

The Role of Media Discourse in Diplomatic Behavior

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Abstract

This article aims to study the role of media discourse in diplomatic behavior concentrating on discourse making in the Persian media of BBC and Voice of America and anti-discourse making in IRIB. The main problem for the media discourse here is nuclear activities in Iran. Using Van Leeuwen and Van Dijk's theories, this research has compared the approaches used in both eastern and western media as well as BBC and VOA.

Key Words: media, discourse making, anti-discourse making, diplomacy, western media, Persian media, BBC, VOA, Iran's nuclear activities

1. Introduction

Media discourse refers to interactions that take place through a broadcast platform, whether spoken or written, in which the discourse is oriented to a non-present reader, listener or viewer. Though the discourse is oriented towards these recipients, they very often cannot make instantaneous responses to the producer(s) of the discourse, though increasingly this is changing with the advent of new media technology, as we shall explore. Crucially, the written or spoken discourse itself is oriented to the readership or listening/viewing audience, respectively. In other words, media discourse is a public, manufactured, on-record, form of interaction. It is not ad hoc or spontaneous (in the same way as casual speaking or writing is); it is neither private nor off the record. Obvious as these basic characteristics may sound, they are crucial to the investigation, description and understanding of media discourse (O'Keefe, 2011).

Public discourse is rapidly evolving through the use of social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter and others. Though often discussed in terms like "social media", or even more general terms like "web 2.0", social media platforms are not homogeneous. The reflexive relationship between social media and culture will be different for each combination of culture and social media platform. The Comparative Informatics community focuses attention on the role of culture in ICT uptake and use. Comparative Informatics examines the need for governments to consider the diverse cultures they serve when developing ICTs for Government (Robertson, 2010), reflects on the cultural biases embedded in current technology, including the keyboard (Nardi, Vatrappu, & Clemmensen, 2011) and questions web 2.0 visions of global collaboration and remixing (Hughes & Lang, 2006) unencumbered by cultural differences (Cervantes, Nardi, & Kow, 2010). Social media is one component of web 2.0 that affords many opportunities for Comparative Informatics research. One important contribution of Comparative Informatics research in the area of social media will be the development of a more thorough understanding of the relationship between culture and social media uptake and use. This proposal focuses on the reflexive construction of culture through discourse using social media (Goggins & Mascaro, 2011).

Most critical discourse analysts acknowledge the importance of (audio) visual aspects of communication (see for instance Fairclough (1995: 6–7); Wodak (2004:8)) and some authors (to a greater or lesser extent) incorporate the visual in their analyses (e.g. Chouliaraki 2004, 2005; Fairclough 1995; Gruber 2004). Nevertheless, the focus clearly remains on studying the linguistic features of media texts (Macdonald 2003: 3–4), and images are consequently often analyzed as if they were linguistic (Philips and Jørgensen 2002: 61). It should be noted that work associated with social semiotics (Kress and Hodge 1988; Kress and Van Leeuwen 1990, 1996, 2001) has managed to integrate the visual in the study of discourse (Blommaert 2000: 450). This makes it especially suitable for analyzing television (Fairclough 1995: 28), the visual dimension of printed texts (Bell and Garrett 1998:14) and photojournalism (see for instance Van Leeuwen and Jaworski 2002).

2. Discourse and Social Media

Prior studies of discourse in social media relate to the expression of political, issue based topics (Gonzalez-Bailon, Kaltenbrunner, & Banchs, 2010; Hill, Hughes, &, 1997; Kelly, Fisher, & Smith, 2005). This work illustrates the reflexivity of social media interactions, and activity in the physical world. The *a priori* existence of shared contexts of individuals based on demographics contributes to a shared set of information between individuals, both virtual and offline. Lazer *et al.* (2010) found that individuals do not rely on political views as a basis for relationship formation, but shift their political attitudes towards those of their social contacts after a relationship is formed. Further, this shift in political attitudes allows for the emergence of a core group of individuals with one set of viewpoints and a periphery of individuals with opposing viewpoints that withdraw from the core. These findings build upon previous research that illustrates the importance of social relationships in political information exchange and discourse (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1987).

Social networking sites enable technologically mediated engagement to occur in multiple ways. Participants can post to the larger group or utilize a mechanism of direct addressal, including the @ symbol, to single out another individual in their social media communication. This singling out occurs in the public forum and is seen by everyone. In addition to these formal direct addressal mechanisms, individuals utilize more informal mechanisms like a user's name. Failure to use the provided affordances for singling out another individual through technological means creates noise that the analyst of social media, whether focused on culture, communications, political science or other domain of interest, must address. Messages where individuals are singled out form a subset of interactions within a particular social media group that, when analyzed together, form a network of conversation. These networks of conversation are more explicitly identified than previous research on conversations within larger scale forums and allow for a much richer analysis of the networks of discourse that emerge (Fisher, Smith, & Welser, 2006).

The leadership that exists in the forum often shapes these outcomes. Leaders in an online space dictate the initial flow of conversation and shape the dialogue over time as more individuals become involved. (Cassell, Huffaker, Tversky, & Ferriman, 2006). As the group grows individuals can also take on leadership positions and shift the dialogue to areas of interest to them (Hersey, Blanchard, &, 1992). These differences indicate that a social media platform and the culture of a particular group within that platform lead to distinct discourse cultures in each case. For example, one person may join a group to find others that they agree with and another may join a group to find individuals they disagree with. Depending on the user motivation they will experience very different outcomes. In Facebook Groups, the posting of a parent post is an exercise of leadership, whereas in Twitter the creation of a hashtag to discuss a new topic may be seen as a similar, but more diffuse expression of leadership around a topic of discourse.

Many attempts to develop visualization technologies to help make sense of large, unstructured conversations online in online forums are available (Kerckhoff & Back, 1965; Sack &, 2000; Smith & Fiore, 2001; Viegas & Smith, 2004). The resulting visualizations allow individuals who are information consumers to better understand the type of information they are reading and who the important actors are. This information, coupled with other behavioral aspects of individuals in social networking sites, and the specific communication technologies enable the identification of discourse roles (Benevenuto, Rodrigues, Cha, & Almeida, 2009; Welser, Gleave, Fisher, & Smith, 2007).

3. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (HSS)

In CDA, media are seen as important public spaces and media discourse is studied as a site of power and social struggle (Wodak and Busch 2004: 109–111).

Some important CDA deals with media discourse specifically. Van Dijk (1988a, 1988b, 1991, 1993) has developed a framework for analyzing news discourse, especially newspaper articles. His socio-cognitive account focuses on “the discursive nature of the reproduction of racism by the press” (van Dijk 1991: 254; see also Jäger and Link (1993) for a collection of papers on racism and the media). The (written) news genre has been most prominent in CDA on media so far (Wodak and Busch 2004: 107). Apart from the examples given above, other well-known examples are Jäger and Jäger’s (1993) account of newspapers and journals edited by right-wing groups, and Wodak et al.’s (e.g. 1990, 1994, 1999) studies of nationalism, antisemitism and neo-racism (see also Chouliaraki 1999). Also warfare reporting has been analyzed from a CDA point of view (e.g. Hackett and Zhao 1994; Rojo 1995; Thetala 2001).

Although print media have traditionally received most attention (Wodak and Busch 2004: 107–108), some CDA has dealt with radio and television. For example, Chouliaraki analyzes television footage of the September 11th attacks (2004) and the Iraq war (2005), and Fairclough (1995) uses examples from British television and radio to illustrate his approach to CDA. Also, a number of authors have focused on (political) interviews (e.g. Ekström 2001) and talk shows (e.g. Gruber 2004) on television and radio from a CDA perspective. In their democratic theory, Laclau and Mouffe’s radical strive for the emancipation of all societal groups. In this fashion, both approaches draw strongly on the concept of hegemony. Laclau and Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (HSS) has the explicit ambition to rethink and de-essentialize Marxist theory, by avoiding the privileging of class and workings of the economy (even in the ‘last instance’) (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2006).

This article mainly focuses on discourse theories and media.

4. Research Objectives

4.1. Main objective: Finding the role of western media through discourse and the role of IRIB through anti-discourse in behavior and stand of actors in nuclear diplomacy field.

4.2. Specific objectives

- Identifying and understanding made discourses in Persian media of BBC and VOA in terms of Iran’s nuclear topic
- Identifying and studying the features of anti-discourse of IRIB against made discourses of competitor media through Iran’s nuclear program
- Describing and identifying the effects of discourse making of Persian media of BBC and VOA about Iran’s nuclear topic in actors’ stand in Iran’s diplomacy
- Identifying how media introduce Iranian and western actors in nuclear diplomacy
- Identifying the state of east sociologic discussions in discourse making of the media of BBC and VOA about Iran

5. Research Questions

A: Discourse analysis in micro linguistic level based on Van Leeuwen’s components and Van Dijk’s ideological square:

How are Iranian and western actors introduced in both side’s media?

B: Discourse analysis in Persian media of BBC and VOA at macro level based on Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory:

1. Based on which central reason the discourse on Iran’s nuclear energy has emerged in Persian media of BBC and VOA?
2. Which components in nuclear discourse of BBC and VOA have been paused?
3. Which micro discourses exist in macro discourses of nuclear energy in the media of BBC and VOA?
4. Which are the subjective situations in nuclear energy discourse?
5. Based on which oppositions is miss-interpretation made in the nuclear energy discourse in the media of BBC and VOA?
6. Which are the Negative and positive aspects in nuclear energy discourse in the media of BBC and VOA?
7. Which are the odd reasons for such discourse?

C: Analysis of Iran’s anti-discourse at macro level based on Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory:

1. Based on which central reason is Iran’s anti-discourse constructed against the discourse of the media of BBC and VOA?
2. Which elements in Iran’s anti-discourse construction are paused?
3. Which are the micro discourses in Iran’s anti-discourse construction?
4. Which are the subjective situations in Iran’s anti-discourse construction?
5. Based on which oppositions is miss-interpretation made in Iran’s anti-discourse construction?
6. Which are the Negative and positive aspects in nuclear energy discourse in Iran’s anti-discourse construction?
7. Which are the odd reasons for Iran’s anti-discourse construction?

6. Nuclear Activities in Iran

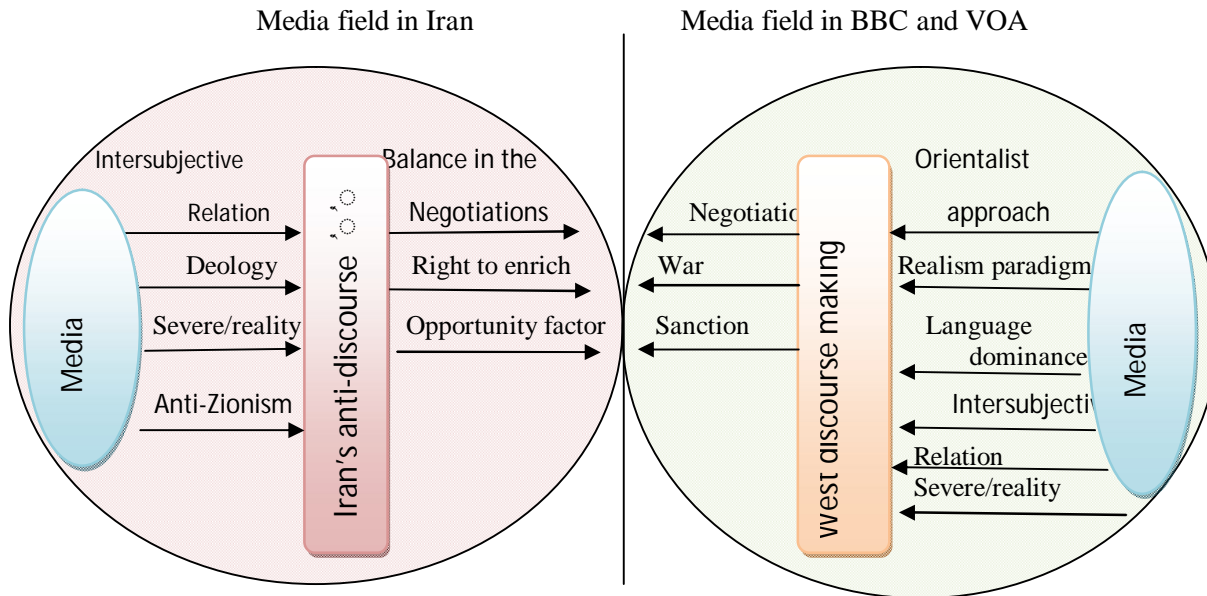


Figure 1: Model of discourse making in western media and anti-discourse making in Iran’s media on nuclear issue

7. Research Achievements

- Discourse making in Persian media of BBC and VOA take a hybrid approach to make nuclear talks and fight with Iran dealing with Iran's nuclear program. This composition is close to the paradigm of smart power. The soft dimension of power is achieved through negotiation and diplomacy and the media also share this by production of meaning and giving dignity and supremacy to the West than to the East. The hard dimension of power is manifested by the evidence of a military attack on Iran's nuclear activities.
- Triangle discourse, ideology and power have been considered in discourse making and support relationship is established between the vertices. The symbolic world of discourses involving multiple binary between the West and Iran, and confirming the status of the West and giving a discount rate to Iran is all to give dignity to the West. That is why discourse with Van Dijk's operation of positive exponential of West and negative exponential of Iran and applying Van Leeuwen's approach to attract actors western actors and remove Iranian actors as well as relying on east sociological assumptions, are a service of power and increase it. These discourses made, producing meaning to transfer certain content, have an ideological function. However, they prioritize their meaning-creation and rejected and marginalize navigation of power and ideology.
- Media policy in the West facing over Iran's nuclear program combines media-based and community-based approaches. Preferring media coverage of the nuclear program, exclusion and marginalization, creating polarity and differentiating between the West and Iran, intentional highlighting and tending to the extreme - reality status implies the western media's hybrid effects on the policy in facing Iran's nuclear program. On the other hand, the BBC and Voice of America play a role as a tribune and executive of the agendas of the West to counter Iran, which implies the community-based approaches that have appeared in the media as well.

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