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# Realization of semantic and lexical instances in online hard news representation: a study through attitude and graduation analysis

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## ABSTRACT

The study explores media discourse through the lexical and semantic realization of text. For that, online hard news on the disruption of tension due to targeting Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani as the Commander of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) on 3rd January 2020 in Iraq was selected from “Tehran Times” and “USA Today.” The “Appraisal Analysis” of Martin and White under “Attitude” and “Graduation” resources were employed to analyze the lexical strategies. The dataset comprises 322 words from the “Tehran Times” and 1727 words from “USA Today.” The study reveals that both newspapers have presented their views *via* social actors (Irani President Rouhani & U.S. President Donald Trump) as an external voice. President Rouhani presented in negative invoked instances with determination to respond in “Tehran Times.” At the same time, “USA Today” portrayed Donald Trump on a positive with correct measures as the need of an hour. The findings suggest “USA Today” only had inscribed judgment and invoked stances. Both newspapers had represented “subjectivity” along with “objectivity” by presenting social actors’ positive image in their local newspapers through direct speech that showed the ideological orientation of newspapers.

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## KEYWORDS

Online hard news; attitude analysis; graduation analysis; semantic realization; lexical realization

## 1. Introduction

Language is considered a social practice with two forms of expression through discourse, i.e., speeches and writings (Liu & Guo, 2016). In this regard, the individual and society have a dialectical relationship through semiotic exchanges (Hasan, 2005). To find the attitude in language, the “Attitude Analysis” draws insight into the text and describes the author’s viewpoint (Martin & White, 2005).

Nowadays, media organizations play the role of media actors in disseminating political communication, and their framing of issues based on different dimensions, such

as fairness, balanced reporting, neutrality, truthfulness, and accuracy show their positive inclination toward the representation (Jakaza & Visser, 2016). In this regard, it is observed that the newspaper continuously keeps readers informed about the happenings of context. Related to this, “hard news” in a newspaper gives readers information based on facts with non-opinionated inputs (Sabao, 2016). It has a function to provide social knowledge by keeping the text “objective” (Sabao & Visser, 2015). However, the representation of news-by-news media leads to the determination of its ideology. On the other hand, it is challenging to analyze the biased or unbiased representation of news media. Still, the frequency of unfavorable and favorable terms of media text helps determine the ideology of news media (Jarman, 2019).

To determine the attitude of the author in news representation concerning the United States of America and Iran on the particular event of targeting Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani as the Commander of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) on 3rd January 2020 in Iraq was framed on “Attitude Analysis” and “Graduation Analysis” by Martin and White (2005). For that, “Tehran Times” and “USA Today” were chosen for having the views of both countries independently through their platforms on targeting Major General Qassem by the U.S. Both newspapers have a wide readership in their countries. In this way, comparing both views will lead the reader to determine the individual stances on this attack, where both social actors (Presidents) explain their reaction, whether it was justified or unjust. However, the study seeks to explain the linguistic attitudinal choices of the writer/author that determine the authorial stance of an author in an instance. Thus, van Dijk (1991) believed that media manipulation is a consensus based on the ideology that describes the authorial relationships in society. However, in the end, newspapers’ ideology will also appear by the selected analysis tool. The decision to focus on newspapers’ written text was based on its powerful and influential role in the study of crafting attitudes (González-Carriedo, 2014).

The study aimed to find the authorial stances of news institutions through the lexical and semantic realization of instances in percentages and, secondly, to determine the subjectivity and objectivity in text *via* “Appraisal analysis,” i.e., “Attitude” and “Graduation” resources that lead to determining the viewpoint of an author as well as newspapers’ ideology.

## 2. Background of the study

The tension between Iran and the United States (U.S.) sparked when the U.S. drove down Iranian oil from the market with maximized pressure. Iran’s officials believed that lifting sanctions could increase its production and export by 1 million barrels per day (Khajehpour, 2015). On sanctions, Iran responded to the United States by attacking the oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, the world’s most important chokepoint, as one-third of oil and petroleum products are exported from this path daily. Iran also attacked the Fujairah Fort in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2019 May and June and Saudi Arabia in September 2019. The attacking strategy by Iran was designed to signal to the United States that by strangling Iran economically, Iran would also affect the other sources of the oil market that would

affect the world. The attack by the U.S. on Irani Major General Qassem Soleimani in Iraq, who was the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) from 1998 to 2020 (till his death), commander of the Quds Force that is responsible for the extra-territorial military operations sparked the tension. The death of the General sparked Iran, and the whole country remained united on one platform to face the retaliation and ready to take revenge. IRGC started its first attack after the General's death on a military base of the U.S. in Iraq.

Iran and the U.S. have had no formal diplomatic relations since 1980. While Pakistan plays a role on behalf of Iran as a protecting power. Switzerland acts on behalf of the U.S. After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Iran overthrew the last monarch, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was supported by the U.S. and replaced with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. This change was supported by Islamic organizations and student movements. In 2015, the U.S. led a successful negotiation on the nuclear deal with Iran, and sanctions were lifted in 2016 but again imposed in 2018 on bitter relations. In 2020, Iran announced its withdrawal from the nuclear deal and was ready to fight for its independent rights. As Goldenberg et al. (2019) stated in their report, Iran and the U.S. global oil market had made a dramatic turn and raised security concerns in the global market. It was supposed to be avoided, most possibly. However, with the emerging crisis after targeting and killing Major General Qassem Soleimani with a drone attack in Iraq, the proxy war seemed to be initiated, and the world was looking for a peaceful solution. Then, U.S. President Donald Trump's stance was that the General was plotting attacks on American military and diplomats, and he had been terminated to stop the war (The New York Times, 2020).

To evaluate the discourse on the issue through the author's representation in two online newspapers, Iran's online newspaper "Tehran Times," and the U.S. newspaper "USA Today" were analyzed. The Iranian English online newspaper "Tehran Times" is 40 years old with conservative alignment, founded in 1979. It is considered a voice of the Islamic revolution. The newspaper established a news agency in 2002 known as the "Mehr News Agency" (MNA), considered one of Iran's most important news media. According to the Tehran Times website, it is not the government's newspaper; in fact, it is a loud voice of oppressed people and the Islamic Revolution (Tehran Times, 2023).

In contrast, the U.S. online newspaper "USA Today" was selected as it was distributed internationally and published by Gannett Company. It was founded by Al Neuharth in 1982 with a daily readership of 2.6 million and 726.906 weekly printed copies. It shared the widest circulation in the U.S. with "The Wall Street Journal" and "The New York Times." Therefore, both newspapers were selected for wider readerships in Iran and the USA, and secondly, to analyze their ability to control the shape of the messages. As González-Carriedo (2014) believed that newspapers have the capacity to sway public opinion toward the desired state of mind on particular issues.

### 3. Literature review

Online journalism has established a new medium of interconnectivity and relation between individuals and news organizations (Lewis & Westlund, 2015). In this regard, the text explains the journalist's attitude in reported news (Stenvall, 2014). However,

emotions are expressed and dependent on various pieces of evidence about inner feelings or influences from context. Notably, the “hard news” is a journalist’s attitudinal expression that can be expressed in inscribed or invoked forms and additionally presents the newspaper’s ideology (Thomson et al., 2008). In this regard, Nádrská (2017) explains the generic and dialogic perspectives in “hard news” that serve as evaluative grounds by examining the internal and external voices in news reports. Another study by Sabao and Visser (2015) stated that the “Herald” and “Newsday” newspapers depend on quoted text to support their views on the issue of Zimbabwe’s constitution-making through the representation of both newspapers; they reinforced their ideology through the use of external sources.

Furthermore, the study by Huan (2015) explains the Chinese and Australian journalists’ use of news resources and finds that Chinese journalists closed down the dialogic space for the elite and opened up for ordinary citizens; in contrast, Australian journalists tend to contract the dialogic space of elite resources as well as expand the resources for engaging with the news resources, and in this way, a power relation is created among a journalist and news resources. The study by Zhang (2015) on 2008 news reporting on the earthquake found that Chinese newspapers were oriented on citizens’ approach reporting strategy. Now, newspapers are more oriented toward people’s true feelings in disasters and crises. Moreover, the study of Jakaza and Visser (2016) stated that news reporting aligns and dis-aligns the reader with interpersonal meanings.

However, the findings in the study of Tavassoli et al. (2018) stated that “Guardian” was seen in a positive, welcoming attitude, while; “Telegraph” took an unwelcoming stance on the immigration of Syrians in European countries that depicted the ideology of news media by the linguistic choices. Pounds (2010) stated that the “Appraisal” choices are evaluative voices in journalistic discourse. Zaidi (2016) believed that the author adopts a particularly suitable role for himself and assigns a complementary role to the reader to align himself based on the writer’s viewpoint by the resource of “Attitude,” “Engagement,” and “Graduation.” The study of Asad et al. (2019a) also found that Malaysian and Pakistani independent and mainstream newspapers had adopted an external voice to support their viewpoint with actual sources. The usage of linguistic choices toward political parties led to the determination of the ideology of news media as “Malaysiakini” and “Dawn” represented social actors fairly and stuck to their ideologies of portraying hard news. At the same time, mainstream newspapers, i.e., “The New Straits Times” and “The News” were seen playing their role for their private political interests in both countries. Another study by Asad et al. (2019c) found that “Malaysiakini” had represented social actors fairly before elections in Malaysia, and “The New Straits Times” was shown to be inclined toward the current ruler, making it a mainstream newspaper that refrained from the coverage of opposition leading to biased representation.

## **4. Research framework**

### **4.1. Appraisal analysis**

Appraisal analysis is described as the dialogic and generic view of stances mentioned in news reports by a journalist (Martin & White, 2005). It deals with the

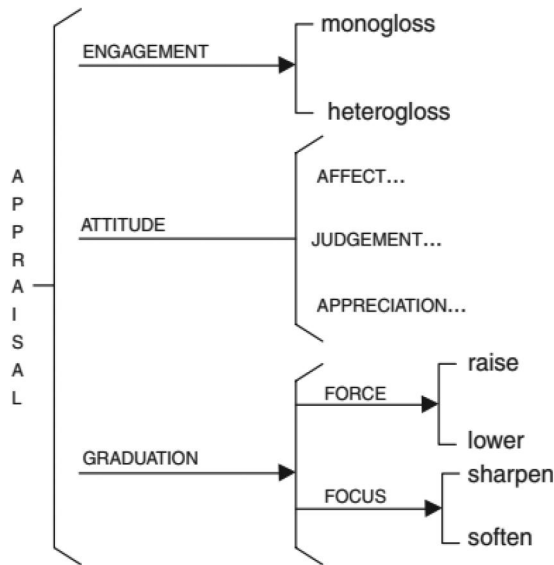


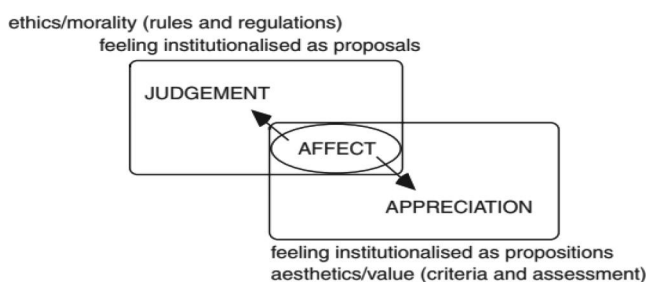
Figure 1. Appraisal resources overview by Martin and White (2005, p. 38).

interpersonal function of language. Journalists employ framing devices that reflect their orientation (Jakaza & Visser, 2016). Martin and White (2005) notion of “journalistic voice” explains the taxonomy for categorizing a news media text by the essential evaluative meanings where positive and negative evaluations are activated (Thomson et al., 2008). The authorial/objective and subjective stance’s evaluation in “Appraisal” is determined by contextual features that explain the individual registers (Pounds, 2010). “Appraisal Analysis” analyzes the lexical realizations of evaluations and a semantic analysis within a context (van Driel, 2018). “Appraisal” theory explains the attitudinal stances by journalists that are based on three discourse resources, i.e., “Attitude,” “Engagement,” and “Graduation” (Figure 1), and the current study is based on “Attitude” and “Graduation” resources to find the lexical and semantic realization of text production. The focus of the study on these two resources is to analyze the author’s viewpoints and the intensity of words used in the online newspaper representation.

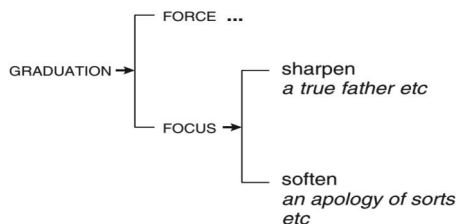
#### 4.1.1. Attitude analysis

“Attitude” is concerned with assessing things with feelings or emotions and judgments of behavior (Martin & White, 2005). The expressions of attitude may be expressed positively or negatively. The writer’s feelings expressed in the text are known as “inscribed” (explicit) attitudes, while externally attributed attitudes or expressions are invoked (implicit) (Tavassoli et al., 2018).

“Attitude” has three sub-resources, i.e., “affect,” “judgment,” and “appreciation” (Figure 2). “Affect” creates the reaction in text emotionally, like worried, *angry*, *horrified*, etc., and can be in the form of positive or negative attitudes/emotions. They are categorized and analyzed into “Un/happiness,” “In/Security,” “Dis/Satisfaction,” and “Dis/Inclination” (Martin & White, 2005).



**Figure 2.** Overview of Attitude resource by Martin and White (2005, p. 45).



**Figure 3.** Overview of Graduation resource by Martin and White (2005, p. 137).

However, “judgment” assesses behavior like *fair, miserly, good, bad, ugly, etc.* “Judgment” has two types, i.e., “social sanction” and “social esteem.” “Social sanctions” are applied as policy on people. It is subdivided into two types, i.e., “veracity,” which deals with people’s truthfulness, and “propriety” which deals with people’s ethicality. “Social esteem” deals with the unusualness of a person in the category of “Normality,” the second category of “Capacity,” deals with a person’s capability, whereas a person is assessed in the category of “Tenacity” in determination.

“Appreciation” values things by the assessment, such as *beautiful, grand, huge, lively, excellent, bonus, ugly, etc.* (Martin & White, 2005). It is divided into three categories, i.e., “reactions,” “composition,” and “valuation.” “Reactions” are attitudes toward things, e.g., *sleepy, exciting, energetic, boring, active, dull, etc.* “Composition” deals with “complexity and balance” in a text; words like *pure, elegant, simple, messy, and unclear* come under “complexity,” while *unified, equal, balanced, neutral, unbalanced, etc.* come under “balance,” whereas; in “valuation,” one values the presence of thing, e.g., *insignificant, creative, innovative, etc.* (Martin & White, 2005).

#### 4.2. Graduation analysis

“Graduation” presents a dialogistic function in which the speaker is strongly or less strongly aligned within the value position (Martin & White, 2005). It is divided into two scales, “force” and “focus” (Figure 3). “Force” covers the intensity in text with the words like *extremely, rapidly, slightly, etc.* “Force” is presented with “quantification” as well as “intensification” in the text, which increases or decreases the volume of attitude.

Moreover, “focus” resources are intensifiers in softening and sharpening prototypicality. Soft prototypicality includes words like *soft attitude, kind person, humble*

*gesture*, etc., while sharp prototypicality includes *claw-like*, *dagger-like*, *piercing*, *spiky*, etc. These define the attitudinal tokens in a text.

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1. Data collection and method

The data set is made by selecting the first hard news of the issue the next day, i.e., 4th January 2020. English newspapers from Iran and the United States of America were selected to analyze the attitude in the text. Both newspapers were selected on their pro-government stances and larger readership in their respective countries. Being the mainstream newspapers, they have a reputation for fast representation of issues on behalf of their governments. The erupted tension between the two countries on the killing of Major General Qassem Soleimani, Iranian Commander of the Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Iraq, was a prominent issue as he was on the top target list of U.S. on the claims of making plans to target U.S. base in Iraq. Being a high-profile figure, Iran took a hard stance on his killing.

Two news reports fall under the selected category of “hard news.” “Tehran Times” (322 words) from Iran and “USA Today” (1727 words) from America were selected for analysis under “Attitude” and “Graduation” resources of “Appraisal Analysis.” The news reports were analyzed manually, and linguistic choices were categorized individually to evaluate the ideology of news institutions toward the current issue by their semantic and interpersonal representation.

After collecting and reading the desired data, there was a need to break down each news report into statements representing the speech of the appraised social actor. The statements might be comprised of one or more statements. Then, they were divided into as many instances dependent on a single expression. Each stance comprises a particular appraised expression or attitude. The coding with symbols was used to represent components in the Excel spreadsheet for analysis. After identifying attitudes in the text, the resources were tallied and calculated according to their occurrences. The instances were analyzed into two categories, i.e., total distribution of Appraisal resources in the dataset and positive and negative inscribed/invoked polarities. Then, the frequencies were taken out for better comparison.

The inductive approach was opted by focusing on exploring new results in context. It starts with observing patterns in experiences to reach a conclusion (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative method was opted for. Avramidis and Smith (2006) stated that large samples sometimes give less understanding of realities. The qualitative method serves concerns with the smaller sample by analyzing and following through context, past impressions, and patterns.

## 6. Findings

Table 1 shows the occurrences of resources employed in the text. “Tehran Times” is seen with the most occurrences of 13 with 93% in “judgment” compared to other resources. In appreciation, 7% is used with 1 occurrence. In comparison, “USA Today” is seen with 88% in “judgment” with 66 occurrences.



**Table 1.** Distribution of attitudinal resources in “Tehran Times” and “USA Today.”

Feature	Tehran Times		USA Today Feature	USA Today	
	Instances	Percentage		Instances	Percentage
Affect	0	0	Affect	0	0
Judgment	13	93%	Judgment	66	88%
Appreciation	1	7%	Appreciation	9	12%

**Table 2.** Positive/negative, inscribed/invoked instances.

Feature	Tehran Times		USA Today Feature	USA Today	
	Instances	Percentage		Instances	Percentage
Positive Inscribed	0	0	Positive Inscribed	8	11%
Negative Inscribed	5	36%	Negative Inscribed	22	29%
Positive Invoked	2	14%	Positive Invoked	15	20%
Negative Invoked	7	50%	Negative Invoked	30	40%

**Table 3.** Summary of attitudinal choices in “Tehran Times.”

'Tehran Times' instances	Instances	Percentage
Appreciation-polarity		
Negative	0	0
Positive	1	100%
Appreciation-type		
Reaction (Impact)	1	100%
Judgment-polarity		
Negative	11	85%
Positive	2	15%
Judgment-type		
Tenacity	11	85%
Capacity	2	15%

“Tehran Times” and “USA Today” have used the most negatively invoked stances in news coverage. “Tehran Times” has used 50% with seven occurrences, and “USA Today” has used 40% of instances with 30 occurrences. Both newspapers represented the issue through social actors, i.e., presidents of their respective countries. In this regard, Iran observed a strict stance against the U.S. by saying the action was unlawful and non-humanitarian. “Tehran Times” represented the issue with 50% negative responses compared to “USA Today” (36%) in the same category. In comparison, negative inscribed stances come in the second position with 36% by five occurrences in “Tehran Times” and 29% with 22 occurrences in “USA Today” (Table 2).

“Tehran Times” has shown only one positive occurrence in the “appreciation” resource with 100%, whereas; the “judgment” resource in the negative is higher with 85% by 11 occurrences. The “tenacity” choice has also received 85%, with 11 occurrences being the most. The second resource choice is “capacity” with 15% by two occurrences (Table 3).

“USA Today” has also shown the most occurrences in “judgment” and “appreciation” resources. In “appreciation” resource, “reaction (Quality)” is seen in a higher percentage with 78% by seven occurrences. Overall, negative polarity with 56% by five occurrences is found to be higher. While in “judgment resource,” “tenacity” choice is higher with 87% by 58 occurrences. In the second position comes the “normality,” with 10% by seven occurrences (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Summary of attitudinal choices in “USA Today.”

'USA Today' instances	Instances	Percentage
Appreciation-polarity		
Negative	5	56%
Positive	4	44%
Appreciation-type		
Reaction (Impact)	1	11%
(Quality)	7	78%
Composition (Balance)	1	11%
Judgment-polarity		
Negative	48	72%
Positive	19	28%
Judgment-type		
Tenacity	58	87%
Capacity	2	3%
Normality	7	10%

**Table 5.** Summary of graduation resources in “Tehran Times.”

Graduation resources	Instances	Examples	Percentage (%)
Focus	Positive = 0 Negative = 0	NIL	0 0
Force	Positive = 0 Negative = 3		0 100%
Force–Intensification	1	Inalienable; serious escalation; grave and heinous act	33%
Force–Quantification	2	Almost; at least	67%

**Table 6.** Summary of graduation resources in “USA Today.”

Graduation resources	Instances	Examples	Percentage (%)
Focus	Positive polarity = 1 Negative Polarity = 1		50% 50%
Sharp		Fighting between various groups that has been going for hundreds of years	
Soft Force	Positive polarity = 2 Negative polarity = 5	Picture of calm	29% 71%
Force–Intensification		Tense picture; suddenly, raised; tough; backlash; stupid; endless wars	
Force–Quantification		Less than an hour	

In the “graduation” resource, “force” (Quantification) with negative polarity (100%) is shown the highest frequency with 67% by two occurrences (Table 5).

“USA Today” has shown equal negative and positive polarities by 50% each in the “focus” resource, while negative polarity with 71% by five occurrences is shown as the highest (Table 6).

## 7. Discussion

The result of newspapers text is analyzed into two resources of “Appraisal Analysis,” i.e., “attitude,” and “graduation.” In the first category of “attitude analysis,” it is found that “Tehran Times” has fallen into the “judgment” resource the most. The issue has

been taken as a serious and social actor, “President Rouhani” is seen in negatively invoked occurrences the most and acted in response to an attack. The instances like “*we will take revenge*,” “*inalienable right for the Iranian people*,” etc. show the determination to act in response to the USA. Direct speech is used rhetorically to communicate the political as well as the ideological orientation of the newspaper (Jakaza & Visser, 2016).

The whole news report has the highest “tenacity” instances. In the second position, the “capacity” resource is found with an instance like “*the strike was a serious escalation*,” showing the powerful response in the form of a strike condemned by President Rouhani. “Tehran Times” is showing its inclination as a hardliner newspaper by the choices of linguistics falling under “attitude” resource. The inscribed stances are also presented with 36%, which shows the ideology of news institutions. The external voice is seen as a rhetorical marker. The “objectivity” on the issue is endorsed by an external voice in the “Tehran Times.” Haun’s views also aligned with Cicourel (1992). Huan stated (2015) that any interpretation, explanation, and exploration of journalistic stances are connected to the ethnographic setting, the perception, and the local organization’s conditions. Similar findings are found in the study of Sabao and Visser (2015) that external voices in attributed resources as social actors serve as reinforcement. According to Asad et al. (2019a), social actors are main doers, and they could be analyzed in media texts by their productive participating role in a context.

In comparison, “USA Today” has shown its stances in “judgment” with 88% and “appreciation” with 12%. The newspaper has taken the help of invoked (40%) as well as inscribed instances (29%). The newspaper’s internal voice, as well as external voice, can be heard. The issue is presented in negative polarity at the highest. The authorial voice of the reporter is presented with instances like “*President Trump was a picture of calm*,” “*after threatening Iran...*,” “*Trump seemed eager to lower the tension*,” “*among the people who joined Trump*,” etc. showing the internal voice in “judgment” resource. The writer expresses his emotions by observing the situation. “USA Today” has presented the issue not in hard news but as a continuous reporting style by adding the latest news from time to time. The newspaper handled the issue as an ongoing crisis that needed to be informed about the latest news of that span.

“Subjectivity,” as well as “objectivity,” are found in the newspaper. “Subjectivity” is in the form of the author’s emotions/views, and “objectivity” is in the form of factual news reporting. Jakaza and Visser (2016) stated that subjectivity is not based on selecting news reports but evaluating journalists’ framed devices that reflect political orientation. By representing invoked and inscribed stances in “USA Today,” the newspaper follows its fair representation of social actors and events that enforces its ideology of liberal unbiased reporting. Asad (2022) stated that the newspapers’ language depicts its ideology through its stances. Regarding newspapers’ role, they have a tendency in emphasizing the attitude and to construe the evaluation toward a particular phenomenon (Puspita & Pranoto, 2021).

The few excerpts are taken from news reports to show the alignment of the writer by presenting his views e.g.

**56 USA Today** *It was not clear why Trump held those meetings at the golf course rather than at Mar-a-Lago, and neither Trump nor his aides have explained it. (Judg, neg (-))*

**110 USA Today** *The president’s tough talk on Iran has been at odds with his promise to withdraw the U.S. military from the Middle East and his constant criticism of predecessors for engaging the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. (App, neg (-), reac (imp))*

As stated in AllSides “USA Today” does not show opinions in favor of any political spectrum (USA TODAY media bias rating is Center, 2019). The findings are similar to the results of Asad et al. (2019a) that independent newspapers in Malaysia and Pakistan have liberal opinions and representation of social actors, while mainstream newspapers have shown more private political interests of them. Another study by Asad (2021) stated that Malaysian and Pakistani alternative and mainstream newspapers served on their inclined interests. From semiotic analysis, the representation could be said to be biased.

Regarding the subjectivity and objectivity of newspapers, Table 7 highlights the words and inclinations of newspapers.

Table 7 presents the used terms in news reports showing “subjectivity” and “objectivity” from both newspapers’ representations. As Jarman (2019) stated, measuring bias in media representation lies in the nature of the concept and determined by the terms used in the text that affects readers. People experience different emotions as well when reading the same article due to their beliefs and information accessible to them (Edgar, 2015). As stated above in Table 7, “Tehran Times” has used words, such as “*serious escalation*” and “*mourning the loss of the honorable martyr*” present the intensity of aggression and innocent killing. The newspaper has taken its stance on behalf of its country and presents its emotions. The newspaper’s expression shows the subject reaction toward the issue. Whereas the words like, “*U.S. forces conducted drone strikes ...*,” and “*killing at least 25 individuals and leaving another 51 injured*” show the factual reporting that falls under objectivity.

However, “USA Today” presents subjectivity with words like, “*Precisely what caused Trump to risk getting involved in a war with Iran is not clear,*” “*Neither the White House nor the Pentagon have detailed,*” and “*Republicans lobbed the same accusation against President Bill Clinton.*” *The facts in objective reporting are also*

**Table 7.** Few terms used in “Tehran Times” and “USA Today” present subjectivity and objectivity.

Newspapers	Subjectivity Phrases	Objectivity Phrases
Tehran Times	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>The strike was a serious escalation</b> of Trump’s growing confrontation ...</li> <li>2. ... the Iranian nation, but also all Muslims and free-hearted people of the world are <b>mourning the loss of the honorable martyr.</b></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ... <b>U.S. forces conducted drone strikes on locations of the PMU forces in Iraq ...</b></li> <li>2. ... <b>killing at least 25 individuals and leaving another 51 injured</b></li> </ol>
USA Today	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ... <b>Precisely what caused Trump to risk getting involved in a war with Iran is not clear ...</b></li> <li>2. ... <b>Neither the White House nor the Pentagon have detailed</b> what Trump said was an “imminent” plot against Americans ...</li> <li>3. ... In December 1998, <b>Republicans lobbed the same accusation against President Bill Clinton,</b> who authorized air strikes against Saddam Hussein’s government ...</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ... <b>Soleimani has long been in the crosshairs of U.S. military ...</b></li> <li>2. ... Trump’s foreign policy—his interactions with both Russia and Ukraine, specifically—<b>have been the subject of criticism</b> for most of his presidency ...</li> <li>3. ... Some critics accused Trump of “wagging the dog,” <b>seeking to divert political attention ahead of the Senate impeachment trial ...</b></li> </ol>

presented with words, such as “Soleimani has long been in the crosshairs of U.S. military,” “... Trump’s foreign policy—his interactions with both Russia and Ukraine, specifically—have been the subject of criticism,” and “seeking to divert political attention ahead of the Senate impeachment trial...” It has been observed that both newspapers presented their views along with factual reporting.

The findings of Asad et al. (2019c) are similar in the case of “USA Today” inclination, where “Dawn” is found as a liberal voice compared to “The News” in Pakistan. In the “Graduation” analysis of “Tehran Times,” “force” quantification resource is used 67% than intensification (33%). The words like “almost,” and “at least” force the stances to align the reader toward the author’s viewpoint. Compared to it, “USA Today” has been seen by using both resources of “Graduation” in news reporting. The writer forces the reader to align with the text by using intense words like “the tense picture,” “suddenly,” “raised,” “tough,” “backlash,” “stupid,” and “endless wars.” The quantification instance in news reports, like “less than an hour,” gives the picture of minute details of happenings and aligns the reader with viewing the news as current happenings. The viewpoint is also aligned using the “focus”—sharp and soft prototypicality. The sharp instance is “fighting between various groups that have been going for hundreds of years.” The soft prototypicality is shown by instance, i.e., “picture of calm.” These are the lexical and grammatical resources that show the writer’s strong feelings toward the issue (Martin & Rose, 2007), e.g.,

**110 USA Today** *The president’s tough talk on Iran has been at odds with his promise to withdraw the U.S. military from the Middle East and his constant criticism of predecessors for engaging the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. (Grad, Force, Intensification-tough)*

**12 Tehran Times** *“Vengeance for killing General Soleimani is an inalienable right for the Iranian people,” Rouhani said while meeting Soleimani’s family on Saturday morning, Mehr reported. (Grad, Force-Intensification- inalienable)*

However, the Iranian newspaper “Tehran Times” has shown an aggressive voice and determination to take revenge for the death of General Qassem. Therefore, we need to be critical thinkers in finding the meaning behind objective words rather than accepting the information by the author (Fan, 2020). The words used in this study highlighted the aggressive/intense and non-aggressive/non-intense tone on the issue. Further, Fan (2020) stated that news writer should try to show their positions, opinions, and attitudes in a hidden way, and there is a need to analyze the hidden ideologies behind the text.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani was on view of losing a brilliant commander assigned to the security of Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Iran. Additionally, he stated that it is a loss for the Muslim countries, and everyone is mourning. The newspaper voice could be heard taking support of the external voice in the form of the President. President also pointed out the killing of 25 Iraqis and injuring 51 through drone strikes. The facts and figures that supported the reaction of the President in response were provided. He further retaliated by warning that the U.S. would face the consequences in years to come. The newspaper took objective reporting instead of subjective reporting. Irani President was employed as an external voice throughout.

In contrast, “USA Today” supported subjective and objective reporting. The newspaper presented US President Donald Trump with a tension-free attitudinal expression with the intention of lowering the emerging crisis. His point of view was explained as he was shown blaming General Qassem for plotting attacks on the US army in Iraq, additionally attacking oil tankers near the Strait of Hormuz. He was on the point also that Irani killed the U.S. defense contractor in Iraq, which triggered the response. Furthermore, the newspaper presented the U.S. point of view and also showed a response through the social actor. The President stated to take any possible steps to safeguard its army and interests. Side by side, he also threatened Iran by stating that it was not a good idea to stand against the U.S. Related to Iraq, he was on the point that they refused the monitoring of the international weapons inspector. “USA Today” presented the American stand as positive, as stated by then President Trump, that these actions were taken to stop the war, not to initiate it. The newspaper has shown the American stance with factors by refusing to accept others.

Thus, both newspapers have presented their direct response and potential actions to the decision makers (Presidents). Both newspapers showed themselves on the proper stances by making others faulty and responsible. Therefore, both newspapers have been observed vocal from their countries by considering newspapers as a contributing medium in significantly shaping views toward other societies and cultures (Rohimajaya & Hamer, 2022).

In contrast, “USA Today” has taken a subjective as well as objective reporting style. Thus, the findings support the study’s objectives by the authorial stances of newspapers, which are calculated, compared, and presented in frequencies as a contrast. Secondly, subjective and objective reporting is also highlighted with the in-depth analysis *via* “Appraisal analysis.” Prastikawati (2021) highlights that “Appraisal Analysis” provides a platform for writers or speakers with the intention of sharing their feelings, values, and judgment about things or people. Finally, the lexical items were found to be created by the effect of the situation in the form of an attack on General Qassem. With the realization of the semantic values of text creation, the ideologies of both newspapers have emerged simultaneously.

Therefore, in contextual implications, the influential factors are the main reasons for text representation in the present form. From the practical implication, the study highlights the political inclination of newspapers. From the theoretical implication, the framework has not been applied before on the selected topic *via* “Attitude and Graduation Analysis.” The article contributes knowledge from the semantic and lexical analysis to view text from the grammatical lens. Furthermore, the grammatical analysis *via* “Attitude” and “Graduation” analysis makes the reader understand the meaning and inclination of each text, whether spoken by an external actor or a newspaper in a particular context, that eventually depicts the ideology of a newspaper. It is believed that many media outlets follow certain ideologies in relation to their political orientation. It even challenges these ideologies (Schmid-Petri, 2017) as observed in comparison of the “Tehran Times” and “USA Today.” In a study of Asad (2022), mainstream media gave privilege to powerful governmental authorities in Malaysia government of Pakatan Harappan (PH) by avoiding political party Barisan Nasional (BN) coverage during the first 14 weeks of the newly elected government. It showed

the political inclination of mainstream newspapers toward PH in a particular situation as earlier it was the opposite from a coverage point of view.

From the perspective of the significance of the study, this study presents the author's viewpoint by framing social actors at the front, which portrays the authorial stance of actors in the scenario. Actors' positive and negative stances are analyzed by various resources of "Attitude Analysis," i.e., Affect, Appreciation, and Judgment reflect their responses to emerging situations. Additionally, *via* "Graduation Analysis," stressed and non-stressed views that represent the intensity of responses by the social actors on Gen Qassem's attack are also highlighted. The study highlights the inclination of newspapers toward their countries by supporting their presidents' stances. It is observed that newspapers had shown their views through presidents instead of their views that present their ideology toward the attack. By opting for "Attitude and Graduation Analysis," the study has presented a beneficial result in recognizing the participant roles of newspapers, social actors in the current scenario, and the ideological perspective. Arkida et al. (2022) believed that newspapers play a vital role in expressing national agendas and social thoughts built as a national discourse through news text.

Additionally, the study would help other researchers in the field of textual analysis to find the political, ideological, semantical, and syntactical views of written text, especially from the newspapers. Newspapers have a powerful influence on public attitudes in molding their opinions and representing social relations (González-Carriedo, 2014). Furthermore, the relationship of the press with politics and ideology is considered a well-consolidated field of study (Labio & Pineda, 2016). Studying grammatical features of text determines the manipulation and expression of social relations, power, and status where ideologies lie at the back (Kareem Ali et al., 2017).

For future recommendations, comparing Western and Middle Eastern newspapers' representation of a particular issue would be beneficial in recognizing their ideologies and stance by looking at the current political scenario of the regions.

## 8. Conclusion

It is concluded that the "Tehran Times" and "USA Today" have maintained their ideologies by representing the news on General Qassem's killings. "Tehran Times" represented the authorial voice, in this case, the external voice of President Rouhani, and his strong response of attacking back. On the other hand, "USA Today" has also represented the news by external voice with the inclusion of the inscribed judgment of the author, which was absent in "Tehran Times." By the detailed analysis of both news reports, it is concluded that both newspapers have presented their liberal and independent voice in favor of their own countries. The actions of each other were criticized with a negative image of others and a positive image of themselves. "Subjectivity" is seen with "objectivity" in both newspapers with the support of external voices as rhetorical markers. Both newspapers have taken support of social actors, but only "USA Today's" inscribed judgment could be seen. From the theoretical implication, the study focused on textual analysis, the writers' viewpoints, and lower and higher stress points on the issue. Eventually, the representation shows the



inclination of both newspapers toward their stance on General Qassem's killing. "Tehran Times" was represented as unlawful killing, and "USA Today" took the stance of just killing. By the analysis, it has been found that newspapers' representation of positive and negative stances on their part depicts their ideology and represents their reactions justified on the issue. However, fact-checking political representation or quality could be determined *via* the frequency of positive and negative words. Additionally, it leads to biased or unbiased representation that presents the significance of the study. This study contributes to the literature as no study has been conducted with the combination of "Attitude and Graduation" analysis to determine the lexical and semantic realization of online hard news representation on the selected issue.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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