab-Israeli conflict in two international newspapers: Al Jazeera English (AJE) and The Washington Post (WP). It explores the dialogic *engagement* within appraisal patterns in news reporting in two key events of the Deal of the Century and the Great Marches of Return. A total of 230 news texts (117 from WP and 113 from AJE) were examined, revealing differing *engagement* strategies of *endorsement*, *attestation*, and *acknowledgement*. AJE often critiqued US's bias and gave precedence to Arab opposition to the Israeli occupation and US policies. WP, on the other hand, framed the conflict in the light of the US's interests, often overlooking Arab grievances. The language used in conflict reporting plays a crucial role, and journalists need to recognise how their emotional evaluation could either obstruct or promote pathways to peaceful resolutions.

Keywords: Engagement, Appraisal Analysis, News Reporting, Discourse Analysis, Arab-Israeli Conflict

1.   Introduction

The Arab-Israeli conflict has long centred around competing national aspirations, land ownership, security concerns, and historical and religious narratives. After World War II, the British government offered political recognition for a Jewish homeland in Palestine and established a two-state Israel and Palestine (Al-Khanji, 2018). Backed by the United States (US), the State of Israel was declared on May 14, 1948. The strong opposition from Palestinians and Arab countries sparked a military conflict causing Palestinians to flee their homes and become refugees across the Gaza Strip, West Bank and other Arab countries (Pappe, 2022).

In 2018, the US proposed the Deal of the Century peace agreement. The Deal recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and promised economic development in the Middle East (Asseburg, 2019). However, Palestinians and Arabs felt this had undermined the internationally endorsed two-state solution, their claims to Jerusalem and aspirations for a future capital. In reaction, Palestinians in Gaza organised protests known as the Great Marches of Return to demand their right to return to their ancestral lands since being displaced in 1948 (Asseburg, 2019). These historical squabbles remain unresolved and more recently the 7th October 2023 attack, which was

reportedly triggered by the Hamas militant, has led the ongoing retaliation by Israel on Palestinian land.

Media representation of the conflict is driven by distinct appraisal systems and emotional evaluations. Different media platforms provide contrasting perspectives, reflecting a spectrum of sentiments. For instance, the Deal of the Century received mixed reactions, with some seeing it as a path to peace and others criticising its perceived bias towards Israeli interests (Warshagha, 2019). The Great Marches of Return were interpreted differently, with some emphasising Palestinian rights and others highlighting alleged politicisation and violence (Alshurafa, 2021; Hart, 2022). The relocation of the US embassy to Jerusalem also sparked intense debates, with some viewing it as a recognition of Israel's historical ties to the city and others as a setback for a two-state solution and Palestinian interests. Discussions on Palestinian return rights generated impassioned debates, with proponents advocating justice for the diaspora and sceptics questioning feasibility and regional consequences.

Political and media discourses enforce and challenge the power structures which then contribute to either conflict perpetuation or resolution. This underscores the need for a nuanced and empathetic discursive approach that contributes towards conflict resolution. The existing literature often overlooks the complexity of media narratives and their impact on public perception and policy discourse, a gap that the current study seeks to address. By analysing how the two different media outlets frame the conflict, this research will illuminate the media discourse and public news consumption, offering insights into the mechanisms by which narratives either escalate or mitigate conflict. This study is essential for fostering a deeper understanding of the conflict dynamics and for promoting a more informed and constructive dialogue in the quest for peace.

2.   Literature Review

While extant research on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has delineated various facets of media discourse and its profound impact on public perception and international relations, recent scholarly contributions highlight an urgent need for an in-depth examination of ideological influences, interpersonal assessments, and the narrative framing within contemporary media coverage of the conflict.

Among the significant research on ideological influence and media framing within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is, for instance, Baidoun (2014) who unveiled the ideological layers affecting the narrative construction, spotlighting the media's pivotal role in propagating specific ideologies that shape public sentiment and international perspectives. Çetinkaya (2023) elucidated the portrayal of Palestinian citizens in Israeli media, underscoring how national ideologies significantly skew media discourse, influencing societal perceptions and intensifying political tensions. This was also echoed in Younis (2021) exploration of selective narrative crafting, which systematically marginalises or highlights certain demographic groups, influencing the discourse surrounding human rights and social justice in the region. Panayotova and Rizova (2021) provided a comparative analysis of the 2021 Israeli-Palestinian conflict coverage by Al Jazeera, BBC, and CNN, revealing how varied narrative frames led to divergent public understandings and responses to the same events. This disparity in narrative frames underscores the impact of media perspectives on global perceptions.

Discourse studies exploring the processes of othering and stigmatisation of racial groups are abundant including antisemitism research. It is important to note that this study focuses on journalistic stances towards the Arab-Israeli conflict without any intention to advocate for or imply an antisemitism sentiment. In the 2023 Gaza War, public opinions which supported the Palestinians against the Israeli government were framed as anti-Zionism which was inspired by antisemitism (Agnew, 2023). Baidoun (2014) who studied both the left and right wings of the Israeli and Palestinian media found all media framed social actors to create distance between the two sides. Kandil's (2007) corpus research showed that Al Jazeera, CNN and the BBC were selective in terms of topics to be emphasised, downplayed or left out to control the positive and negative representations of the differing actors involved. The Palestinian national identity itself had also been understood and used as both the promoter of peace and conflict (Mattson, 2013). Conflict reporting is primarily controlled by dominant stance that shapes news language and meaning to communicate beliefs. Such a stance leads to news discourse that affects the ways people see or experience the conflict (Miller-Graff & Cummings, 2017).

One prominent feature of news discourse is its reliance on accounts of events within the narration or news stories by journalists (Bell, 1991; Cotter, 2010; Tiffen et al., 2014; Van Dijk, 1988). In this sense, journalists do not only mediate "the wider socio-political environment to its audience" (Tiffen, 1989, p. 32) via quoting different news sources but also weigh their positions.

The selection, deselection, and framing of news sources are intimately connected with reporters' personal, professional, and cultural beliefs (Caldas-Coulthard, 1994). This aligns with Stubbs (1996, p. 197) who contends that "whenever speakers (or writers) say anything, they encode their point of view towards it". Journalistic quoting practices are therefore critical means to construct, negotiate, perpetuate and sustain (unequal) journalistic positions and power relations (Bednarek, 2006; Jullian, 2011; White, 2012).

News journalism also relies heavily on appraisals, sculpting narratives to align with journalists' perceived audience preferences, dictating hierarchy, emphasising or marginalising events, and favouring conflict-driven discourse (Oteíza, 2017). Journalists' quest for engagement inadvertently introduces biases, potentially distorting objective reality (Song, 2021). Despite many studies addressing ideological nuances in news (Al-Najjar, 2009; Wodak & Forchtner, 2018), a gap exists in the literature concerning appraisal resources, particularly in the context of events like the Deal of the Century and Great Marches of Return; hence, these two central events in the Arab-Israeli conflict are the foci of the study here. Further, with arguments of news stances outlined above, they inevitably necessitate a critical discourse approach to analysing and interpreting data.

The current study uses a critical discourse lens (Fairclough, 2018) as well as Martin and White's (2005) *engagement* framework to dissect the strategic use of dialogic tools such as *endorsement*, *attestation* and *acknowledgement*. By employing the *engagement* system within appraisal study, this study assesses how media constructs and disseminates various stances during key events such as the Deal of the Century and the Great Marches which led to the Rights of Return Protests. The approach illuminates the pivotal role of appraisal mechanisms in shaping journalistic discourse and stance formation. The study compares data from an Arab news outlet, Al Jazeera *(*English) (AJE), and the American Washington Post (WP) as these two outlets offer a global perspective on this issue besides being the most read Arab and US media outlets respectively. This study has its significance in calling for a more responsible practice in shaping public opinion and an inclusive approach to facilitating the understanding of peaceful conflict resolution.

3.   Analytical Framework: Appraisal and *Engagement*

The appraisal system by Martin and White (2005) is a framework for dissecting how language serves interpersonal functions. It unpacks the way writers utilise linguistic tools to navigate

emotions, judgements, and evaluations, offering insight into their subjective interpretations of text (see Figure 1).
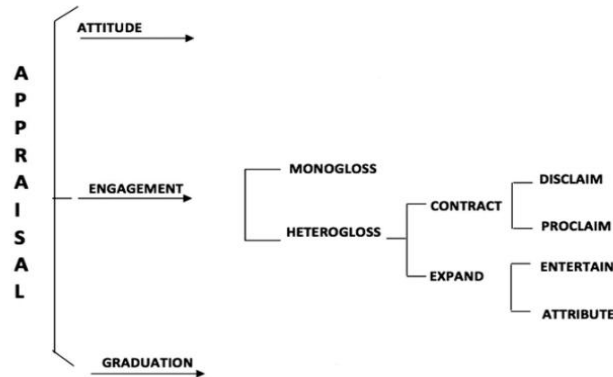

Figure 1. Outlining the Appraisal Framework (adapted from Martin & White, 2005, p. 23)

The appraisal system operates within three semantic domains: *attitude, engagement, and graduation. Attitude* explores personal opinions and emotions; *engagement* focuses on how writers align or distance themselves from alternative perspectives, and *graduation* scales these feelings and opinions in discourse (Mirzaaghabeyk, 2022). This paper, however, is limited to *engagement* in discourse, i.e., how writers position themselves concerning the values conveyed and the expected audience due to space limitation.

Engagement is about weaving meanings from prior sayings, potential viewpoints, and foreseeable feedback (Dong & Fang, 2023). It goes beyond recognising alternative voices; it involves the balance between acknowledging opposing views and potentially limiting them. Martin and White (2005) categorised utterances into heteroglossic (acknowledging diverse external voices) and monoglossic (insulated, sidelining alternative perspectives) (see Figure 1). *Engagement* can be anticipatory, considering reader reactions and pre-emptively addressing counterarguments, or reflective, responding to previously voiced perspectives. Furthermore, engagement resources, like *contraction* and *expansion* can either invite diverse voices into the discourse or narrow down the dialogue, discounting potential counter-voices.

3.1 Contract

Contraction resources in discourse serve to limit or exclude certain dialogic alternatives, segmenting them into two principal categories: *disclaim* and *proclaim* (Martin & White, 2005, p. 117). While *disclaim* directly rejects or supplements viewpoints, *proclaim* actively challenges or excludes them (Figure 2). Notably, in journalistic stance studies, by leveraging the framework by Martin and White (2005), Huan (2018) identified the *contract* dimension primarily as the *proclaim* category and *expand* predominantly as *attribution* (Figure 2).
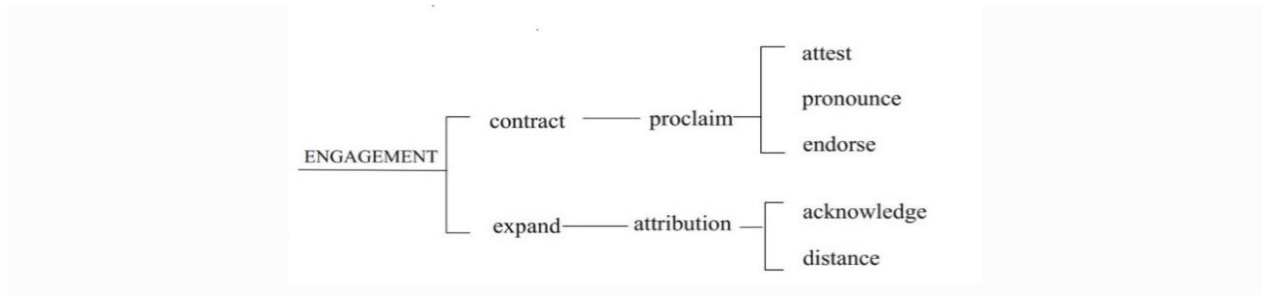

Figure 2. A modified model for coding engagement by Huan (2018, p. 23)

Engagement strategies subtly embedding valuations through quoting and projection, significantly influence journalistic stance underscoring the role of news as a conduit for knowledge. Despite its appearance of objectivity, this stance can steer readers towards particular viewpoints, prompting the need for critical awareness to unveil these subtle biases (Allington & Swann, 2009).

3.2 Expand

Martin and White (2005) categorised *expand* into two facets: *entertain* and *attribute* (Figure 1). Within *entertain*, linguistic elements such as modal verbs, modal attributes, adverbs, and mental verbs come into play. They facilitate an exploration of varying degrees of probability, thus preventing the discourse from succumbing to a monolithic, singular voice. On the contrary, *attribute* is dedicated to presenting external propositions, meticulously untangling them from the author's voice. This detachment is achieved through mechanisms like direct and indirect reported speeches and thoughts. Further by Huan (2018) as seen in Figure 2, the *attribute* category itself harbours subtleties; *distance* involves the author explicitly distancing themselves from the cited material, underscoring its external nature. Conversely, *acknowledge* simply presents the external voice without taking a clear stance regarding the presented viewpoint. Overall, while the *expand*

resources contribute to the richness of discourse, the *contract* resources serve as a counterbalance, guiding discourse towards a more restrained direction.

The media landscape being both mono- and heteroglossic carries the voices of various social actors such as journalists, experts, politicians, and the public. On one hand, this may enrich the discourse, on the other, the choices made by these actors, or how these social actors are represented, such as whom to highlight or sideline and which aspects to emphasise, frequently carry biases, from legitimising specific viewpoints to undermining others. Coesemans (2012) further argued that discerning the influences of various actors can enhance media literacy, but this enhancement hinges on an active and engaged audience. It begs the question of whether news consumers are actively deconstructing these narratives or passively absorbing them (Wong, 2017). This raises pressing concerns regarding the authenticity and impartiality of news discourse (Van Dijk, 2013).

4.   Methodology

The study employs descriptive and qualitative methods, anchored in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), to examine political speeches and news texts. Specifically, it leverages Fairclough's socio-dialectical framework to explore the appraisal approach within CDA, focusing on the *engagement* system's role in shaping news that influences public perceptions and ideologies (Figure 3). It critically examines the *engagements* of AJE and WP journalists i.e. curating of the dialogic space to reshape perceptions regarding the Israeli-Arab conflict through tools like *endorsement, attestation,* and *acknowledgement*. The journalistic stances dialectically provide insights into institutional practices including political influences of the discourses.
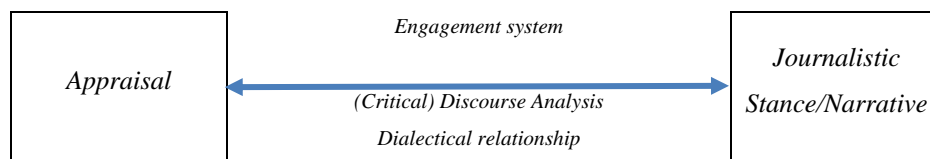

Figure 3. The conceptual-analytical framework of study

The analysis concentrated on the first nine months of the 2018 Great Marches of Return Protests (30 March and 30 December 2018), a period marked by significant global attention due

to its socio-political ramifications. *Al Jazeera* (English) (AJE) and the *Washington Post* (WP) online news were selected as the data sources. AJE, based in Qatar, is one of the most significant Arab daily newspapers with a focus on global news, particularly in the Middle East (Al Najjar, 2009). On the other hand, WP, based in Washington D.C., has a substantial readership both within the US and is rated as the highest-read newspaper across the world (Audit Bureau of Circulations US[2]). The selection of these two English news outlets for analysis in the study is strategically rooted in their universal reach with offices around the world making them prominent key players in shaping public opinion. They provide the Eastern and Western perspectives in reporting the same events but with distinct orientations, attitudes, and ideologies.

The data were sourced from the webpages of the newspapers studied as well as from the LexisNexis database. After data cleaning, concordance lines were analysed with the aid of a corpus software (WordSmith Version 8), which were then further tagged, sorted and counted using the Excel software functions.

5.   Results

5.1   Distribution of *Engagement* across the Corpora

An overview of prevalent tendencies of the engagement patterns in terms of *contract* and *expand* is encapsulated in Table 1.

Table 1. Key *engagement* patterns in each corpus

No	Engagement	AJE Corpus		WP Corpus	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1	Attest	67	6 %	4	3 %
2	Endorse	58	4 %	70	4 %
3	Pronounce	25	2 %	32	2 %
	Contract	**150**	**12 %**	**148**	**9 %**
4	Acknowledge	1150	87 %	1387	89 %
5	Distance	16	1 %	20	2 %
	Expand	**1166**	**88 %**	**1407**	**91 %**
Total		**1316**	**100 %**	**1555**	**100 %**

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[2] http://auditedmedia.com

Table 1 shows that in the *expand* category, characterised primarily by *acknowledge*, dominates both AJE (N=15, 87%) and WP (N=1387, 89%) while distance is significantly less (AJE with N =16, 1%; WP with N=20, 2%). This indicates a preference for an open dialogic space that incorporates different voices, including those with challengeable, contingent, and contestable stances. The *contract* category, however, carries a much lower occurrence (AJE N=15, 12% and WP N=148, 9%). Through *contract*, journalists employ direct accounts (*attest*) and *endorsed* other voices to a considerable extent. These engagement patterns were found to align with themes such as international law violations, the peace process, conflict consequences, and humanitarian concerns within the Israeli-Arab conflict discourse. Due to space limitation, this study only delineates analyses of the top three engagement patterns which are *acknowledge*, *attest* and *endorse* as evident in Table 1.

Various actors contributed to the unique perspectives based on their roles and concerns, encompassing political entities discussing Hamas and the peace process, civilian voices highlighting the conflict's tangible impact and the need for ceasefires, and militants offering tactical insights. These dynamics are depicted in the *engagement* markers in Table 1 and further visualised in Figure 4, illustrating how journalists balanced these voices to reflect the multifaceted nature of the Israeli-Arab conflict.
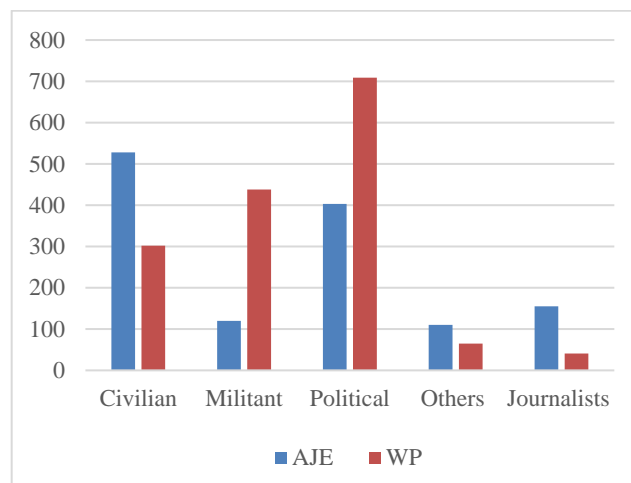

Figure 4. Distribution of actors across the corpora

Figure 4 highlights distinct editorial choices in AJE and WP regarding actor representation. AJE prioritise civilian narratives (40%), suggesting a commitment to humanised stories, while WP dedicates only 20%. Conversely, WP explore militant actors more extensively (28%) compared to AJE (10%), suggesting a focus on conflict intricacies. In politics, WP (45%) surpassed AJE (30%), indicating a focus on the geopolitical context. AJE exceled in spotlighting other actors and journalists. These choices invite critical reflection on potential editorial inclinations, biases, or unintended narrative consequences.

5.2   Distribution of *Contract* Patterns Across Social Actors' Representation

This segment focuses on *contract* patterns, particularly the *attest* and *endorse* elements, in tandem with social actors in news discourse. By strategically elevating certain voices and muting or constraining others, news writers curate the narrative's tonality, subtly guiding readers towards a particular perspective or consensus. Such tactics are not merely stylistic choices; they cultivate dialogic relationships, transforming propositions into seemingly unassailable truths or validated positions. Figures 5 and 6 outline the frequency of these patterns in relation to social actors, showing the dominant *contract* patterns and their alignments with specific actors in AJE and WP narratives.
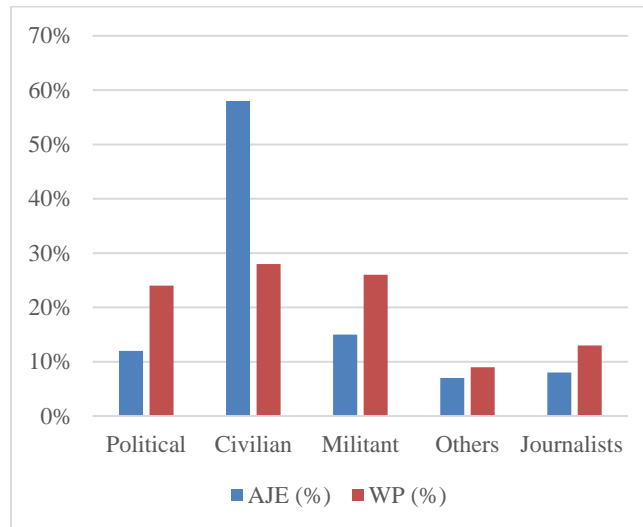

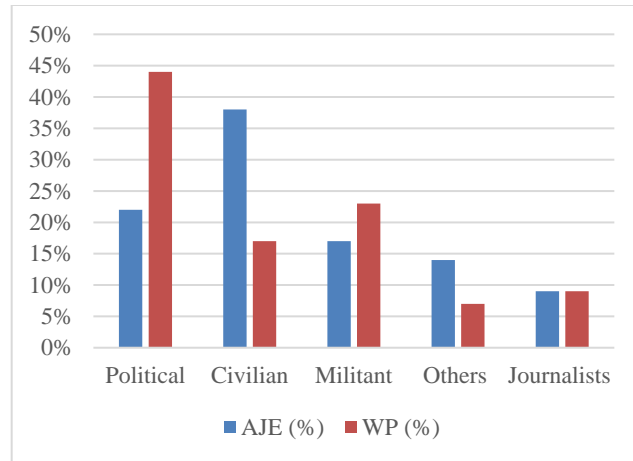**Figure 5. Distribution of *attest* across the corpora**

Figure 6. Distribution of *endorse* patterns across the actors in the corpora

Figures 5 and 6 underscore significant differences in how AJE and WP structure their news narratives by employing *contract* patterns. This orchestration serves to define events and characters while solidifying their stance in the news ecosystem. A closer look at the data reveals disparities in the use of *attest* and *endorse* across social factions in both newspapers. AJE gives prominence to civilians with 58% (N=39) of *attest,* in stark contrast to WP's 28% (N=13). Conversely, WP leans towards political actors with 24% (N=11) compared to AJE's 12% (N=8).

Similarly, the *endorse* feature shows differences. AJE favours civilian voices, accounting for 38% (N=22), while 17% (N=12) in WP. WP leans towards political and militant figures with 44% (N=31) and 23% (N=16), respectively, whereas AJE assigned 22% (N=13) to political actors and 17% (N=10) to militants. These statistics reveal the editorial inclinations of the newspapers, emphasising specific social players, possibly reflecting their organisational ethos, target audience, or geopolitical perspectives.

The distinct utilisation of dialogic spaces becomes evident when analysing the construction of their narratives. These spaces, crafted by news writers, exemplify selective highlighting - a choice of sources and perspectives shaping events and characters within the news ecosystem. These disparities are not coincidental but a reflection of each newspaper's editorial strategy, worldview, and priorities.

Below are excerpts from WP exemplifying the mechanics of how *contractive* dialogic resources were employed.

(1) "I **saw** Palestinian terrorists broke into a home in the settlement of Itamar and massacred an entire family," an Israeli soldier in Hamish told Washington post (WP-27-APR-2018)

(2) "We **saw** very brave Israeli officers who have achieved an agreement with a group that they are always seen as terrorists," Omri Reftov, an Israeli raised in Tel Aviv said (WP-12-APR-2018)

(3) Netanyahu **noted** Hamas statement, there is no long-term diplomatic solution, and he **saw** Hamas members threatening Israeli which increases the hostility with the Palestinians (WP-27-APR-2018)

The WP's examples focus on "seeing" which creates immediacy and authenticity, drawing readers into the events. For instance, Example (1) provides an Israeli soldier's harrowing account that adds complexity to the Israel-Palestine narrative, substantiated by "saw." Example (2) showcases civilian perspectives, highlighting trust, betrayal, and diplomacy while Example (3) spotlights Netanyahu's active engagement, painting him as an attentive leader. These examples highlight WP's approach to news reporting, emphasising first-hand accounts, concrete evidence, and sensory experiences enhancing the credibility of the narratives. WP appears to favour the Israeli perspective, often portraying them as victims of the conflict. This bias is evident in the presentation of personal stories and reactions from Israelis directly affected by the situation. Furthermore, the sourcing from Israeli agencies and narratives solidifies this bias. The spotlight on Israeli civilian accounts evokes empathy, humanising the Israeli side of the narrative. The narrative also tends to frame Palestinians, especially militant groups, as instigators or terrorists, stressing Israeli trauma and hardships while contrasting them with perceived threats. The discourse underscores Israeli efforts at negotiation, portraying them positively, and suggesting a one-sided approach, while subtly implying a lack of reciprocation from the Palestinian side.

Conversely, AJE reporters predominantly draw upon external sources that highlight Israeli measures against Palestinians, framing them primarily as blameless casualties of Israeli operations, as exemplified in Examples (4) to (7).

(4) ICC **found** that six hospitals, nine healthcare centers, and there was no justification for live fire. It also censured the Israeli government for systematic discrimination against the Palestinian citizens. (AJE-29-APR-2018)

(5) "Security Council refused **to see** massive Israeli aerial bombardments, killing more than 2,000 Palestinians," Abbas cited the Jerusalem announcement. (AJE-27-APR-2018)

(6) "Israeli officials were slammed for a policy that **saw** Palestinian family homes repeatedly targeted over supposed links to armed faction members," Haydee Dijkstal, an international criminal and human rights lawyer added. (AJE-12-APR-2018)

(7) "We **watched** two soldiers get out of a military jeep, kneel and aim their guns at us, taking up a sniper stance, Razan and saw her point to her back and then fall down" Rami Abu Jazar, 29, a volunteer paramedic from Khan Younis told Al-Jazeera. (AJE-18-JUL-2018)

AJE writers scrutinise Israeli actions against Palestinian citizens, drawing upon authoritative external sources to assert a perspective. AJE portrays Palestinians as victims of Israeli aggression, leveraging the International Criminal Court's (ICC) condemnation of unwarranted violence and deliberate targeting of essential facilities as seen in Example (4). The ICC's verdict, characterised by the verb "*found*," amplifies the indictment of Israel's systemic prejudice. Furthermore, AJE subtly critiques the Security Council's perceived indifference towards Palestinian suffering, suggesting a deliberate blindness. By humanising the narrative through personal anecdotes as shown in Example (5), AJE evokes a visceral connection to Palestinian struggles, while highlighting Israeli officials' targeted assaults on Palestinian homes in Example (6) and apparent attacks on non-combatants as in Example (7). AJE's multifaceted approach integrates institutional judgements and individual experiences to construct a cohesive narrative. It emphasises alleged Israeli transgressions and the disproportionate human toll on Palestinians.

The selection of *endorsed* and *attested* voices is not arbitrary; it reflects a deliberate effort to validate certain perspectives while marginalising others. By presenting specific sources as authoritative, journalists subtly steer readers towards preferred narratives. However, this controlled discourse may overlook alternative viewpoints, limiting a comprehensive understanding. News reporting entails a choreographed narrative construction, where information

inclusion and exclusion sculpt a particular storyline. Recognising this dynamic is crucial for news consumers, fostering critical thinking and a more nuanced approach to interpreting reported events.

The juxtaposition of AJE's and WP's utilisation of *attested* sources illustrates how news organisations interpret events through distinct lenses shaped by their organisational ethos, geographical location, target audience, and underlying biases. WP appears to foreground voices that highlight Palestinian militancy, potentially framing Israeli responses as defensive measures. This portrayal could sway public opinion to view Palestinian actions as provocations, legitimising Israeli reactions. Conversely, AJE focuses on the humanitarian struggles of Palestinians, particularly under the Israeli blockade, portraying them as victims of systemic aggression. By highlighting power imbalances, AJE aims to evoke empathy for Palestinians. Such differing approaches underscore the subjectivity in journalism, where editorial policies and audience expectations influence narrative construction.

5.3 Distribution of *Expand* Across the Corpora

This section delineates how journalists attribute utterances to external sources, moving beyond mere attribution to examine the discerning choices made which are amplifying certain voices, resonating with specific narratives, and aligning with preferred perspectives. Table 2 outlines the distribution of social actors linked to the attribute *acknowledge* within the corpus studied.

Table 2. Distribution of actors associated with *acknowledge* patterns in the corpora

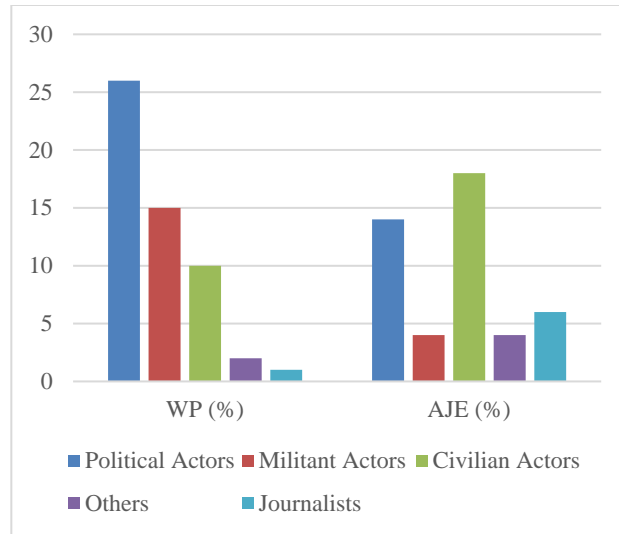| NP	Political Actors		Militant Actors		Civilian Actors		Others		Journalists		Total Occurrences	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
WP	642	26 %	400	15 %	264	10 %	52	2 %	29	1 %	1387	54 %
AJE	372	14 %	93	4 %	451	18 %	94	4 %	140	6 %	1150	46 %
Total	**1014**	**40 %**	**493**	**19 %**	**715**	**28 %**	**146**	**6 %**	**169**	**7 %**	**2537**	**100%**

Figure 7. Distribution of actors associated with *acknowledge* patterns

Table 2 shows that political figures dominate the discourse with 40% of *acknowledge*, highlighting the focus on political realms such as agreements and endorsements. Militant actors contribute 19%, suggesting *acknowledgement's* role in conflict resolution. Civilian actors at 28% extends *acknowledgement* beyond politics, recognising societal contributions. The 'Others' category introduces ambiguity at 6%. In a comparative analysis (see Figure 7), WP prioritised political voices (26%) over AJE (14%), reflecting a political *acknowledgement* orientation. Conversely, AJE emphasises civilian voices (18%) more, showcasing a broader *acknowledgement* approach. Militant sources are less mediated in AJE (4%) than in WP (15%). Additionally, AJE includes journalists and 'Others' (10%), amplifying diverse perspectives. Notably, the verb "*said*" emerged as the most frequent word, revealing reliance on attributing sources. This intertextuality, as noted by Martin and White (2005), presents a veneer of neutrality while subtly conveying implied positions. Thus, while striving for objectivity, journalists subtly influence reader interpretation through their choice of language and source attribution.

5.4   Patterns of *Acknowledge* Across Social Actors in the Corpora

The study adopts a pragmatic approach, focusing on the pervasive *acknowledge* marker, notably "*said*", within AJE and WP. With 606 occurrences in AJE and 774 in WP, "*said*" serves as a primary vehicle for *acknowledgement* in both sources. The WordSmith corpus software was used to facilitate collocation observation within a 5:5 window around the node word "*said*".

Figure 8 visually represents these concordances, emphasising the significance of word associations. By employing this nuanced examination, the sub-section offers insights into how news sources *acknowledge* external information within thematic contexts.
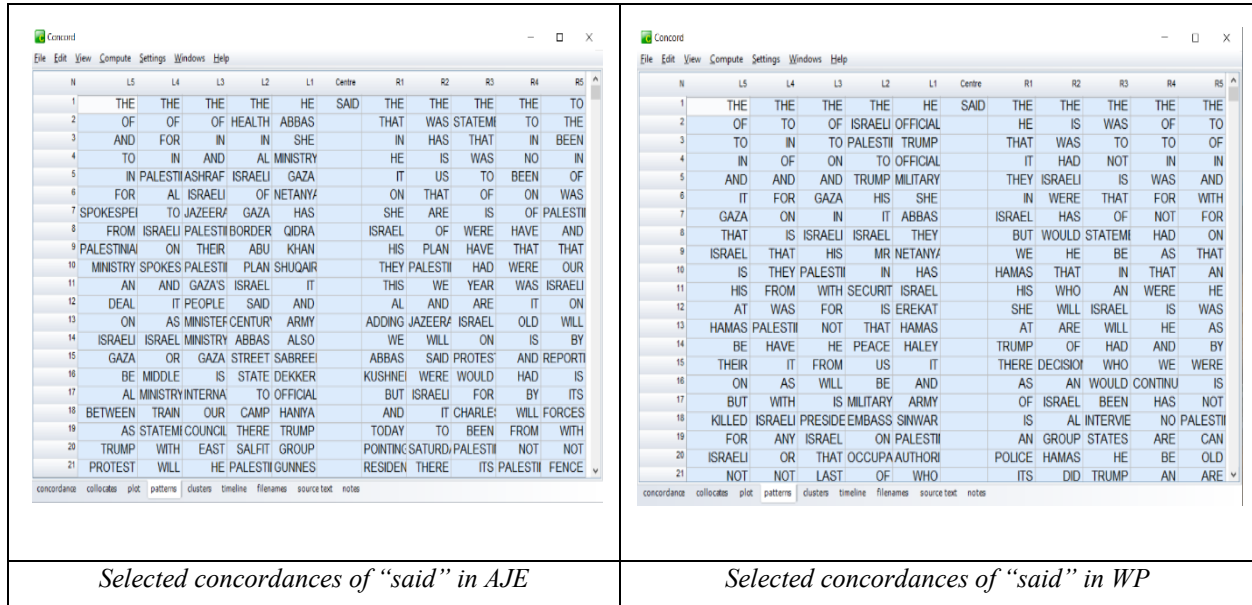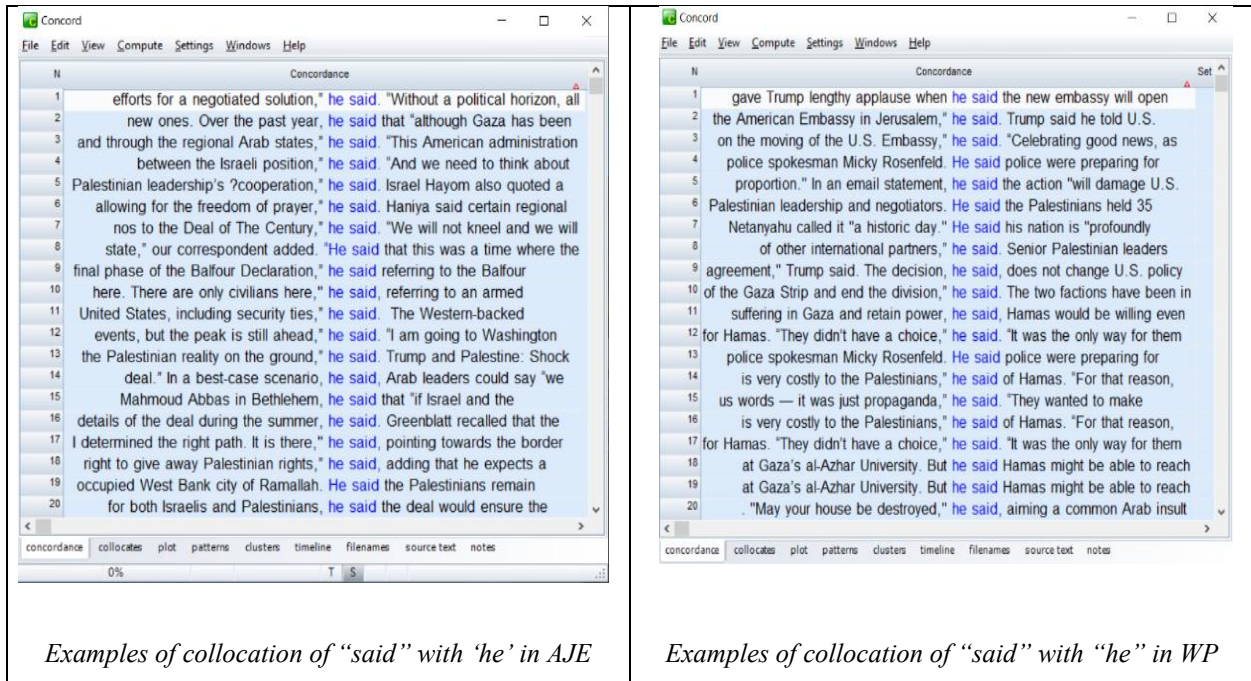

| Selected concordances of "said" in AJE | Selected concordances of "said" in WP |

Figure 8. Selected concordances of "said" in AJE and WP corpora

Figure 8 also showcases that in both the AJE and WP corpora, the term "*said*" was most frequently collocated with "he" as seen in the column marked "*L1*". In AJE, this is followed by "Abbas", "she", "they", and other terms, whereas in WP, "he" is followed by "official", "Trump", "Israel", and others. A further examination reveals distinct patterns: AJE mediates Palestinian and Arab voices, evidenced by collocations with terms like "Abbas", "Palestinian Ministry of Health", and "Netanyahu". In contrast, WP emphasises American and Israeli official voices, as seen with "US officials" and "Israeli military".

It was further observed that there is a high prevalence of "he" as a gender-specific identifier shaping language use and attribution patterns. Figure 9 illustrates how "he" is positioned within news narratives.

| Examples of collocation of "said" with 'he' in AJE | Examples of collocation of "said" with "he" in WP |

Figure 9.   Examples of collocation of "said" with "he" in AJE and WP corpora

The research further undertook a manual examination of all concordances involving the searched collocation "said" with "he". Table 3 presents the frequency of this "said" collocation with "he" within the two corpora. Table 3 provides an insightful breakdown of "said" collocations with "he" in the AJE and WP corpora, unveiling *acknowledgement* patterns within these sources. In AJE, Arab civilian sources are prioritised, constituting 38% (N=229), followed by Arab political sources at 27% (N=166). Israeli political sources received 11% *acknowledgement*, while Israeli civilians were *acknowledged* at 6%. Other official voices were represented by 8%, and Palestinian and Israeli militants accounted for 6% and 3% respectively. Journalistic sources were the least frequent at 1%. Conversely, WP prioritised Israeli political sources at 34% (N=263), with Israeli militants following at 22%. Arab political and civilian sources are *acknowledged* at 14% and 9% respectively, while Palestinian militants and Israeli civilians each receive 9% *acknowledgement*. Other official and journalistic sources collectively represent 3% of the data.

Table 3. Distribution of "said" collocation associated with "he" across the corpora

Acknowledge Sources	AJE		WP	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Arab political Sources	166	27 %	110	14 %
Israeli Political Sources	66	11 %	263	34 %
Arab Civilian Sources	229	38 %	70	9 %
Israeli Civilian Sources	34	6 %	69	9 %
Palestinian Militant Sources	34	6 %	69	9 %
Israeli Militant Sources	21	3 %	164	22 %
Journalistic Sources	8	1 %	12	1 %
Other Official Sources	48	8 %	17	2 %
Total	**606**	**100 %**	**774**	**100%**

Examples from both newspapers illustrate how voices related to themes like the Deal of the Century and the Relocation of the US Embassy to Jerusalem are mediated, showcasing distinctive *acknowledgement* strategies. The following are some concordance line examples from WP:

(8) "I want to make one point very clear: This decision is not intended in any way to reflect a departure from our strong commitment to facilitate a lasting peace agreement," **He** (**Trump**) said. (WP-18-Jun-2018)

(9) **He** (**Kushner**) said recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital is not only a "necessary condition for achieving peace," but also "in the best interests of the United States of America." (WP-12-July-2018)

(10) "No country alone can solve a regional or international conflict, without the participation of other international partners," **He** (**Abbas**) said. (WP-24-April-2018)

WP endeavours to give precedence to the voices that praise the Deal and *acknowledges* it as a big chance that should be seized for the two sides of Arabs and Israelis. For instance, in Example (8), Trump's commitment to moving the American Embassy to Jerusalem is presented with certainty, suggesting fulfilment of peace commitments. In Example (9), Kushner's positive portrayal of recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital aligns with pro-US policy perspective. Similarly, Abbas's emphasis on international cooperation in *Example* (10) advocates for collaborative conflict resolution, aligning with a globalist perspective, alleviating suffering and

resolving regional conflicts. These attributions not only convey the statements' content but also subtly position the writers' perspectives within the international political narrative, influencing readers' perceptions of these geopolitical issues.

In contrast to WP's depiction, AJE's discourse offers a starkly different perspective, emphasising Arab voices vehemently rejecting the US-led deal. AJE writers focus on Palestinian resistance to the proposed agreement, portraying it as a threat to their rights and Jerusalem's significance. They highlight the unified Palestinian rejection of the plan's terms and its potential impact on their land, rights, and political sovereignty. AJE underscores Palestinian and Arab determination to retain control over Jerusalem and opposes any deal seen as undermining their aspirations, as demonstrated by the ensuing examples:

(11) "This was a time where the Palestinians needed to get together because Jerusalem is the religious, cultural and political capital of Palestine." **He** said,… " the US President <u>Donald Trump</u>'s long-awaited <u>Middle East plan</u> is completely denounced, it is "aggressive" and "one-sided"". **He** (**King of Joran, Abdallah II**) said. (AJE-30-MAY-2018)

(12) "After the nonsense that we heard today we say a thousand nos to the Deal of The Century," **he** (<u>Hamas</u> **leader Ismail Haniya**) said. (AJE-13-Sept-2018)

(13) "Trump's statement about Jerusalem is nonsense and Jerusalem will always be a land for the Palestinians … The Palestinians will confront this deal and Jerusalem will remain a Palestinian land," **he** (**the senior official for Hamas**) said. (AJE-30-MAY-2018)

(14) **He** (**Palestinian Authority minister Ziyad Abu Zayyad**) said "the plan is completely unacceptable to the Palestinians" …., "We will never give up Jerusalem as our capital, nor the Jordan Valley and areas in the West Bank as part of our state," he told Al Jazeera. (AJE-28-July-2018).

The use of "said" in Examples (11) to (14) attributes powerful and defiant statements, asserting his rejection of the Deal's legitimacy and framing it as a conspiracy. This *acknowledge* pattern underscores a firm stance against any compromises on Jerusalem and Palestinian rights, conveying a sense of resolve and unity against the Deal. In Example (11), *"said"* attributes the King of Jordan's statement, in which he emphasises the significance of Jerusalem and critiques the US plan as aggressive and one-sided. This aligns with a stance that highlights the deep-rooted

importance of Jerusalem and opposes the plan's perceived biases, reflecting the King's critical perspective. In Example 12, the inclusion of *"said"* attributes a dismissive and assertive statement to Hamas leader Ismail Haniya, rejecting the proposed Deal as nonsense. This *acknowledge* pattern reinforces Haniya's unequivocal stance against the deal, positioning it as unacceptable and demanding strong opposition. So is in Example (13) where *"said"* attributes a statement to a senior Hamas official, who characterises Trump's statement as nonsense and affirms Jerusalem's Palestinian identity. It showcases the official's resolute position against any change in Jerusalem's status and the commitment to confronting the proposed deal. In Example (14), the use of "said" underscores the assertion that the plan was wholly unacceptable and his commitment to retaining Jerusalem, Jordan Valley, and West Bank areas. This pattern amplifies the firm stance against the Deal and the insistence on core Palestinian territories.

AJE orchestrates a starkly contrasting news narrative compared to WP, manifesting a bias leaning towards a disparaging portrayal of the US Deal. Employing a calculated *acknowledge* pattern, AJE strategically foregrounds dissenting voices, sculpting an atmosphere conducive to outright rejection of the proposal. Elevating King Abdullah II's vehement condemnation of the Deal as a conspiracy, alongside Hamas leader's rebuke, amplifies the discourse's tone of defiance. By magnifying the voices of Palestinian factions denouncing the Deal as absurd and underscoring Jerusalem's significance, AJE engineers a unified narrative of opposition. This selective curation perpetuates a palpable sense of resistance, shaping readers' perceptions to mirror collective Palestinian sentiment. AJE's utilisation of the *acknowledge* pattern serves as a manipulative editorial strategy, framing criticisms as irrefutable truths, thus eclipsing the Deal's potential merits.

6.   Discussion

In the scrutiny of the data, linguistic patterns of *endorse, attest* and *acknowledge* surfaced within the journalistic narratives of AJE and WP. These patterns wield significant influence in shaping evaluative language within news discourse, showcasing writers' astute selection of expressions and sources to align with their propositions. This strategic manoeuvring enables the moulding of narratives, effectively steering opinions (Van Dijk, 2013). Within AJE and WP, these categories of language are selectively embraced to varying degrees of subjectivity, reflecting the writers' biases and preferences. This selective bias is evident in the privileging of certain voices over others, perpetuating existing power dynamics and cultural paradigms. As White et al. (2018)

emphasised, such editorial choices elevated specific individuals while marginalising others, reinforcing hierarchical structures, the assignment of voice is predicated upon the elevation of certain individuals at the expense of others. This selection inevitably reflects prevailing cultural paradigms and hierarchical power dynamics.

Comparatively, AJE tends to prioritise civilian and journalistic sources, while WP amplifies political and militant voices, evident in the distribution of *attest* sources. Regarding *endorsement*, AJE favours empirical substantiation alongside civilian sources, whereas WP exhibits a proclivity for political and militant sources, endorsing uncritical stances. This disparity highlights AJE's effort to mitigate the influence of militant sources, contrasting with WP's embrace of such perspectives through heteroglossic voices within its news discourse (Martin & White, 2005)

AJE and WP also exhibit contrasting tendencies in sourcing and endorsing voices, reflecting underlying editorial biases. AJE leans towards civilian and journalistic sources, while WP prioritises political and militant voices, evident in the distribution of *attest* sources. This disparity extends to the endorsement of positions, with AJE favouring empirical substantiation alongside civilian sources, while WP tends towards political and militant sources, endorsing uncritical stances. The differential treatment of alternative sources underscores the schism between AJE and WP, with AJE predominantly enlisting Arab political sources and WP relying heavily on US sources. This divergence in strategy delineates their quests to either narrow or expand dialogic spaces accommodating alternative voices, reflecting the newspapers' editorial positions. In acknowledging alternative sources, WP journalists aim to circumscribe dialogic spaces through mediation of US and Israeli political actors, while AJE widens these spaces, albeit tangentially mediated via political and militant sources.

In stance-taking, both newspapers align with propositions reflecting their socio-political values. WP aligns with US and Israeli political sources, while AJE supports the Palestinian cause, shaping news discourse according to socio-cultural practices and institutional values. The interpersonal relationship between journalists and sources is shaped by the newspapers they work for, with AJE journalists highlighting Palestinian suffering under Israeli occupation, reflecting the newspaper's preferred stance and power dynamics.

Qatar, the predominant owner of Al Jazeera, champions the Palestinian cause, aligning with Hamas, the leading Palestinian political party (Samsi et al., 2021). Consequently, AJE's news

content accentuates the Palestinian perspectives, advocating their right to self-defence and rejecting external proposals regarding their land. This editorial stance reflects the values of Qatar, promoting socio-political ideologies aligned with Palestinian interests. Conversely, WP aligns with the US government, a staunch supporter of Israel (Hutchinson, 2023). WP prioritises narratives favouring Israeli sovereignty and downplays Palestinian concerns, reflecting US foreign policy objectives. This editorial divergence underscores the association between media ownership, geopolitical interests, and news coverage biases (Tiffen et al., 2014). While both outlets allow some diversity in coverage, they often limit certain perspectives to align with institutional and political agendas. To mitigate bias, news organisations must adhere to editorial standards emphasising fairness, accuracy, and inclusivity, fostering a more balanced portrayal of conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

Journalism, ideally, needs to serve as a platform for fair and balanced discourse, transcending strict objectivity to navigate through biases and partisanship. Transforming conflicts into opportunities for reconciliation and peace demands a shift in language, challenging stereotypes, and fostering mutual understanding. Language, wielded responsibly, can offer creative solutions to entrenched problems, bridging gaps and fostering harmony among diverse groups. Essential to responsible conflict reporting is the access to credible sources, ensuring accuracy and preventing the spread of misinformation. Upholding stringent sourcing standards not only fosters audience trust but also provides a nuanced understanding of conflicts. Journalists play a crucial role in offering diverse perspectives, highlighting peacebuilding efforts, and avoiding the reinforcement of dominant narratives.

7.   Conclusion

By focusing on how news narratives construct public attitudes, viewpoints and stances through the strategic use of evaluative language and ideologically charged framings, this research not only contributes to academic discourse but also provide practical insights for policymakers and stakeholders engaged in conflict resolution and peace efforts. One crucial learning point from this study is that by dissecting linguistic subtleties in conflict reporting, we can uncover biases and hidden agendas, facilitating a more objective interpretation of news content. Traditional media's tendency to sensationalise conflicts can perpetuate violence and misunderstanding, underscoring the importance of peace-oriented narratives in fostering a more constructive public discourse

(Bakti & Lecomte, 2015; Galtung, 2003; McGoldrick & Lynch, 2005). By emphasising precision, neutrality, balance, and fairness in conflict reporting (Burhanudeen, 2006; Richmond, 2020), journalistic discourse can promote trust and advance peacebuilding efforts. The language of peace assumes paramount importance, aligning with communication rights enshrined in international laws and fostering reconciliation, democracy, and equality. Journalists are urged to maintain independence and sensitivity to societal dynamics, prioritising peace over fear and terror. The media's role extends to nurturing 'peace consciousness', offering diverse perspectives and challenging divisive narratives. It must be grounded in balanced reporting and a focus on non-violent solutions, offering an alternative to sensationalism, and aiming to promote understanding and social responsibility. Ultimately, the language of conflict reporting has the potential to facilitate constructive dialogue and contribute to peaceful resolution, aligning with the principles of responsible and peace journalism.

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