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The Language of Football: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the FIFA World Cup 2022 Social Media Coverage

ABSTRACT

Sports events are global phenomena around the world. Football is the most common and effective language when it comes to sports. Each language has its own set of tools to achieve ends. The year 2022 witnessed a distinguished sporting event on Arab lands in the area of the Middle East, the FIFA World Cup. It was the most prominent, important and widely debated event. Qatar hosted the World Cup Championship. It is the first version of the World Cup to be held in a Muslim country in the Middle East, which made it surrounded by a lot of arguments over a number of issues since the announcement of Doha hosting the tournament in 2010. Though the World Cup was held before in controversial countries such as Russia, particularly, regarding its human rights record and stance on LGBT issues, however, no previous tournament has been as controversial as this one. Social media, newspapers and TV channels covered the event with different reactions from one side and contradictory ones from the other. This study uses critical discourse analysis to show how international media entities portrayed the FIFA World Cup version of 2022 hosted by Qatar. The main aim of the study is to understand how the specific characteristics of social, political, and religious issues impact the media discourse and influence the portrayal of the host country. The study also aims at clarifying the most common ideologies that the Western media has presented about the Middle East and the Arab Muslim world. To fulfill the above aims, the study hypothesizes that (i) Western media has presented Qatar World Cup 2022 as a negative version, and (ii) the negative ideologies about the Arab Muslims countries are employed rather directly in different ways. The data are collected from the YOUTUBE channel of BBC NEWS. The data are analyzed linguistically and ideologically within Van Dijk's (1995, 2011) approaches. The study concludes that: (i) the Arab Muslim world is presented as a place suppressing differences, restricting freedoms and gagging mouths in regard to human rights. (ii) the Arab Muslim world is presented as the *other* whose values and religious ideologies are de-emphasized throughout the negative representations and strategies used in the data under analysis. The politicization of social media to drop the tournament held in Qatar was among the priorities of the Western media to boycott the tournament.

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لغة كرة القدم: تحليل نقدي لخطاب التغطية الاعلامية على مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي لكأس العالم لكرة
القدم 2022

م- ايهان عبدالمنعم غفوري - جامعة تكريت - كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية - قسم اللغة الانكليزية

الخلاصة:

إن الأحداث الرياضية هي ظواهر عالمية في جميع أنحاء العالم. كرة القدم هي اللغة الأكثر شيوعاً وفعالية عندما يتعلق الأمر بالرياضة. كل لغة لديها مجموعة من الأدوات الخاصة بها لتحقيق الغايات. حيث شهد عام ٢٠٢٢ حدثاً رياضياً مميزاً على الأراضي العربية في منطقة الشرق الأوسط، وهو كأس العالم لكرة القدم. لقد كان الحدث الأبرز والأكثر أهمية والذي نوقش على نطاق واسع. استضافت قطر بطولة العالم. وهي النسخة الأولى من كأس العالم التي تقام في دولة مسلمة في الشرق الأوسط، الأمر الذي جعلها محاطة بالكثير من الجدل حول عدد من القضايا منذ الإعلان عن استضافة الدوحة للبطولة عام ٢٠١٠. حيث اقيم المونديال من قبل في دول مثيرة للجدل مثل روسيا، على وجه الخصوص، فيما يتعلق بسجلها في مجال حقوق الإنسان وموقفها من قضايا المثليين، ومع ذلك، لم تكن أي بطولة سابقة مثيرة للجدل مثل هذه البطولة. غطت وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي والصحف والقنوات التلفزيونية الحدث بردود أفعال متباينة من جهة ومتناقضة من جهة أخرى. تستخدم هذه الدراسة التحليل النقدي للخطاب لإظهار كيف قامت وسائل الإعلام الدولية بتصوير نسخة كأس العالم لكرة القدم لعام ٢٠٢٢ التي تستضيفها قطر. ان الهدف الرئيسي من الدراسة هو فهم كيفية تأثير السمات المحددة للقضايا الاجتماعية والسياسية والدينية على الخطاب الإعلامي والتأثير على صورة البلد المضيف.

كلمات مفتاحية: كأس العالم، فيفا ٢٠٢٢، تحليل الخطاب، التغطية الاعلامية

I. Introduction

Discourse analysis is deep-rooted in a critique to a realist approach to language. Alcázar (2012: 249) mentions that it rejects the idea that social reality has a fixed fundamental meaning that is basically reflected by language. Rather, it claims that meaning is established within language and as a consequence, language is constitutive of the social world. Discourses are made up by a series of associated statements (visual and/or textual) that refer to a specific topic. They create an authoritative language for talking about this topic which has real concerns and effects. In other words, discourses form the way a specific issue is understood and this understanding forms the way we act. Discourse analysis does not turn to texts or images as a foundation of facts or evidence about an exact topic. It does not read texts or analyze images viewing 'truth' but tries to understand what the texts or images claim and how this claim forms the social world. Widdowson (2007:7) believes that "discourse" contains not just the text but also the motivation of its production. He also states that every text is produced according to the ideological and social values of its producer.

Johnson & McLean (2020:377) define discourse analysis as a field of investigation composed of numerous heterogeneous, mostly qualitative, approaches to the study of relationships between language-in-use and the social world. Lawrence (2009:215) states that given that one of the key components of any discourse analysis is to try to recognize hegemonic discourses in action, it is mainly important to step outside hegemonic discourses. This can be realized as part of an attempt to observe a text “with fresh eyes and ears.” It is also part of the process of engaging in reflexive analysis, where the researcher surveys his own position in the discourse, and how that position works to constitute specific understandings of the issues under analysis.

II. Critical Discourse Analysis

Dealing with Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) requires a kind of accuracy and a great deal of shared knowledge of other societies, since most of the texts carry hidden messages with controversial meanings from one side and represent an aspect of a social and political view from another side. Van Dijk presents a model of analyzing a discourse which is well known as the (Sociocognitive Approach). Unlike the other approaches that investigate the relationship between society and discourse in CDA, van Dijk's approach sees the relation between them mentally represented. His plea to include cognitive psychology within CDA analysis is of great importance. It is distinguished by the Discourse- Cognition- Society triangle(Van Dijk,2009:64).

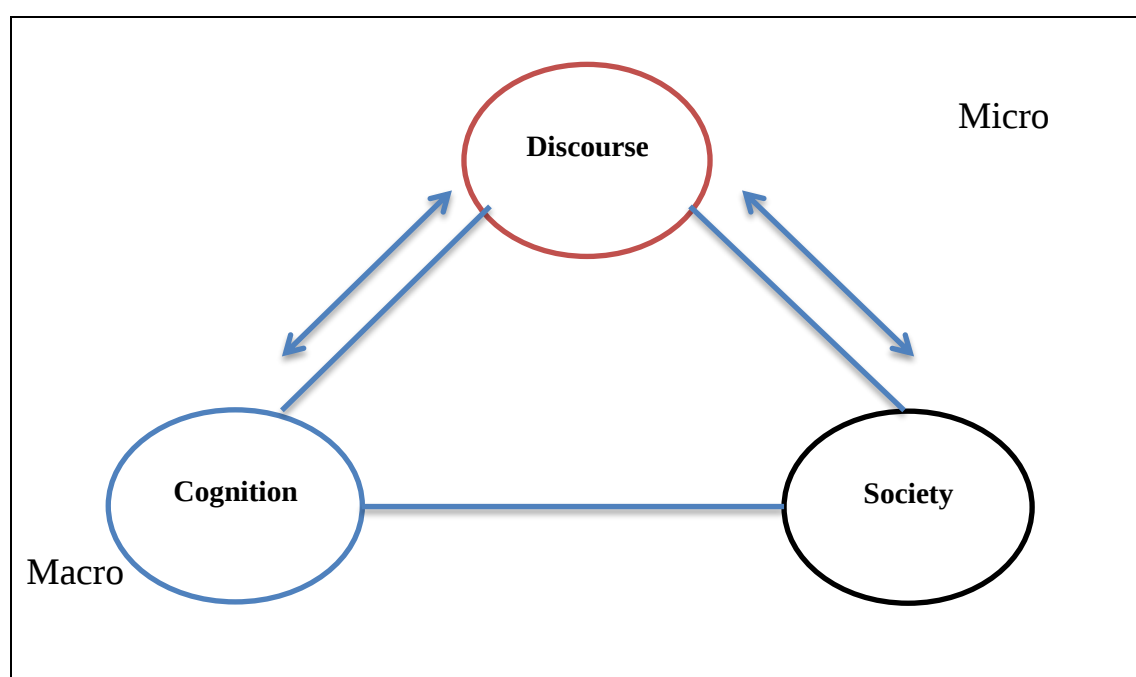


Figure (1): The Triangular Relationship between Discourse, Cognition and Society adopted from van Dijk (2015a:6)

III: Concepts of CDA adopted by van Dijk's Approach

1. Ideology

Van Dijk (1998:8) mentions that ideology is the set of beliefs, ideas, and values shared by members of specific group which presents limited views of the world. He believes that ideology associates social structure with social cognition.



Figure (2): van Dijk's (1998) Representation of Ideology

Hall (1996:26) states that the role of ideology is to make sense of the social relations, structures and practices, i.e. institutions of society. He denotes that ideology also seems to stabilize society by specific shapes of power and dominance.

To van Dijk (1998:9), ideology is not only recognized in cognitive terms, but also it is well-defined at the macro-level in terms of social relations, social groups, and at the micro-level in terms of social practice.

2. Power

Power can be defined as "a set of actions" which can be used more or less effectively according to the speakers i.e. who they are and what their contexts are (Thornborrow,2001:8).

Van Dijk (1993a:254) states that there are two levels of power controlling others: (1) through actions level: power based on force and money and through cognition level: power based on information, knowledge and dominance, which is described as modern and effective as it is used by media for instance.

3. Attitude

According to van Dijk (1982:35-51) attitude can be distinguished from that one which was common in social psychology, attitude to him was used to refer to individuals' points of view and their opinion. In some way, attitudes in CDA are linked to ideologies. Van Dijk believes that attitudes are forms of "social representations" or "socially shared opinions".

IV. Social Media Coverage

The foundation of social media from the beginning has been known for providing online communication, private, public, or nonprofit making institution to communicate. After few years the power of media has increased and becomes the ruling power and the cold war politically and economically all over the world. Social networking sites have brought the world together geographically, the world has become a small village, as social media in its various forms, such as YOUTUBE channels occupy a huge space in the lives of many people of all ages.

V. Methodology

In an attempt to explain the different ideological dimensions within the news coverage of Qatar World Cup, a qualitative method of analysis involving an "interpretive and naturalistic approach... to make sense of, or interpret the different phenomena in terms of meanings" (Trumbull, 2005:101) brought to them is used.

VI. Data Selection

Five selected reports are chosen entirely from websites, YOUTUBE channel. The selected data are surveyed from BBC NEWS. These reports represent the negative points of view about Qatar's hosting the World Cup 2022. The five reports will be analyzed according to two levels of analysis are suggested through this approach: 1. micro and macro levels of analysis, and 2. discourse, cognition and society.

VII. The Adopted Modal for Analysis

The present study adopts Van Dijk's (1995) socio-cognitive approach suggests a socio-cognitive paradigm. Discourse, social, and cognitive assessments are all included in this approach. The basic assumptions that this approach is based on state that cognition mediates between society and discourse and that discourse analysis is focused on various textual and spoken forms of communication (Van Dijk, 1995:21).

He (Van Dijk,1995:22) under the title of "Discourse analysis as ideology analysis" states that ideologies are expressed through text and talk thus discourse structures might be an expression of ideological meanings. He further states that the surface structure of text and talk is the only conventional way of expressing different meanings (ibid:23).

Two levels of analysis are suggested through this approach:

1. micro and macro levels of analysis
2. discourse, cognition and society

The micro level of analysis makes sheds light on the linguistic structure of discourse highlighting aspects of lexicon, syntax, themes, local semantics, global semantics (topics), schematic structures and rhetoric, pragmatics and dialogical interaction.

The macro level on the other hand, under the Social and Cognitive Analysis deals with overall societal frameworks, institutional / organizational structures, group relation, group structure, sociocultural values, ideologies, systems of attitudes, personal values, personal ideologies, group connections, such as racism and prejudice, as well as group structures, such as identity, tasks, objectives, norms, status, and resources (Van Dijk, 1995:20). Thus the macro-level analysis depicts social group domination, inequality, and power.

Within the ideological square, Van Dijk (2005) introduces the four strategies to deal with ideological discourse depending on the representation of *Self* and *Other*.

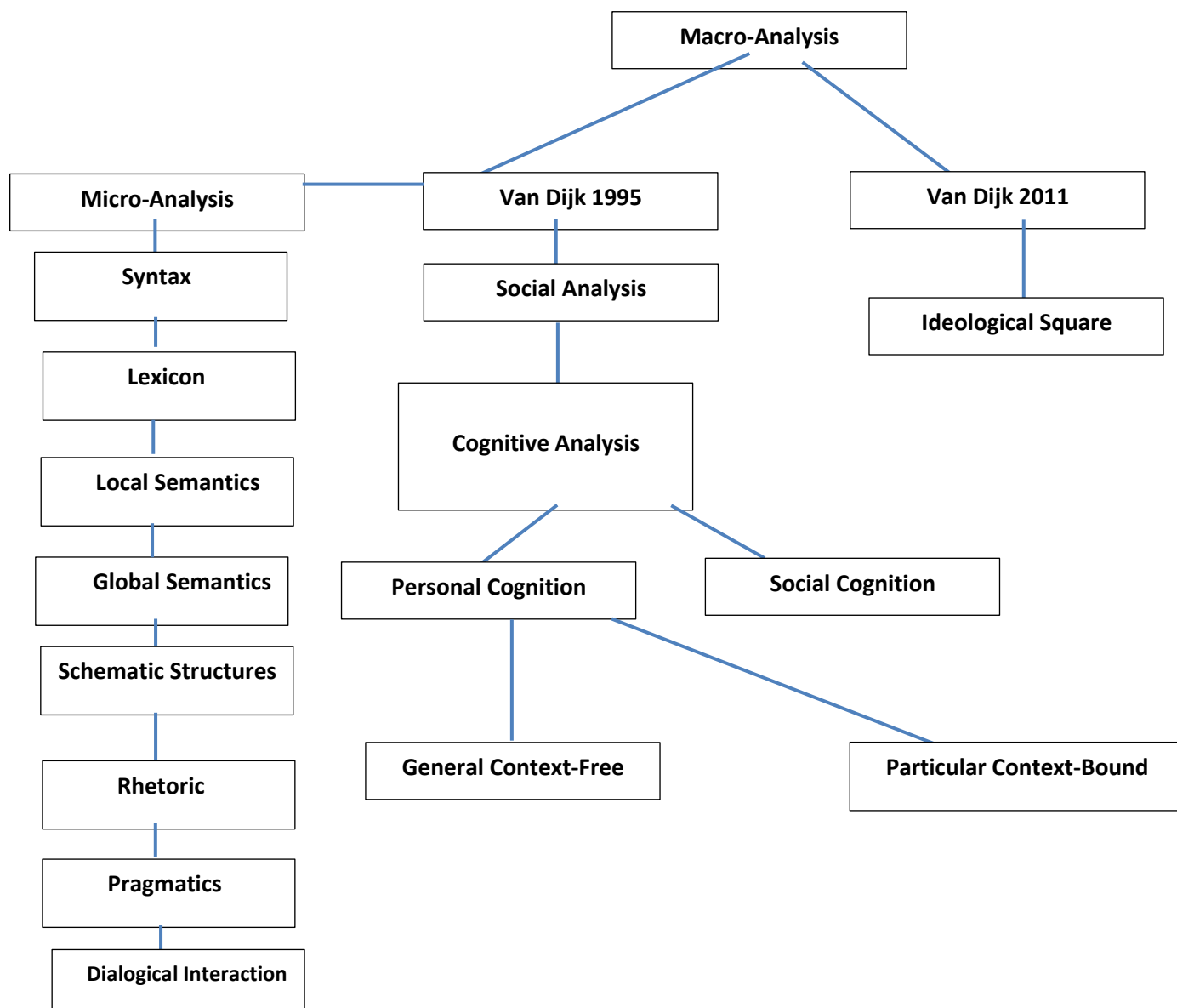
Emphasize “Our” good things.(Exaggerate self’s positive features , actions,...)*

* Emphasize “Their” bad things.(Exaggerate other’s negative features, actions,...)

* De-emphasize “Our” bad things.(Extenuate self’s bad features, actions,...)

* De-emphasize “Their” good things.(Extenuate other’s positive features, actions,...)
(2011 :44).

Adopted Model for Analysis



Van Dijk (1995, 2011)

Table 1.1 Ideologies and discourse: Levels of analysis

Elements in the relations between ideologies and discourse at the various levels of analysis

1 Social Analysis

societal structures

Institutional/Organizational structures

Group relations

Overall

Group structures

2 Cognitive Analysis

2.1 Social cognition

Sociocultural values

Ideologies

Systems of attitudes

Sociocultural knowledge

2.2 *Personal* *cognition*

2.2.1 General (context free)

Personal values

Personal ideologies

Personal attitudes

Personal knowledge

2.2.2 *Particular* *(context-bound)*

Models

Context models

Mental plans and representation of (speech) acts, discourse

Mental construction of text meaning from models

Mental (strategic) selection of discourse structures

Van Dijk (1995: 20)

VI. Data Analysis

Text No.1

'For me it is clear: Qatar is a mistake. We regret choosing Qatar to host the World Cup due to controversial issues regarding human rights and climate issues. Football and the World Cup are too big for a small country like Qatar to host. It was a wrong choice and I was responsible for it as president of FIFA' (Sepp Blatter, Former FIFA President) BBC.

A. Micro-level Analysis (surface structure)

On this level of analysis, a number of strategies used to make up this text need to be accounted for. One can notice that in this text, the choice of the lexical items *mistake*,

regret, controversial issues, climate issues, small country and wrong choice indicates a negative view towards Qatar as a host of World Cup. The lexical item *Qatar* is directly linked to the words *mistake, regret, small (belittling) and wrong choice* to belittle the resources of this country and doubt its capabilities. This is rather emphasized right from the first sentence which shows clearly that choosing Qatar is a mistake reflecting the negative properties associated with this country. As for lexical relations, the repetition of the lexical items *choosing* and *choice* as well as the use of the antonyms *big* and *small* adds to the coherence of the text. This is on the one hand. On the other hand, using the syntactic structures *Qatar is a mistake, We regret choosing Qatar to host the World Cup, Football and World Cup are too big for a small country like Qatar to host and It was a wrong choice* underlies negative representation of the other. This negative representation is also shown in the topicalization of in the sentence *Qatar is a mistake* which emphasizes negative properties about Qatar to degrade the other's image. The same thing is true where both *football* and *World Cup* are topicalized to emphasize and magnify the notion that Qatar is too small country to host such a big event.

When it comes to the sentence *I was responsible for it as president of FIFA*, focus is put on the responsibility which is undertaken by the FIFA president for choosing Qatar as host of World Cup. This syntactic prominence relates to semantic prominence which in turn relates to prominence of actors to emphasize the negative properties of the country being chosen.

Under rhetoric, the text encompasses hyperbole as a means of exaggerating the requirements for holding the World Cup and belittling and underestimating Qatar's capabilities via the use of the expressions: *mistake, too big, small country and wrong choice*.

Pragmatically speaking, the different speech acts within this text express a negative evaluative ideology for ideologies presuppose the relationships of power as the former FIFA president, Batler feels entitled to verbally treat Qatar as inferior to other countries like Russia and the USA.

B. Macro-level Analysis

The above micro-level analysis establishes the road map for the major issues of the macro-level. Under Social analysis, the text raises doubts about Qatar's resources to host the World cup. The issue of climate and human rights shows how these ideologies participate in the social cognition which links sociocultural values and systems of personal attitudes as indicated by the former president of FIFA claiming

that it was a mistake to choose Qatar and belittling the "small" country's capabilities to host such a cup. Raising these points against Qatar reflects the exaggeration of the other's negative features upholding discriminatory ideologies.

Text No.2

'Allegations that Qatar is underreporting the number of migrant workers who have died of heat stroke have been revealed. Across the Gulf, extreme heat is affecting more-and-more people, especially millions of migrant workers who go there to support their families back home. Temperatures that go above 50C, thanks to climate change, can leave workers with life-altering illnesses including heart failure. The Qatar Government did not respond when asked to comment'.

A. Micro-level Analysis

The second text start in an assault like manner accusing Qatar of underreporting a number of migrant workers who have dies of heat stroke. One of the tools to maintain text cohesion is the choice of the lexical items: extreme heat and temperatures that go above 50C as near synonyms, died and heart failure as collocations, and life-alerting illness and heart failure as super ordinate and subordinate.

Holding Qatar as a responsible agency of underreporting the number of migrant workers and not responding when asked to comment is realized by having Qatar and the Qatar Government as the a subjects in the initial positions of the two structures: *Qatar is underreporting....and The Qatar Government did not respond.....* respectively. The complexity of all the text sentences makes a link to the ideology behind these sentences that Qatar is the suitable country for what it is chosen for. The selection of *migrant workers* as lexical items to highlight a social issue where Qatar is blamed for clarifies the aim behind this selection.

As far as local semantics is concerned, the socio-cognitive process which underlies the negative representation of Qatar expressed in the structures: *Allegations that....., millions of migrant workers emphasizes social inequality by "the semantic strategies that aim to legitimate" injustice.*

Within global semantics strategy the topicalization of Qatar and the Government of Qatar and holding them responsible for the bad conditions the migrant workers live in highlights "ideological management" to conversely tropicalize information that emphasize negative out-group properties.

The over statements " extreme heat" and " millions of migrant....." represent a hyperbolic as models of social beliefs that show unfavorable information concerning the other.

Under pragmatic strategies, propositions, leading to negative evaluation, that Qatar has a bad record of human rights and as a country it enjoys a hot climate that would not be suitable to host the World cup as heat goes over 50C are expressed throughout the above text.

B. Macro-level Analysis

Within the social dimension of analysis, the text makes reference to the migrant workers and the discriminatory policy by the Qatar Government against those workers which is linked to climate issues to implicitly highlight the negative properties of Qatar and promote the ideology that this country is incapable of hosting the World Cup. The writer of the text holds Qatar responsible for the death of a number of migrant workers and as a social cognitive element within the cognitive analysis, this issue pushes toward enhancing sociocultural knowledge about the position of Qatar as far as World Cup is concerned.

Taking the representation of this particular context-bound issue of World Cup, the writer of this text promotes a negative view towards Qatar via the power granted by media.

Text No. 3

'But there is no denying the build-up to this tournament has been especially troubled. There have been persistent fears over the human toll of building the infrastructure required in such a short period of time and in such a climate, along with discriminatory laws that prohibit homosexuality and curtail women's freedoms through male guardianship rules'.

A. Micro-level Analysis

The surface structure of Text No.3 exposes a number of claims that hide certain ideologies behind them. The first sentence assures that it is not possible to deny that the build-up to this tournament has been an issue as far as human toll is concerned. The lexical items selected: *persistent fears, toll, prohibit, curtail and male guardianship* all are meant to promote the negative view that the West adopts towards Qatar . This selection works also as a demeaning metaphor on the level of rhetoric to dehumanize the other. The social power of the West which is expressed through their

criticism of the curtailing woman's freedom along the rules which prohibit homosexuality (as Western values not adopted by Muslim societies).

As a socio-cognitive process which underlies the negative representation of Qatar being an out-group is seen as a biased local coherence in the semantics of the text being analyzed. The text explicitly shows bias towards the Western values to be imposed on Arab and Muslim countries. Westerners look at themselves as elite whose ideology is meant to de-emphasize social inequality by certain semantic strategies, such as criticizing discriminatory laws that prohibit homosexuality and curtail women's freedom, that are meant to be transferred to others. These detailed topics of inequality and prohibition of certain "rights" are upgraded from being macrostructures into being superstructures under the title of "human rights".

Pragmatically, the style reflects ideologically inferiorization through the speech patterns that depict Qatar as a violator of human rights in not observing the homosexuality and curtailing women's freedom through male guardianship.

B. Macro-level Analysis

Under the social analysis, discrimination strategy is used to show that Qatar is adopting a discriminatory policy towards homosexuals and women. The issues of climate, the toll of building the infrastructure and LGBT rights push in the direction of establishing certain sociocultural values to affirm the Western attitude as an issue to be cognitively perceived. This strategy tries to transfer these local issues within the Qatari society (context bound) into a more universal model of representation of the LGBT rights.

Text No. 4

'The eyes of the world are on Qatar, as it prepares to host the football World Cup. While the tournament organizers are keen to highlight a fun and modern nation to global audiences, the country's bedrock is its cultural and religious traditionalism, which includes laws which prohibit homosexuality, and curtail women's freedoms through male guardianship rules'.

A. Micro-level Analysis

The text starts with an introductory statement to direct the attention of the readers to this global event of hosting the football World Cup. The second statement is in favour of the tournament organizers but an indirect criticism is directed to the in the second part of this complex sentence. Certain lexical items (bedrock, religious traditionalism) are selected to highlight the Western attitude

towards Islam and Islamic laws. This issue is highlighted and taken against Qatar despite the fact that the organizers are keen to present fun and modern nation to global audience. The syntactic and thematic structure of the first sentence focuses on Qatar as the rhyme of the sentence which carries new information to be highlighted. Thus the social power is translated quite directly into linguistic forms symbolizing the writer's attitude. The Western values and attitudes towards Qatar as an Arab and Islamic country are reflected in the lexical selection and text wording shedding light on the ideology behind these social issues.

One aspect of the discourse semantics is the underlying mental model and hence social cognition is the implicit criticism directed to Qatar on the issues of prohibiting homosexuality and curtailing women' freedom.

The recursive reference to the rights of LGBT and the depiction of woman as oppressed under the Islamic laws makes a global topic that is subject to ideological management which is internationally upgraded and given the features of a schematic structure.

As a rhetorical device, understatement is used to belittle the tournament organizers efforts compared to the social issues raised concerning the Western ideology towards minority and woman rights. Thus, relations of dominance and power are presupposed.

B. Macro-level Analysis

The social issues which are raised in this text represented by religious traditionalism, homosexuality prohibition and women's freedom show the overall societal structure and discrimination from a Western perspective.

These sociocultural values within the Qatari society intersect with the Western values; raising these particular issues within the bound context of the Qatari society and giving them prominence within the media shows the exercise of power and dominance and the globalization of the Western interpretation of these issues. One last point to mention is the negative representation of the *other* through de-emphasizing *their* good things and the positive representation of *our* good things and de-emphasizing of *our* bad things.

Text No.5

'The state of Qatar has said it has "nothing to apologize for" in hosting the 2022 men's football World Cup, amid controversy over the country's human rights record. The country has strict anti-LGBTQ+ laws and there are concerns over the treatment of those working on infrastructure projects for the tournament.'

A. Micro-level Analysis

Text No. 5 falsifies Qatar stance right from the beginning as it is stated that "Qatar has nothing to apologize for" as if it has done something wrong and should apologize for. This reflects a Western point of view that Qatar has a human rights record and strict anti-LGBT laws. The first sentence begins with the subject "the state of Qatar" holding it as a responsible agency as English is a language in which grammatical subjects taking initial position can be hold responsible agencies. In this way *Qatar* is depicted as a minority compared to the West thus it is given the subject position.

The selection of the lexical items: *apologize, human rights record, strict anti-LGBT laws and treatment of those working on infrastructure projects* reflects a bias attitude towards this country. Qatar is negatively represented as the management of the overall text meaning shows underlying negative self-presentation of out-group. This presentation implicitly shows the underlying mental model which is realized as social cognition. The specificity of the social issues raised here leads to level of generality in describing events and generalizing Western ideologies and attitudes making a global topic via upgrading and assigning more prominence through media.

As semantic rhetorical devices exaggeration and hyperbole are used in depicting the "country's human record" and the "strict anti LGBT laws" and belittling the country's efforts in such a way that a negative image is drawn.

The following statement: The state of Qatar has said it has "nothing to apologize for", which exposes a kind of guardianship over Qatar by the Western media requiring it to apologize for not adopting the Western attitudes and ideologies presupposes a relation of dominance and power.

B. Macro-level Analysis

The issue of discrimination, sexism and the strict anti-LGBT laws is meant to be formulated as an overall societal structure that Qatar should observe as a socio cultural value behind which lies a system of Western values and ideologies that are meant to be imposed. Taking certain particular issues as Qatar World Cup and transforming it into a global issue hindered by the country's human rights record and strict anti-LGBT laws is meant to emphasize the other's bad things and de-emphasizing their good things as a strategy within what is known as the ideological square.

Conclusion

1. The Arab Muslim world is presented as a place suppressing differences, restricting freedoms and gagging mouths in regard to human rights.
2. The Arab Muslim world is presented as the *other* whose values and religious ideologies are de-emphasized throughout the negative representations and strategies used in the data under analysis.
3. The analysis of the selected texts on the micro-level clarifies that these texts have been structured in such a way that exploits most of the surface structure phenomena which related to discourse analysis level.
4. On the macro-level analysis rather specific current issues and events represented by Qatar World Cup are given prominence and directed in such a way to criticize the social and religious systems and human rights record of the Arab Islamic world.
5. Persistent and recursive attempts are clear in Western media, by virtue of the power it enjoys, to globalize certain Western values such as LGBT rights making advantage of presenting these values within a range of human rights and climate issues.

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