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REFLECTION OF AZERBAIJANI IDENTITY IN INTERNATIONAL MEDIA: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Açar sözlər: *Azərbaycan kimliyi, beynəlxalq media, tənqidi diskurs təhlili, tranzitivlik analizi, media diskursu.*

Ключевые слова: *Азербайджанская идентичность, международные СМИ, критический дискурс-анализ, анализ транзитивности, медийный дискурс.*

Keywords: *Azerbaijani identity, international media, critical discourse analysis, transitivity analysis, media discourse.*

In recent years the way identity is represented in the media has become an increasingly important topic in discourse studies. Global media play a crucial role in how we think of countries, politicians and developments in different parts of the world. Since news rapidly travels across the globe, it usually is global media that provide our only glimpse into foreign countries and thus largely shape our perceptions of countries and their identities. The way a country is portrayed in news reports therefore not only informs our knowledge of it, but shapes our identity of the country.

Commonly associated with objectivity, news reporting does not simply reflect reality. Events are not reported as they occur, but are (re)constructed by editors and journalists through the choices they make about language and discourses. These choices affect how certain aspects of an event are given prominence, while others are ignored or marginalised. In consequence, the actions of individuals are portrayed in a particular light, blame assigned to certain parties, and their behaviour evaluated. As such, national identity is not an unchanging given, but is dynamic and constructed through discourse, open to interpretation in a variety of contexts.

Global news media such as the BBC and The Guardian play an influential role in interpreting news of other countries to a worldwide audience. They are recognised as authoritative sources of news for millions of people, and the language and framing of news reports as well as editorial choices often produce particular narratives that are read, heard or saw by millions of people. Through these reports, interpretations and selections of what is newsworthy the global news media shape the

way we think about different parts of the world. These perceptions of particular countries shape our understanding of politics, culture and society to often allow only a narrow interpretation to come across.

The article explores how Critical Discourse Analysis can be used to identify and interpret practices and structures connected to integration. Critical Discourse Analysis views discourse as a practice that is connected to power, ideology and social structures. It analyses how language is used to negotiate meaning and reality. Fairclough, for example, argues that language is not only a reflection of reality, but also an active means of constructing reality [2, s. 62–65]. Others have studied how identity is presented and constructed through various discursive strategies (Wodak [6, s. 359–363]), and how shared knowledge and ideology are used in discourse (van Dijk [7, s. 63–94]). A number of studies have demonstrated that much media discourse is based on an implicit “us and them”-opposition, which is reproduced by lexicon, evaluation and framing (for example, through metaphors and the choice of quotation) [4, s. 47–52].

Despite a marked increase in scholarly interest in the post-Soviet region as a whole, several countries, including the South Caucasus state of Azerbaijan, have remained marginal to comparative analysis. In general, most research conducted to date has focused on more ‘developed’ regions such as Western Europe and North America. As for methodological approaches, Critical Discourse Analysis is a very commonly employed tool within media studies; yet, only a handful of studies have integrated such an approach with the sort of fine-grained linguistic analysis that examines transitivity. Within Fairclough’s framework, transitivity analysis represents a particularly valuable resource for the study of how actions and actors are textually represented and thus, of how agency and responsibility are constructed. This study seeks to address the prevailing lacuna within the fields of media discourse analysis and post-Soviet studies by conducting a corpus-driven investigation of the representation of Azerbaijani identity within news articles published by two of the world’s leading quality outlets: the BBC and The Guardian. Focusing on the period from 2010 to 2024, the study applies Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of discourse as its primary framework for analysis and utilizes transitivity as a complementary method of analysis at the textual level. The resulting data and analysis therefore afford a detailed investigation into how Azerbaijani identity is represented within international media discourse, thereby offering insight into how national identity is constructed in newspaper texts more broadly.

The current research raises the following key questions: 1) how the Azerbaijani identity is represented in news articles of the BBC and The Guardian published during the period of 2010-2024; 2) what differences can be observed in the delivery of identity in both newspapers; 3) how transitivity patterns are employed to represent Azerbaijani actors and actions.

The research employs qualitative approach and draws on data derived from online news articles published by the two studied outlets (the BBC and The Guardian) over a fourteen-year period. As the researcher is unsure of the materials available, the years 2018 and 2019 have not been included. By using a purposive sampling method, texts have been selected that are relevant to Azerbaijan. The articles from the two different newspapers represent two different discursive practices, which make for interesting analysis. The keywords for the search for suitable texts were ‘Azerbaijan’, ‘Azerbaijani’ and ‘Nagorno-Karabakh’. In total thirty articles have been selected for the study. One from each newspaper, one per year. The analysis does not only focus on general features that emerge and have possibly remained unchanged. Emphasis is also placed on detecting recurring patterns of linguistic representations of identity over different time periods and within varying political contexts. This is crucial because such representations do not remain static. Furthermore, conflict can manifest itself in different ways and at different times; thus, so the argumentatively the analysis of discourse is as important, if not more so, across different time frames rather than confined to a singular period.

The analysis will follow Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of discourse that in short entails examining discourse on three interconnected levels: textual analysis, discursive practice and social practice. The study will initially engage with a textual approach that draws upon aspects of Systemic Functional Linguistics’ (SFL) study of transitivity patterns, which seek to account for how participants are constructed as active, passive or even backgrounded within communicative exchanges [3, s.213–289]. This text based focus on participant positioning will extend to an assessment of how social actors are given voice within news texts or marginalized in deference to dominant government and elite viewpoints. Furthermore, the analytical model positions understanding the ways in which news reports are developed and packaged within a broader analysis of news discursive practice. What types of sources are selectively sourced for the report and in what ways do journalists foreground particular events and attribute primary agency to particular individuals or organisations whilst simultaneously neglecting alternative viewpoints. In situating discourse within wider power relations the study engages with social practice and in so doing seeks to expose the range of ideological and institutional filters that inform contemporary discourse relating to Azerbaijan within prominent UK news outlets. Thus, what initially emerges within text as evidence of increased active participation by Azeri individuals and groups within BBC reporting on local events, for example in reports about an emerging boom within the country, is contrasted with The Guardian who can deploy stronger evaluative discursive claims that accord with a more critical reading of both the causes of, and evidence provided by Azerbaijani political elites of positive political reform. In reading the reported phenomena and practice within discourse of Azerbaijan in prominent news

outlets the analysis will establish how phenomena related to development are projected and narrated within critical and positive accounts of emerging political democracy within post-Soviet and Islamic country of Azerbaijan in order to reveal the interconnections between reported political changes and widely observed problems associated with unequal development, material corruption, growing social inequality and further restrictions on individual freedoms that reflect a significant continuation of the discourse critiquing elite corruption of access to resources and abuse of human rights in a variety of countries.

Azerbaijani identity is reflected in both quality and quantitative terms in the analyzed newspapers. Importantly, the same set of topics (i.e. politics, human rights, conflict and geopolitics) crop up again and again. As such, the press generally presents a relatively monotonous image of Azerbaijan. Viewing the press through the lens of transitivity also reveals interesting patterns with respect to how the image of Azerbaijan is constructed at the level of text. Within these newspaper articles, some participants are portrayed as active, capable decision-makers, whereas others are cast as passive or merely provide a backdrop against which more important developments take place. The image of Azerbaijan is thereby shaped in such a way that readers come to perceive some participants as bearing greater responsibility and exercising more control than others.

Despite addressing broadly the same story, the two newspapers report on the issues raised by Azerbaijan's victory at this year's Eurovision Song Contest in significantly different ways. The coverage in the BBC generally follows a straightforward, largely descriptive format and seeks to report events in a neutral fashion. The report of the victory is epitomised by the opening sentence of the BBC's article on the song contest which reads: "Azerbaijan has been crowned the winner of this year's Eurovision Song Contest," a simple factual observation which conveys a sense of celebration at the achievement of the Azerbaijani performer [11]. The article in *The Guardian*, on the other hand, contains a far greater degree of evaluation and exposition and functions to steer the reader to a particular interpretation of the issues involved. The initial sentence of *The Guardian* piece on the victory reads: "Victory at the Eurovision Song Contest like free and fair elections here must have been handled with all the decorum of an Azerbaijani parliamentary election," clearly combining reference to the song contest with political critique of human rights abuses in the country [12]. Thus, the two newspaper reports of the events associated with the victory of the song by the Azeri group Sadaya deliver two significantly different portrayals of the identity of Azerbaijan.

Discourse analysis of articles on Azerbaijan printed in English-language global newspapers in 2003 reveals that certain fundamental 'patterns' appear repeatedly. This set of patterns projects an image of the country that is cumulative; overall, neutral or informative articles in the global media contribute to a

recognisable image of the country and in time to expectations about what topics will be treated in reports on the country. Yet, other issues - such as the role of media in constructing identity - are never mentioned. It is also the case that some aspects of identity are consistently foregrounded while others are largely ignored. Thus, political and conflict related topics are the norm, whereas references to culture, social life and 'everyday' issues with regards to Azerbaijan are the exception. Discussion of these omissions reveals that their effect in reportage of issues relevant to Azerbaijan is to provide a partial and even simplified representation of a complex country. The issues are present, but the way that they are reported, the choice of words and phrases, and generalising statements, all serve to give a specific slant to perceptions of the country. This is, however, not due to any design to distort public knowledge. Rather, it is a result of both media practices and of the social, political, institutional and ideological environments that frame those practices. The articles treated in this volume reveal how differently particular aspects of contemporary life in Azerbaijan could be reported. The combined linguistic data and the overall patterns emerging from media reportage present a composite image of how the country can be perceived by the global community in general.

The paper argues that Azerbaijani identity is actively constructed in international news coverage. By applying Fairclough's framework and transitivity analysis, it is possible to unveil subtle cues of how identity is linguistically represented. The results demonstrate the substantial role of media discourse in constructing the construction of national identity.

With globalization and digital communications on the rise, national identity is more important than ever. This is especially true for international media portrayals of countries. Given that many international portrayals of Azerbaijan are delivered through the reporting of foreign media outlets, it is vital to analyze these representations to better understand how these images are constructed and how global audiences utilize them to form perceptions of both the nation and its people in terms of politics, culture and society.

Scientific novelty of the research lies in the application of transitivity analysis integrated with Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, which, although CDA has been commonly utilised in media studies, has fewer applications in conjunction with detailed linguistic analysis at the textual level. The research presents a longitudinal comparative analysis of the BBC and The Guardian's reporting on Azerbaijan for the period of 2010–2024. This study fills a gap in the current research on media representations of Azerbaijan.

Practical significance of the study's findings lies in its potential application in discourse analysis, media studies and linguistics, for understanding how language is used to shape public perceptions of identity. Methodological insights of this study

can also be applied to various other settings in which identity is constructed and disseminated in international media discourse.

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REFLECTION OF AZERBAIJANI IDENTITY IN INTERNATIONAL MEDIA: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Summary

This article considers the presentation of the Azerbaijani identity in international media sources. Conducted between 2010–2024, this study focuses on news articles from the BBC and The Guardian newspaper in order to look at differences and similarities in their reports on the subject. Using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis model, this study conducts a critical analysis of the texts and applies transitivity analysis. The findings illustrate that Azerbaijani identity is essentially constructed within the framework of political events, conflicts and different geopolitical interests, and that national identity is generated in media discourse. Moreover, the findings demonstrate that the identity construction can be assessed through both linguistic units and the social context in which they are used.

BEYNƏLXALQ MEDIADA AZƏRBAYCAN KİMLİYİ: TƏNQİDİ DİSKURSİV TƏHLİL

Xülasə

Məqalədə Azərbaycan kimliyinin beynəlxalq mediada diskursiv şəkildə necə təqdim olunması BBC və The Guardian qəzetlərinin 2010–2024-cü illərdə dərc olunmuş xəbərlərinin müqayisəli təhlili əsasında araşdırılır. Tədqiqat Fairclough-un Tənqidi Diskurs təhlili yanaşmaqla yanaşı və mətn səviyyəsində tranzitivlik analizini tətbiq edir. Araşdırma göstərir ki, Azərbaycan kimliyi əsasən siyasi hadisələr, münaqişələr və geosiyasi kontekstlər çərçivəsində formalaşdırılır: bu iki media qurumu arasında təqdimat üsullarında müəyyən fərqlərin müşahidə olunması ilə. Nəticələr media diskursunun milli kimliyin formalaşmasında mühüm rol oynadığını və bu dəyərləndirmədə həm dil vahidlərinin, həm də sosial kontekstin əhəmiyyətini vurğulayır.

ОТРАЖЕНИЕ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНСКОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ В МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ СМИ: КРИТИЧЕСКИЙ ДИСКУРСИВНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ

Резюме

В статье исследуется дискурсивное представление азербайджанской идентичности в международных СМИ на основе сравнительного анализа новостных материалов, опубликованных BBC и The Guardian в период с 2010 по 2024 год. В исследовании применяется подход критического дискурсивного анализа Фэрклафа и транзитивный анализ на уровне текста. Исследование показывает, что азербайджанская идентичность формируется главным образом в рамках политических событий, конфликтов и геополитического контекста: при этом наблюдаются определенные различия в методах представления между этими двумя медиа-институтами. Результаты подчеркивают важную роль медийного дискурса в формировании национальной идентичности и значимость как языковых единиц, так и социального контекста в этой оценке.

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