

## A Discourse Analysis of Selected Newspapers Articles on UNSC Resolution 2334

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### Abstract

This paper aims to examine newspapers texts concerning UNSC Resolution 2334 as displayed in *The Boston Globe* and *The Jerusalem Post*. Through the analysis the researcher investigates how the lexical and grammatical structure of the news articles are used to portray the events and the participants using Discourse Historical approach (DHA) and transitivity which are considered major approaches of Systemic Functional Grammar. The research concludes that lexical and grammatical construction of newspaper articles is never objective and is always motivated by ideology.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Discourse Historical approach (DHA), power relations, Resolution 2334, systemic functional grammar (SFG), transitivity.

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### INTRODUCTION

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one of the most complex struggles in contemporary politics; there are the issues of settlements, violence and border lines; therefore, this conflict has received its share of international intervention and media coverage over the past seven decades.

The last attempt to pass a resolution concerning the conflict was on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 2016. Resolution 2334 was issued by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and addressed the issue of settlements “reaffirm[ing] that the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace”. Fourteen countries voted for this resolution including four permanent members with veto power (China, France, Russia and the UK) whereas the United States abstained.

Being a relatively permanent ally to Israel, the United States abstinence has been marked as a discursive act and as a landmark in the history of the American-Israeli relationship, resulting in controversy over the reason behind the U.S.’s stance with regards to the resolution and its timing, especially because it was

passed in the lame duck period of Obama’s term in the office.

Naturally, political analysts, columnists and writers reacted to this resolution by publishing analyses offering opinions and commentaries with regards to the Resolution.

This paper aims to examine and analyze how *The Boston Globe* which is considered a major news outlet and *The Jerusalem Post* which is a ‘leading Israeli English newspaper’ (<http://www.jpost.com>) view UNSC 2334 resolution depending on discourse analysis approaches.

### METHODOLOGY

The method to be opted for in this paper is a descriptive, qualitative one in which the data corpus will consist of two selected newspaper articles on UNSC Resolution 2334 namely “Cognitive Bias and UNSC Resolution 2334” and “The Consequences of not Vetoing the Israel Resolution” from *The Jerusalem Post*, *The Boston Globe*, respectively.

Based on a conflation of Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) and transitivity discourse analysis approaches, the study will define the overall ideologies and argumentations used to delegitimize this resolution from a pro-Israeli perspective.

### Research Questions

- What are the discursive strategies used to delegitimize UNSC Resolution 2334?
- How is power relations displayed through the semantic and grammatical structures of the articles?

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section gives a brief introduction about the theoretical framework of the paper, followed by a through discourse analysis of the articles that are the question of this research paper.

### Discourse Historical Approach (DHA)

DHA is a key analytical method used for divesting ideologies that underlie what is claimed to be an ‘impartial, objective’ representation of the world. This is mainly achieved through “the systematic and retroductable investigation of semiotic data (written, spoken or visual)” [1] with the purpose of demystifying and deciphering the way in which linguistic expressions are used in the manipulation of power relations and representation of identities.

When conducting a DHA study of a text, one must identify textual realizations, content and investigate the text’s discursive strategies [2]. This can be achieved through the use of DHA tools of analysis as summarized below based on Reisigl & Wodak’s “The discourse-historical approach (DHA)” paper:

- Nomination which refers to the construction of social actors, objects, phenomena and processes.
- Predications which are attributes related to social actors objects, phenomena, processes.
- Argumentation which is related to questioning the claims of truth and normative rightness.
- Perspectivization refers to the speaker’s/ writer’s point of view.
- Intensification and mitigation strategies refer to modifying the illocutionary force and thus the epistemic status of utterances.

### Transitivity

“We make ‘meaning’ through our *choice* and use of words” argue Gerot & Wignell [3] referring to the dialectical relationship between form and function and to the fact that every choice is purpose-driven. This relationship is investigated thoroughly in the works of Halliday on what he termed Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). According to Halliday, SFG consists of three major systems: transitivity, mood and theme, each concerning a certain aspect of language. For the scope of this paper, I will focus only on transitivity which is said to reflect the representational aspect of language [4], its ideational function that is. This method of analysis allows the researcher to fit an infinite number of events in a finite number of processes, showing “who does what to whom” [5]. While ‘who and whom’ are the participants, the ‘what’ is the process which is usually annexed with a circumstance.

While participants and circumstances are self-explanatory, a process according to Halliday [6] is usually the verb that *represents* the action, event or state of mind of the participant. Halliday also distinguishes between six types of processes; material, mental and relational being the three main processes and referring to “the external world, the inner experience of consciousness, and the process of classifying and identifying” [7], respectively. The three remaining minor processes are: behavioral, verbal and existential; while behavioral and verbal are intermediate between mental and material processes, existential refer to ‘the mere existence of an entity without predicating anything else’ [8].

To investigate the *meanings* underneath the articles’ structures, I examine DHA structures parallel to transitivity patterns and social actors in two selected newspaper articles tackling the topic of UNSC Resolution 2334.

### DHA and Transitivity Structure in the Selected Newspaper Articles

Through a DHA and transitivity analysis of the textual realizations of the text, micro- argumentative schemes that the writers use in order to delegitimize UNSC Resolution 2334 are built up throughout the texts. These can be noted, first through the recurrent references to the historical right emanating from religious ‘holy’ ties of the Jews with the land of ‘Israel’ by the repetitive use of nomination strategies in reference to “Judaism, synagogues, historic Jewish sites, God’s chosen ones”.

The second premise the writers use to delegitimize the resolution is the claim of ‘Jewish’ continuity of existence on the land of ‘Israel’ which is textually evident through the intertextual reference that *The Boston Globe* article makes via stating that “Jews could not live in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem, where there forbearers had built homes and synagogues for thousands of years”, “[t]hese Judenrein prohibitions were enacted by Jordan, which had captured by military force these Jewish areas during the Israeli war of independence”, thus presupposing and connoting the continuity of Jewish existence and backgrounding or even excluding Palestinian presence. In fact, throughout the article “The consequences of not...”, no reference is made to Palestine as a geopolitical entity, instead reference is only made to Arabs and Jordanians who are portrayed as invaders and predicated as barbaric and “destroyers of culture” depriving humans from their basic human rights, forbidding Jews from “praying...attending classes...and seek[ing] medical care” and “destroy[ing] all the remnants of Judaism including synagogues, schools, and cemeteries, whose headstones they used for urinals”, as well as intentionally and voluntarily waging wars and directly targeting civilians (direct goals of the shelling) through intensifying the perpetration of violent material

processes the likes of “shelling civilian homes”, “capturing by military force Jewish areas” and “illegally occupy[ing] the entire West Bank” while the Jews are associated with defensive peaceful material processes that transform the state of war into an act of necessity important for the restitution of basic human rights, thus the war is predicated as a “defensive war that Jordan started” and for the purpose of ‘retaking’ what has transitionally been seized from them by force.

The third premise that the writers use to further delegitimize the resolution is brought into light through the invocation of acts of antagonism directed towards the Jews by the Palestinians which can be seen through the various lexical choices of the writers, such as referring to “Jordanian prohibitions” imposed upon the Jews as “Judenrein” which is an adjective used to describe “areas from which Jews are excluded (originally with reference to organizations in Nazi Germany)” according to Oxford dictionary, thus equating German Nazi acts which are usually linked with holocaust with the acts of the Jordanian army against Jews, which is obviously an intensification; other references to the antagonistic and hostile nature of the Palestinians can be seen in the intertextual references and the various predications of the resolution itself. While the former is achieved through direct quoting of the PLO Charter that describes the “partitioning of Palestine and the establishment of Israel [as] illegal and null and void, regardless of the loss of time” and by ironically referring to the Palestinians as “helpless victims, not to be held accountable for their words, their actions and what they preach to their children.”, such references manage to further explicate the ‘oppression’ that Israelis have to endure as a result of their occupation of Palestine, the latter (prediction) can be seen in describing the resolution as “a diplomatic war to delegitimize all of Israel through boycotts, sanctions, and the international criminal court”.

The above arguments are further intensified when psychology is recontextualized and projected unto politics and cognitive bias is brought into the equation, making the United States’ choice to abstain a result of some sort of mental instability as cognitive bias which is defined as a departure “from standards of logic and accuracy” [9] is dubbed the reason behind the United States’ stance. In other words, siding with the Palestinians is seen as a deviation from the normal logical ways of thinking and is a “postcolonial cognitive bias” as the author phrases it –even though this kind of bias doesn’t exist in the original taxonomy of cognitive biases- referring to actions resulting from the guilt complex that postcolonial countries tend to develop towards colonized countries. In referring to this state of bias, the writer uses the verb {suffer} which characterizes the process as an attributive relational one, making it a more or less static state with “the US president Barack, his adviser Ben Rhodes, National Security Adviser Susan Rice and Secretary of State

John Kerry” on the one hand functioning as the carrier and “Israelis”, on the other hand, operating as the attribute, thus signifying “ideological conflicts” according to Bagheri [7].

Throughout these arguments, social actors are nominated. While nominations used in reference to America and Israel are individualized {US President Barack Obama, his adviser Ben Rhodes, National Security Adviser Susan Rice, Secretary of State John Kerry, president-elect Trump and Netanyahu}, not a single reference is made to Palestinians as individuals rather all references to them are collectivized. In CDA, individualization is usually used in reference to “elite people and those whose stories are worth reporting, while ordinary people are usually collectivized” [10]. In other words, from the viewpoint of social actor model, what is worth addressing are events related to and affecting the worlds’ supreme powers: Israel and America, while those related to the Palestinians, on the other hand, are second rate and marginalized.

It is worth mentioning that nominations made in reference to Americans are linked with different processes in terms of transitivity analysis. While those related to the Obama administration are negative relational “US President Barack Obama...suffer” and negative material “[t]his is what President Obama has wrought...”, those related with the new Trump administration are positive material- from an Israeli perspective of course-, “president-elect Trump can undo this pernicious agreement...”, “there is a need by Trump upon taking office to untie his hands and to undo the damage wrought by his predecessor”. In this sense, the two American administrations represented by Obama and Trump are juxtaposed with Trump being likened to a savior figure from the atrocities brought about by the “ill-advised” decisions made by Obama.

Any disruption in these premises would turn these arguments on their head and would refute all claims behind the oppressive nature of the resolution. The historical-religious right, to start with, can be easily rebutted simply by highlighting the fact that the mere existence of certain religious historical ties with a given country does not give any religious group the right to claim possession over that country. In fact, this overdependence on biblical discourse in the construction of group identity to help justify the existence of Israel has had its share of research and questioning by both Arab and non-Arab researchers the likes of Baruch Kimmerling in his *The Palestinian People: A History* [6] to *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* 2012 by Eyal Weizman and the countless productions of Arab writers on the illogicality of these biblical claims.

Secondly, the fact that Palestine was actually populated prior to the Israeli occupation is also made obvious in the various recommendations made by the

different commissions dispatched to Palestine prior to the Zionist attempts to occupy the land; take the 1919 King–Crane Commission, for example which anticipated "complete dispossession of the present non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine, by various forms of purchase.", thus presupposing the existence of 'others' as well as the existence of Palestine as an independent political entity –through nominating (Palestine)-.

To conclude, through a transitivity and a DHA analysis, the pro-Israeli discourse was demystified the 'premises' and ideologies used to delegitimize UNSC Resolution 2334 deciphered.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined how lexical and grammatical choices of news texts on UNSC Resolution 2334 appearing in *The Boston Globe* and *The Jerusalem Post* construct the event and the participants involved using both Discourse Historical approach (DHA) and transitivity analysis which is one of the major systems of systemic functional grammar as the main theoretical framework.

As the analysis has shown, both newspapers attempt to portray the resolution as an act of belligerency against Israel connecting it at the same time to various ideological groundings, or what has been termed in this paper as 'premises' in an attempt to delegitimize what has been considered an anti- Israeli resolution.

The results of this paper concord with those of Roger Fowler [4, 11] and Michael Stubbs [3] who both claim that representation in newspapers is never impartial and is ideologically driven as can be evidenced in the both grammatical and lexical choices [4].

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## INDEX

### The consequences of not vetoing the israel resolution

AMID THE CONTINUING controversy over the Obama administration's refusal to veto the Security Council's resolution regarding Israeli "settlements," it is important to understand why Israeli leaders across the political spectrum as well as American supporters of Israel — including many who oppose settlement expansion and favor a two-state solution — feel so negatively about this resolution.

Its text states that "any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem" have "no legal validity and [constitute] a flagrant violation under international law." This resolution is not, therefore, limited to settlements in the West Bank. It applies equally to the very heart of Israel.

Before June 4, 1967, Jews were forbidden from praying at the Western Wall, Judaism's holiest site. They were forbidden to attend classes at the Hebrew University at Mt. Scopus, which had been opened in 1925 and was supported by Albert Einstein. Jews could not seek medical care at the Hadassah Hospital on Mt. Scopus, which had treated Jews and Arabs alike since 1918. Jews could not live in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem, where their forbearers had built homes and synagogues for thousands of years. These Judenrein prohibitions were enacted by Jordan, which had captured by military force these Jewish areas during Israel's War of Independence, in 1948, and had illegally occupied the entire West Bank, which the United Nations had set aside for an Arab state. When the Jordanian government occupied these historic Jewish sites, they destroyed all the remnants of Judaism, including synagogues, schools, and cemeteries, whose headstones they used for urinals. Between 1948 and 1967 the UN did not offer a single resolution condemning this Jordanian occupation and cultural devastation.

### Netanyahu struggles to defend settlement policy

...The bad news is that no future president, including President-elect Trump, can undo this pernicious agreement, since a veto not cast can never be retroactively cast. And a resolution once enacted cannot

be rescinded unless there is a majority vote against it, with no veto by any of its permanent members, which include Russia and China, who would be sure to veto any attempt to undo this resolution. Obama's failure to veto this resolution was thus a deliberate ploy to tie the hands of his successors, the consequence of which will be to make it far more difficult for his successors to encourage the Palestinians to accept Israel's offer to negotiate with no preconditions.

The good news is that Trump can ameliorate the effects of this resolution immediately upon assuming office. He can do so by officially recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moving its embassy there. This would dramatically demonstrate that the United States does not accept the Judenrein effects of this bigoted resolution on historic Jewish areas of Jerusalem, which are now forbidden to Jews.

...Obama's ill-advised, lame duck, and undemocratic effort to tie his successor's hands must not be allowed to destroy the prospects for a negotiated peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2016/12/27/the-consequences-not-vetoing-resolution-against-israel/E06kgDJUrPrXeSmp06umCL/story.html>

#### **Cognitive bias and unsc resolution 2334**

In essence, one creates a reality not based upon objectivity, but influenced by emotions, leading to irrational judgments.

Israeli Amos Tversky and his colleague Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman are famous for their research regarding systematic human cognitive bias. Cognitive bias often leads people to decisions that, when fully understood, are irrational by their own standards.

In essence, one creates a reality not based upon objectivity, but influenced by emotions, leading to irrational judgments.

US President Barack Obama, his adviser Ben Rhodes, National Security Adviser Susan Rice and Secretary of State John Kerry suffer from a postcolonial cognitive bias. Their reality is that Israeli settlements are the primary cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nothing can disabuse them of this distorted reality, and every event in the region is seen through this biased filter.

Ignoring the facts of Israeli offers for two states over the past 69 years, or a Netanyahu settlement freeze in 2009, allows them to blame Israel for their own repeated diplomatic failures, while ignoring a PLO Charter that still calls for the end of Israel. "The partitioning of Palestine... the establishment of Israel are illegal and null and void, regardless of the loss of time," it says.

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Cognitive-bias-and-UNSC-Resolution-2334-477377>.