A Corpus-Linguistic Analysis of Online Iranian News Coverage on Syrian Revolution

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Abstract : The Syrian revolution is a major issue in the Middle East, which draws in world powers and receives a great focus in international mass media since 2011. The heavy global reliance on cyber news and digital sources plays a key role in conveying a sense of bias to a wide range of online readers. Thus, based on the assumption that media discourse possesses ideological implications, this study investigates the representation of Syrian revolution in online media. The paper explores the discursive constructions of anti and pro-government powers in Syrian revolution in 1000,000-word corpus of Fars online reports (an Iranian news agency), issued between 2013 and 2015. Taking a corpus assisted discourse analysis approach, the analysis investigates three types of lexicosemantic relations, the semantic macrostructures within which the two social actors are framed, the lexical collocations characterizing the news discourse and the discourse prosodies they tell about the two sides of the conflict. The study utilizes computer-based approaches, sketch engine and AntConc software to minimize the bias of the subjective analysis. The analysis moves from the insights of lexical frequencies and keyness scores to examine themes and the collocational patterns. The findings reveal the Fars agency's ideological mode of representations in reporting events of Syrian revolution in two ways. The first is by stereotyping the opposition groups under the umbrella of terrorism, using words such as (law breakers, foreign-backed groups, militant groups, terrorists) to legitimize the atrocities of security forces against protesters and enhance horror among civilians. The second is through emphasizing the power of the government and depicting it as the defender of the Arab land by foregrounding the discourse of international conspiracy against Syria. The paper concludes discussing the potential importance of triangulating corpus linguistic tools with critical discourse analysis to elucidate more about discourses and reality.

Keywords : discourse prosody, ideology, keyness, semantic macrostructure
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