

## An Investigation into Texture, Power and Ideology in Electronic News Articles

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### ABSTRACT

It is widely believed that media texts are shaped by the wider social and cultural structures. Therefore, attaining a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of media reporting entails complete understanding of the social artifacts and the cultural structures. Using Critical Discourse Analysis and Halliday and Hasan's (1976) models of cohesion, this study examines texture, power and ideology in an electronic news article. The analysis looked into the context to comprehensively examine the text. The analysis revealed that referencing and lexical cohesion are the writer's preferred model of cohesion throughout the text. It is also apparent that substitution and ellipsis are unexpectedly popular, which reflect a speech-like style. The critical analysis reveals that the article has hidden ideological meanings and is being divided along some ideological lines to reflect the views of those whose interest is being served and those whose interest is being undermined. The writer used foregrounding and lexis to serve his ideology, and backgrounding and sometimes omission to undermine the ideologies of the 'other'.

**Key words:** Texture, Power, Ideology, Electronic News Articles, Critical Discourse Analysis

### INTRODUCTION

Language in use is the main goal of conducting discourse analysis. Throughout the years, linguists developed several approaches to tackle spoken and written discourse. Halliday and Hasan (1976), for instance, developed the functional grammar approach, in which they focused on the linguistic structures of texts. They viewed language as a system of meanings accompanied by forms by which the meaning can be expressed. They focused on aspects that make a text meaningful and coherent. Recent years, however, brought a shift in linguists' interest from the linguistic structure of texts to how texts figure in the social process. Language is no longer seen as a reflection of reality, but as creating reality. Power abuse, dominance, inequality and bias, on the one hand, and how these sources are initiated, maintained, reproduced and transformed within a specific social, economic, political and historical contexts (Dijk, 1988), on the other, become a vital part in analyzing discourse. This new approach is called Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA was applied in several types of discourse, and media is one them. This study rigorously examines the relationship between the discursive practices and texts, on the one hand, and the wider social and cultural structures, on the other. In other words, this study investigate how texts "arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power" (Fairclough 1995, p. 132). The use of CDA in investigation media reporting is not a new practice. McGregor (2003), for example, studied how news reports

serve the dominant power; Kress (1990), on the other hand, studied how journalists adopt the ideological discursive structure to serve a particular system.

Using an article published in the Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER), "The UN has Failed Burma", this study examines power, ideology, and the textual artifacts of the text. In order to analyze the cohesive relations in the text, Halliday and Hasan's (1976) principles – referencing, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion- will be applied. CDA will be used to determine the ideological postures and power relations. At the beginning, it will be useful to start with the grounding of the text.

### CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Van Dijk (1998) viewed critical discourse analysis as a field that studies and analyses written and spoken texts in social, cultural, historical or political contexts in order to highlight discursive features such as dominance, ideology, power, bias, and inequality. Fairclough (1993, p. 135) defines critical discourse analysis as "discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony."

Critical discourse analysis is not a simple discipline or narrowly defined theory; it is “not a homogeneous method, nor school or a paradigm, but at most a shared perspective on doing linguistic, semiotic or discourse analysis. Where some critical scholars are cautious and subtle in their critique, others may be more outspoken and radical. And where some scholars in this perspective, at least in practice, remain within the theoretical and methodological mainstream of modern linguistics and discourse analysis, others extend their domain of exploration to semiotics, history, cognitive science and the social sciences.” (Van Dijk, 1993, p.131). Critical discourse analysis shares the methods of linguistics and discourse analysis, but it differs from them in being critical. It implied different methods and approaches to study text and talk, and one of these is critical linguistics.

In analyzing a text, Fairclough (1992) scrutinized syntax, transitivity, and the modality of the text, in almost the same way as critical linguistics. However, for Fairclough the textual analysis is not comprehensive without intertextual analysis that “draws attention to the dependence of texts upon society and history in the form of the resources made available within the order of discourse (genres, discourses, etc.)” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 195). The main objective of Fairclough’s theory is to make a “contribution to the general rising of consciousness of exploitative social relations, through focusing upon language” (1989, p. 5). This objective remained in the core of his later work. This analysis will be carried out on this study. However, at the beginning, it will be useful to start with the grounding of the text.

### Foregrounding and Backgrounding

The text, as it is mentioned earlier, is adapted from FEER, which is an electronic as well as printed magazine that is interested in political, economic, international relations as well as other interests in Far East Asia region. The article, “the UN has failed Burma”, (<https://www.cetri.be/The-U-N-Has-Failed-Burma?lang=fr>), is one of 32 electronic articles posted from the 15<sup>th</sup> of September till the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2008. The other posted articles discussed topics such as the international financial crises and its effect on the Asian market, the protests in Thailand and the forming of the new government, the contaminated milk in China, and the nuclear crises in North Korea. In its subcategory, the article is one of 10 texts (almost 30% of the whole postings in the nominated period) posted under International Relations. Other articles focused mainly on the relationship between China and Iran, Beijing Olympics and China’s image, North Korea and the World, and, of course, UN’s role in Burma.

“The UN Has Failed Burma” is written by Aung Din, who is a member of the Washington D.C.- based campaign for Burma and served for more than four years in the prisons of the Burmese Regime as a political prisoner. The article discusses the latest visit of the UN special envoy, Mr. Gamabari, to Burma. The writer is not content with the outcome of the visit as the envoy praised the Burmese regime for several issues, and offered them help in the coming election in 2010. The writer accused the UN for what he called “the UN.’s desire to abandon the poor people of Burma” and asked the UN to leave them alone.

UN’s failure in establishing democracy and freeing the people of “Burma” from “the military regime” which is rolling the country for 20 years is foregrounded throughout the text. The title, the picture, which shows the regime’s prime minister and the envoy shaking hands and smiling during the last visit, and the objections of NLD leaders and the Burmese Democracy Movement members emphasizes the writer’s opinion: the opinion the text’s readers are encouraged to subscribe to. However, the UN’s humanitarian and positive diplomatic role in Myanmar and the regime’s quick response to cyclone Nargis was downplayed, or in fact, omitted. The fact that the UN has raised more than \$30 million in aid for the victims of cyclone Nargis that saved thousands of lives and built hundreds of houses was backgrounded and totally ignored.

## TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

### Referencing

In the article, there were 25 occurrences of personal references (Table 1) and 12 occurrences of demonstrative references (Table 2). Of the personal references, 20 are used as personal pronouns, and five were “it” referring to a fact or a thing. 10 of the personal references are examples of anaphoric references. They exist as ties to presupposed participants which occur outside of the referring clause (AlAfnan, 2018). “He”, for example, in line 33 refers back to the envoy in line 32. In line 81, the personal pronoun “I” in the direct quotation refers back to the speaker, who is Mr. Gambari, the UN envoy. “Them” in line 63 also refers back to NLD leaders in line 61. In addition to the anaphoric references, there were 8 cataphoric references in the text. In line 32, the writer used “we”, but he didn’t make a direct reference to who those “we” are. The in-text possibilities are: the Burmese democracy movement (line50-51), NLD leaders (line 61), or the poor people of Burma (line 95). However, it is really tempting to believe that none of the above mentioned is meant by the “we”, because the writer is not a member or part of anyone of them. Therefore, it was identified as a reference to the Burmese in general or to the members of Washington DC based US campaign for Burma, of which the writer is the executive director.

Halliday refers to demonstrative referencing as “verbal pointing” to indicate a “scale of proximity” to the presupposed reference (Halliday and Hasan 1976, p. 57). With regards to the use of “the” as a demonstrative reference, five out of twelve demonstrative references were noted. In line 18, “the regime” refers back to the Burmese military regime in line 2. The envoys, in line 20, also refer back to the UN special envoys to Burma in line 16-17. Because the article is a written text, all the demonstrative references are endophoric (i.e. refers to something is already mentioned in the text).

### Substitution and Ellipsis

Substitution and ellipsis are characteristic features of spoken text and are usually confined to “contiguous passages” (Halliday 1994, p. 310) but they do exist within written texts so that the presupposed reference is not unnecessarily repeated.

**Table 1.** Personal referencing

Line	Pronoun	Line reference	Referenced item
2	Our	100- cataphoric	The members of the Washington D.C. based US campaign for Burma
7	my	--	1 <sup>st</sup> person pronoun: the writer
25	Its	24	China
32	We	100- cataphoric	The members of the Washington D.C. based US campaign for Burma
32	He	32	The UN envoy
41	He	40	The UN special envoy to Burma
44	He	40	The UN special envoy to Burma
41	his	40	Mr. Ibrahim Gambari
47	Him	40	The UN special envoy to Burma
50	It	44-45	The UN envoy Spending 20 munities only with NLD leaders
63	Them	61	NLD leaders
65	He	63	The UN envoy
65	They	61	NLD leaders
67	It's	66-67	The regime
70, 71, 73	He	66	Mr. Gambari
76	It	74	The referendum
77	We	100- cataphoric	The members of the Washington D.C. based US campaign for Burma
81	I ( 2 times)	80	Mr. Gambari
84	Them	83	Issues to discuss with the authorities of Myanmar
84	We	100- cataphoric	The members of the Washington D.C. based US campaign for Burma
86	Our	100- cataphoric	The members of the Washington D.C. based US campaign for Burma
90	Its	90	The Security Council
95. 96	We	100- cataphoric	The members of the Washington D.C. based US campaign for Burma
96, 97	Our	100 cataphoric	The members of the Washington D.C. based US campaign for Burma
96	Us	100 cataphoric	The members of the Washington D.C. based US campaign for Burma

**Table 2.** Demonstrative references

Line	Reference	Line reference	Reference item
2-3	Our country	2	Burma
3	Entire country	2	Burma
7	My country	2	Burma
18	The regime	2	The military regime that rules Burma
20	The envoys	16-17	The special UN envoys appointed by the secretary-general to Burma
29	Those	20	The special UN envoys appointed by the secretary-general to Burma
31	Their	20	The special UN envoys appointed by the secretary-general to Burma
32	The envoy	20	The special UN envoys appointed by the secretary-general to Burma
62-63	The UN envoy	59	Mr. Gambari
66	The regime mouthpiece	65-66	New Lights of Myanmar
83	These	81	The five issues Mr. Gambari wanted to discuss in Myanmar ( Burma)
91	Myanmar	40	Burma

**Table 3.** Substitution

Line	Reference	Line reference	Reference item
22	The one and only body	23-cataphoric	Security council
91-92	In that context	90-91	The Security Council commitment to the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Myanmar

Because of this anaphoric referencing function, substitution and ellipsis create a sense of cohesion throughout the passage (AlAfnan, 2015a/2015b). In the text, there are two cases of substitution (Table 3). “The one and only body”, in line 22, is interpreted as a substitution of the “Security Council”, in line 23. This is a cataphoric substitution used to emphasize the role and the responsibility that should be carried by the Security Council. The second substitution occurred in line 91-92 “in that context”, which substituted “The Security Council commitment to the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Myanmar”, in line 90-91.

On ellipsis, there are issues that are “unsaid” in the passage and the reader must supply the missing information (Table 4). Because most cases of ellipsis are anaphoric to something written in a previous clause, the effect is highly cohesive. In line 8-9, for example, “support and intervention” refers to line 2-3 in which the elliptical reference to “over the military regime that rules our country”. In line 47 “in protest” also seems an elliptical reference to “to spending 20 minutes with the leaders of NLD” in line 44-45. In fact, the name of the country “Burma” was elapsd in six occasions in the text, because it was mentioned earlier.

### Conjunctions

Halliday (1976) defines conjunction as a clause or clause complex, or some longer stretch of text, (which) may be related to what follows it by one or other of a specific set of semantic relations. Conjunctive elements are not “devises for reaching out into the proceeding text” like reference, ellipsis and substitution. Rather they are cohesive “by virtue of their specific meanings” (Halliday and Hasan, 1976, p. 226). In the given text (Table 5), line 29-30 “and those who.” is an additive conjunction that links back to the UN envoy to Burma. “However” in line 59 is an adversative conjunction (AlAfnan, 2016) that links back to “Meeting NLD leaders for one hour and a half” in line 56-57. Another adversative conjunction “yet have been unable...” appears in line 18 to link to “the 24 visits of UN envoys in the last 13 years” which appears in line 17.

### Lexical Cohesion

Lexical cohesion differs from other cohesive devices (i.e., referencing, substitution, ellipsis, conjunctions) in that it is a non-grammatical function. Through the use of vocabulary,

**Table 4.** Ellipsis

Line	Reference	Line reference	Reference item
6	The population	General	Of Burma
8-9	Support and intervention	2-3	Over the military regime that rules our country
11	Willing to help	4	The people of Burma
20	Of the envoy	17	In Burma
35	Inaccurate reporting	General	About the situation in Burma
47	In protest	44-45	To spending 20 minutes only meeting NLD leaders
51	With a mandate	General	From the UN
60	The 2010 election	General	In Burma
62	Were shocked and dismayed	60	Of the invitation
65	He didn't answer	62	The question
72-73	The military rule	61	In our country (Burma)
81	Before I left	45	Burma
81	To discuss	83	With the authorities in Myanmar
89-90	Inserted a paragraph	88	To the security council presidential statement
94	Consolidate the power	38	In Burma

**Table 5.** Conjunctions

Line	Reference	Line reference	Reference item
4	Over the years	1	The 20 years of nonviolent struggle
16	Over the past 13 years	12-13	Since the General Assembly instructed the Secretary-General to help Burma
29-30	And those who take up...	22	The envoys
76	So that...	69	The envoy praised the regime for being able to address the problem of cyclone Nargis
81	Before I left	General	Myanmar
35	Recently	41	August 18-23 2008
59	However	56-57	Meeting NLD leaders for one hour and a half
65	Later	56	After the meeting

**Table 6.** Lexical cohesion summary

Lexical item	Variations
Burma	Burma/Burma/our country/the entire country/Burma/my country/Burma/Burma/Burma/Burma/Burma/Burma/Burma/Burma/Burma/Burma/our country/Myanmar/Myanmar/Myanmar/Burma/
United Nations	UN/United Nations/General Assembly/UN/UN/Security Council/UN/UN/UN/the UN office in New York/UN/UN/New York/United Nations/United Nations/Security Council/the UN Security Council/Security Council/UN/UN
The Authorities in Burma	The military regime/military/the regime/the Burmese regime/military regime/the regime/the military dictatorship in Burma/the regime/the regime/the regime/the Burmese regime/the military regime/the regime/the regime/the regime/the regime/the regime/authorities in Myanmar/the regime/the regime/the regime.
UN envoy to Burma	The UN special envoy/the envoys/the envoys/the UN special envoy/the envoy/the UN special envoy/Mr. Ibrahim Gambari/the UN envoy/Mr. Gambari/Mr. Gambari/the UN envoy/Mr. Gambari/Mr. Gambari/Mr. Gambari/
The opposition in Burma	The leaders of Burma democracy movement/Burma's democracy Movement/the National League for Democracy/NLD/Burmese activists in exile/Burmese Democracy Movement/NLD/ethnic representatives/NLD leaders/NLD leaders/NLD leaders/democracy movement/
The people of Burma	The population/Burmese/its (Myanmar) people/the poor people of Burma/Burmese

cohesion exists when ties between lexical items can be identified. In the article the UN has Failed Burma, this proved to be the most cohesive element through the different forms of reiteration and collocation (Table 6). Reiteration refers to the repetition of a lexical item though the repetition may not exactly match the presupposed lexical item. Reiteration can take the form of repetition of the same word or through the use of a synonym, antonym, meronym, or hyponym. Collocation differs from reiteration in that it refers not to a semantic relationship between words but rather it refers to the tendency of words to “share the same lexical environment” (Halliday and Hasan 1976, p. 286).

A general word list is used to generalize the overall patterns of lexical cohesion from the article. Six general categories of lexis were identified. Of the categories, the largest in terms of quantity of either reiterated or collocated lexis seems to be “the authorities in Burma” and “the opposition”. The first lexical patterns relate to “Burma”. “Burma” was repeated throughout the text fourteen times, so repetition was the notification. Under the same category, we find “Myanmar” was used three times and it was identified as a synonym of “Burma” (this point will be discussed in details in next section – power and ideology). “The Security Council” and “General Assembly” appear to be meronym of “the United Nation”. Later, “Burmese” “the population” and “the people” are identified as hyponym of “the people of Burma”. There were few examples of collocations in the text such as: “the military regime” “the UN envoy”, “democracy movement”, and “the military dictatorship”.

The beef of the article, that the United Nations failed the old Burma (not the new Myanmar) or abandoned the Burmese, is clearly organized through the lexical selection. Repetition through synonymous lexical items and collocation is very dominant and creates what Halliday and Hasan (1976) call texture in text.

## POWER AND IDEOLOGY- CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) concerns itself with the consideration of a spoken or written text as an example of

social interaction (Alafnan, 2017) and the power relationship inherent within that interaction. CDA then decodes the meaning of, and the ideological assumptions behind, a text. It is important to look at texts critically because, as Fowler (1991, 25) points out; “...events and ideas are not communicated neutrally because they are transmitted through the medium that contains certain structural features which in turn are impregnated with social values that form some perspective on events.”

In the given article, the title “the UN has failed Burma” expresses the ideological believe or the background of the writer. Burma, which is an Asian country bordered by the People’s Republic of China on the northeast, Laos on the east, Thailand on the southeast, Bangladesh on the west, India on the northwest, the Bay of Bengal to the southwest with the Gulf of Martaban and Andaman Sea defining its southern periphery, was renamed by the military regime rolling the country since 1962 to Myanmar. Now, the country is officially known as “the Union of Myanmar”. It is clear that the writer, who served years in the regime’s jails as a political prisoner and is the Executive Director of the US campaign for Burma, does not recognize the regime as the official authority in the country. Therefore, he does not recognize “Myanmar” as the official name of the country. The writer used Burma 15 times in the text, where “Myanmar” was used three times only, and they were used in direct quotations of the UN officials (who recognize Myanmar).

The writer used “the military regime” and “the regime” throughout the text to refer to the governors of Myanmar. Those words were used in a negative manner which implies that they are not the official representatives of the country and do not have the people’s mandate. However, the UN- in a direct quotation- referred to them as “the authorities of Myanmar” (Line 83). The people who live under the regime were described as “the poor people of Burma” (Line 95) and their life were described as a “struggle” (line 2). The country is governed by a “dictatorship” (line 5). Several countries realized that, and they chose to “stand against the tyrannical rule in Burma” (line 11). The UN envoy is a “supporter of the regime” (line 58) and he “praised their deeds” (line 66). Therefore, “the UN has Failed Burma” (the title)

and “abandoned its people” (line 95) to take the regimes side (the picture showing the Regime’s Prime Minister and the UN envoy shaking hands and smiling supports that). As a result, the UN may be succeeded in Myanmar but it failed the (old) Burma and the Burmese.

## CONCLUSION

This study examines how texture, power and ideology play a vital role on the construction of electronic magazine articles. Working within Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) models of cohesion and the disciplines of Critical Discourse Analysis, the study shows the elements of texture and the hidden ideological meanings behind the words. Cohesion analysis has shown what principles exist that create semantic links within text between sentence and paragraph boundaries. CDA, on the other hand, has uncovered the ideology of the writer, and the methods he used to construct the text. Even though “the military regime” is the authority in Myanmar, and the freedom of speech is low, the electronic magazine gave the writer, who is antigovernment, the space, the freedom, and the power to express and spread his ideology throughout the universe, including Myanmar or Burma. This study showed the ideologies and the belief of the electronic report writer greatly influenced his word choice to create impressions and make points.

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