




DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON INTERNATIONAL ONLINE NEWS REPORTS OF MANCHESTER BOMBING




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ABSTRACT

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Since September 11 attack, Islam has always been getting the spotlight whenever news of terrorisms are reported in the media. The issue of terrorism is further heated when it was held responsible by Muslims. Media has a major influence in framing the issues while reporting the news. This paper aims to provide insights into two different international online news reports on Manchester Bombing in United Kingdom on 22 May 2017. The reports were examined using a discourse analysis approach centring on Rhetorical Structures, and Grammatical Analysis. While both articles seem not taking side and being bias towards each group of interest, The Washington Post appears to be more inclined towards dragging the trivial info regarding the perpetrator (i.e family and faith) and what is called as supposition of the ongoing investigation into the news report. Meanwhile Aljazeera is seen to be stressing more on the outlook of Muslims concerning the act of terror by pointing out multiple voices from Muslim community to make sure the audience knows where Muslims stand on this matter. The analysis shows that the online news reports in Washington Posts has the propensity to report the news in singular perspective in which the focus is merely on the suspect and anything that come with him so, it opens the path for readers to construct their own interpretation of the whole situation. Meanwhile, Aljazeera leans on illuminating the issue in broader perspectives by providing multiple insights into the issue be it from the Muslim and the heterogeneous community in Britain to come together in the wake of the horrific incident.

1. INTRODUCTION

Media can be put in a good use to the society by making them more aware of what is happening on local, national and global level. However, despite its positive influences, media can detrimentally warp one's perspective of some truths (Mohamed *et al.*, 2017). The way media acts in communicating certain topics particularly in articles and online news has the capacity to ruin the society by encouraging false ideas, praising selfishness, omitting details for the sake of bias opinion, even instilling ideologies with the purpose of condemning the targeted party. In the cases where audience does not possess direct knowledge or experience of what is happening, they become particularly

reliant upon the media to inform them. However, as pointed out by Happer and Philo (2013) this is not to say that “the media simply tell us what to think; as people do not absorb media messages uncritically, but they are key to the setting of agendas and focusing public interest on particular subjects”. Hence, this paper analyses two online news reports concerning the religious sensitivities on the terror attack incident in United Kingdom – Manchester Bombing on May 22, 2017. The aim is to explore how the news is constructed to promote certain ideologies.

2. AN OVERLOOK AT THE MANCHESTER BOMBING TERROR ATTACK

May 22nd marks the day of the terror stroke by 22-year-old Salman Abedi; a young man with British citizenship by blowing himself up using “an improvised explosive device” (Andrew, 2017) packed with nuts and bolts to act as shrapnel. The blast which was described as “the worst terrorist attack in the UK since London Bombing in 2005” has taken dozens of innocent citizens with “22 death and 59 others injured” (Andrew, 2017). The bomb was detonated at the foyer of Manchester Arena moments after the US singer, Ariana Grande conclude her performance and fans had started making their way home. The majority of the fans who came for the concert were teenagers and young adults wherein the bomber had been killing and injuring scores of children.

3. TERRORISM IN EUROPE COUNTRIES

There are many cases that are reported in international online news reports concerning the terror attack in European countries that negatively framed the Muslim community as terrorists. This is made worse when there are active terrorist groups in Muslim countries (Abu *et al.*, 2017) which make it easy for the non Muslim to believe the news. The first case is the spree shooting in Frankfurt Airport, Germany. The shooter, 21 years old Arid Uka who is a Kosovo Albanian who grew up in Germany was sentenced to life for killing two United States Airmen and seriously injuring the other two. On 2nd March 2011, the day of the incident, Uka was working at the airport’s international postal centre when he approached the two airmen boarding the army bus and asked them for a cigarette. After conforming that the men were bound for Afghanistan, Uka shot them using a 9mm pistol.

Two prominent international online news portal reported the incident; BBC News and Al Jazeera. When reporting how Uka was prompted to instigate the attack, BBC News (2011) reported that Uka “had been radicalized by jihadist propaganda videos he watched online”. Aljazeera (2011) on the other hand reported that Uka “was influenced by Islamist lies and propaganda”. Despite reporting the similar news, both of the news portal used two different words that carry two different connotations. BBC News used the word ‘radicalized’ which has a negative connotation while Al Jazeera used the word ‘influenced’ which has a more softer connotation.

In similar articles, the two news portals also reported the chronological order of the incident differently. Aljazeera (2011) reported that Uka “regrets shooting dead two US airmen and wounding two more at Frankfurt airport in March.” Meanwhile, BBC News (2011) reported that Uka shot the two airmen dead while “two others were severely injured; one of them was blinded in one eye” It can be noted here that the BBC News reported the injuries sustained by the two other surviving victims of the incident in greater details than what Al Jazeera reported. The stress of the severity of the injury is to persuade the readers’ sentiments and influence the readers to take the gravity of the incident seriously. The description of the attack by BBC News highlighted on the intensity of violent act done by Uka. This, in one way, framed the readers’ opinion and perception of the issue.

The next case elucidates how the media portrays terrorist attacks by downplaying its significance or accentuating its gravity to feed the readers conceptualization of the issue itself. This illustration is seen between the two incidents which happened back to back with only a day apart. Beirut bombing which happened on 12th November 2015 has taken the life of 43 civilians and a similar attack which happened in Paris on the next day, 13th November 2015 took the life of 130 victims, 7 perpetrators and injured 413 others. Both attacks were held responsible by ISIS.

The same online news portal reported the two incidents differently. On 12th November, The Guardian posted an article on the Beirut bombings entitled “ISIS claims responsibility as suicide bombers kill dozens in Beirut” (Kareem, 2015). Meanwhile, on 14th November, the Paris bombing attack was reported with the headline, “Paris attacks kill more than 120 people – as it happened” (Claire and Kevin, 2015). From the headlines, it can be observed that the news report on the Paris attack tried to evoke the sentiments of the global citizens by citing the number of the killed victims. In comparison, the headline of the Beirut incident did not mention the number of victims killed specifically, only the word ‘dozens’ was used. The use of numeral ‘120’ and the word ‘dozens’ in the headlines carry different weights in prompting the readers to feel empathy for the victims. Mentioning a three figure number is more persuasive in swaying the readers’ emotions than using the word ‘dozens’.

In addition, the news report of the Paris attack was delivered in a detailed chronological manner. The use of the chronological order in such detail was meant to arouse the readers’ poignancy by using pathos. In contrast, the news report of the Beirut incident was written in a direct and clear manner with the regular orderly news report composition. This shows that the article on the Beirut incident was meant to report the news of the incident solely, without trying to induce the sympathy of the readers.

4. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON MEDIA DISCOURSE ON TERRORISM

There are several recent studies that have been carried out on media discourse particularly concerning Islam and Muslims. Bandar (2012) investigated how Muslim women are represented in the BBC News compared to Arab News as major ‘western’ and ‘Muslim’ news source respectively. The researcher employs analytical tools and concepts from the Dialectical-relational, socio-cognitive discourse – historical and sociosemantic approaches to the critical discourse analysis (CDA). Bandar concluded that western ‘liberal’ narratives supported by ‘evidence’ from ‘moderate’ Muslim voices tend to be preferred in the BBC’s reporting especially regarding *hijab*. This results in a marginalization of a majority of female Muslims voices. The way BBC used unclear discourse regarding the topic raising serious questions about the relevance.

Sandra (2015) examined the region’s media representation of Islam and Muslims to determine what images are most often portrayed in major newspapers from cities in Southern Appalachia. With more than 80% of Appalachia’s population following Protestant Christianity, exposure to Islam in daily life is limited. Sandra’s findings show that mass media coverage regularly scrutinizes the religion of Islam and the actions of Muslims in the public sphere. They are often represented with the long-standing tradition of stereotypes and negativity such as militant, terrorist, extremist, violent, and radical. In the process of producing, the same verbiage, stereotypes, and misconceptions are repeated over and over. Sandra (2015) also stated that traces of Islamophobia are indeed in the newspaper articles where the pieces often used words that were inflammatory, alarming, and frightening (i.e. “terror”, “attack” and “extremist”).

The studies reviewed above show that Islam and Muslims are often represented negatively in western media.

5. METHODOLOGY

Discourse analysis approach was used to analyze the online news reports. The analysis of this paper focused mostly on the three elements of analysis; rhetorical structure, and grammatical analysis. These three elements helped to divulge on how the media play its role in framing the news regarding the issue of terrorism from the linguistic perspective.

5.1. Analytic Lenses

5.1.1. Rhetorical Structures

Rhetorical structures in the news report are used to promote, persuade, and strengthen their arguments and interests. Teun (1988) explains a persuasive article can be written by expressing or signaling the most important

element and also the various special operations at each level. They are used in a different way in order to give expressions and emotions to a discourse (Basant, 2015). The structures can be in a single word, a phrase, an omission of a word or a phrase, repetition of words or sounds, or specific sentence structures. In order to write a very persuasive news report, several techniques can be applied; the used of hyperboles as exaggerations, establish contrast for a word and sentence meanings, or build a climax (Teun, 1988). For sure, the rhetorical elements in the news report has the formal tone as it is used to make readers understand the information which leads to a better persuasion.

5.1.2. Grammatical Analysis

Online news reports are usually structured by linguistic grammars, which include the words used, sentences formed, and also the meanings produced. Grammatical analysis of the discourse is like the “system of rules” (Teun, 1988). The meaning of the previous sentence needs to be considered in order to understand the next sentences. Teun (1988) further asserts that the properties of the sentence form or the meaning applied in every sentence depends on other sentences in a discourse. Online news reports are a formal situation, which the readers can expect a disciplined style of writing like the formal choice of words, complex sentences, complete articles, and accurate grammar in every sentence. The style of writing is influenced by the author’s gender, ethnicity, power, and status. From that, the perspective of the author can also be exposed by looking at the grammatical analysis. Teun (1988) adds that sentence syntax allows analysts to dictate the meanings of subject roles according to the word order, such as the usage of subject or object, or the application of active and passive forms. It is supported by Emily (2012) in which various grammatical means may represent people, actions and events in different ways.

5.2. Sampling

The purpose of this study is to provide insights into two different international online news reports on Manchester Bombing, from the perspective of linguistic. There are abundant lists of accessible international online news reports that unveil the cases on the Manchester Bombing on 22nd May 2017. Nevertheless, this study will only centre upon the well-known international online news reports, which are Washington Posts and Aljazeera. For this study, four keywords were used in the sampling process in the international online news reports: ‘Muslim’, ‘terrorism’, media representation’ and ‘international online news reports’. These keywords were inserted into the online news reports website of search item to discover the news reports that associated with the keywords.

Numerous aspects need to be taken into account in the process of filtration to specify the number of Manchester Bombing cases from the search results. First, the article must report the Manchester Bombing incidents that occurred in United Kingdom. Second, the online news reports must be current and up-to-date for the readers to comprehend the issues which is in the year of 2018 and 2017. Third, the news reports must wholly focus on the terrorism incidents of Manchester Bombing instead of economy, politics, sports or any other unrelated cases. Lastly, the online news reports must be on the same case which was Manchester Bombing in comparing the linguistic perspectives between Al-Jazeera and Washington Post.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

Discourse analysis was steered on two online news reports. This section will present the discourse analysis for the online news from *The Washington Post*, followed by online news report in the *Aljazeera*.

6.1. Manchester Bombing Probe Expand With the Arrest of Two Continents (Griff et al., 2017)

This is the headline of the online news from The Washington Post dated on 24th May 2017. In the headline, the use of the word “continents” is meant to divide two different countries. The headline itself is designated to spark the readers’ curiosity of which countries are constituent of the two continents mentioned. The author was using word

exaggeration to describe two countries as continent to make the issue heavier and more serious in which it falls under pathos mode of persuasion. Timothy (2005) discusses *pathos* as a form of proof (a persuasive strategy) that appeals to an audience's emotions. The author intends to evoke readers by appealing to their emotion when reading the news title. Overall, this headline manages to attract the readers' attention to go through the article.

Extract 1 below presents the analysis of Rhetorical structures.

Extract 1

1. Interior Minister Gerard Collomb, told broadcaster BFMTV that Abedi may have also gone to Syria.
2. Abedi may have also gone to Syria and had "proven" links with the Islamic state

In the news report, rhetorical structure is used in portraying the credibility of the source by mentioning a prominent figure, Interior Minister Gerard Collomb (line 51) to strengthen what is called as supposition with the phrase "may have also gone". The online news puts forth a credible source to convince the reader that it might really have happened if the higher position has reported it, deserting the possibility of the outcome otherwise. By using credibility as a mode of persuasion adds to the element of *Ethos*. Timothy (2005) explains that the credibility of the speaker is very important because audiences are persuaded not only by the argument presented but by the speaker as well. On the other hand, unconfirmed information may have resulting to the greater misunderstanding for the readers into taking the information wrongly by overlooking at the absent of evidence to the claim. To add, most people know that Syria is a country of Muslim dominant and happen to be the base of ISIS militant movement. This connection puts negative lights to the country that has always been bombarded with the news of war and bombings throughout the media. Instead of delivering the confirmed and concrete information of the news, this news report sways the reader with information that is still under investigation where it is normally comes with a few possible hypotheses. Besides, the word "proven" (line 52) is wrote in inverted comma. While the perpetrator may have gone to Syria, it may have links with the Islamic State. However, this claim still cannot be confirmed, hence the word proven is put in an inverted comma. Instead of letting go this piece of unofficial information, this news report is trying to put essence in the terror attack that might connect it with ISIS militant by mentioning Syria. While focusing the story between two countries; Britain and Libya, the author uses these phrases to put this matter into different perspective of the information that should not yet be concealed to the public.

Extract 2 below presents the Grammatical analysis.

Extract 2

1. with security services on two continents rounding up suspects
2. Salman Abedi, whose parents had emigrated from Libya to escape the rule of Moammar Gaddafi, was on radar of British security services before Monday's attack

As we mentioned previously, the title uses the word "continent" to appeal to the reader in more larger and serious issue. In the news report, the word is again used to clarify the constituents of it which are Britain and Libya. Instead of describing both Britain and Libya as countries, the gap of these two countries become greater with the word continent. The division between them can be seen from the perspective of economy, religion and education. This make the reader perceive these two countries as two different entities; the developed country and the third world country. Besides, the arrangement of a sentence is seen to be focusing on the additional information that is not pertinent to the issue being reported. While reporting the news about Salman Abedi – British citizen – information about his parents also included in the line "whose parents had emigrated from Libya to escape the rule of Moammar Gaddafi" (line 43). This piece of information is considered trivial to the bigger issue of terrorism where the focus of the news should be about the terror and the perpetrator. This news report shows that even Salman is born in Britain it still does not make him a part of the community. Instead, the whole family is seen as immigrant who came to seek asylum.

Extract 3 below presents analysis of another part of the news.

Extract 3

1. The mosque where the Abedi family worshiped – and where Ramadan Abedi had once been responsible for issuing the call to prayer – on Wednesday denounced the blast and expressed hope that Manchester can heal.
2. “this act of cowardice has no place in our religion or any other religion”

This online news report does not obviously state its stand of generalizing Islam as a religion that encourages violence as news is supposed be neutral. However, the author seems to add information that does not need to be addressed. The line of which the author reveals Muslims’ stand in condemning this terror, is also included with the family’s background as a true believer that practices Islamic fundamentals. This puts the faith in a negative manner when the author implies even with the strong abiding to the religion, Salman Abedi still cannot be stopped from conducting the mass terror. However, at the end of the news report, the author quotes Fawzi Haffar, a trustee with the Manchester Islamic Center in an attempt to justify that Islam or any other religion does not enjoin violence. After all the attempts to shift the focus of the issue, the author tries to recover his or her neutral side of the story.

6.2. Manchester United (Aljazeera, 2017)

This is the headline of another media outlet reporting on the same case; Manchester bombing. As a famous name for English League football team, the article manages to grab readers’ attention. However, instead of reporting news regarding football, this news report citing the name of the state to report the occurrence there.

Extract 1 below presents the analysis of Rhetorical structure.

Extract 1

1. As might be expected, his actions attracted almost universal condemnation
2. My thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families

Firstly, the phrase “as might be expected” carries a layered meaning. If the audience were to interpret the sentence, they would relate the bombing act committed by Abedi with the previous act of terrorism done under the name of Islam. The multiple number of these kind of terrorism has tainted the faith itself and has negatively affected the Muslims. Thus, when a certain act of terrorism done by a Muslim, the world is always quick to relate Islam and terrorism. The fear and expectation of the prejudice is later explicated in line 19-21, “But some were fearful that, as has often happened in the wake of other attacks in the UK, their faith might be held responsible by anyone predisposed to look for stereotypes or scapegoats. “The next use of rhetorical structure in the news report is by the mention of the notable figure in the British Muslim community, Harun Khan. In his quote, he expressed his strong opposition to the act of violence committed by Abedi. Khan also appealed to the audience emotionally when he expressed that, “My thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families”. The concern and consolation expressed by the secretary general of Muslim Council of Britain goes to clarify that despite the bombing was an act of violence orchestrated by Muslims, not all Muslims are in favour of such barbarity. Not only that, the news report also included that the sentiment is agreeable with the rest of the Muslim community.

Extract 2 presents the analysis of Grammatical structure.

Extract 2

1. Mancunian Muslims, who were as heartbroken and appalled as anyone else that such an outrage could have happened in their proudly diverse and tolerant city.

In this news report, the media has taken the perspective from Muslims community regarding the terror conducted by their fellow Muslim. In constructing the sentence, the author arranges the sentence with the use of verbs *heartbroken* and *appalled* to describe the grief and shock Muslim got upon hearing the news. The author also

uses adverb *proudly* along with the adjective *tolerant* in the same line to deliver the underlying message that Muslim community also belong to the country and with them in condemning the terror act done by Salman Abedi. With the use of several adjectives and adverb in one line demonstrate the mood and tone of the subject, in this case, Mancunian Muslims who shared their disbelief and grief over the act of terror as a part of community who belongs there.

Extract 3 presents the analysis of another part of the news.

Extract 3

1. “My thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their family”.
2. “May the perpetrators face the full weight of justice both in this life and the next”
3. 224 incidences of anti-Muslim hate crimes were reported in Britain – an increase of 505 percent on the same period in 2016.

From this online news report, the author gives more perspective to the Muslim society in Britain in the lights of terror attack that held responsible by a fellow Muslim. It gives more quotations from prominent figure of Islam and Muslim community to show a clear standpoint of Muslims in this issue. This terror act done by the terrorist is nowhere near the teaching of Islam and it is all an act of individual that has gone astray. The author also includes statistical report on how hate crime towards Muslim as an act of revenge for getting higher by the year. While this news report sticks to its neutral state of news, it gives more insights on how Muslim has taken the issue and what are the struggle faced by them as a minority in the country.

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This part will discuss the prominent points that arise when the two online news portal articles were put in comparison. Firstly, the two articles showed subtle inclination towards two agendas that benefit two groups of the community. The Washington Post appears to be neutral when conveying the news on the Manchester bombing incident. But within the text, there are several instances of relating the Manchester bombing act with the Muslim community as a whole. For example, while delivering the report on the issue itself, the article also includes the details on the bomber like the quote from his father and the details about the mosque the family frequents go. This additional information was meant to hint that despite the strong religious teachings, the bomber, Salman Abedi was still able to commit such violent act. The one track dimension of the report by The Washington Post opens the path for readers to construct their own interpretation of the incident, the bomber, his religion, the general Muslim community and Islam’s relation to the act of terrorism.

Al-Jazeera on the other hand, inclines on providing a more diverse perspective of insight into the issue by providing the statement made by the prominent figure in the local Muslim community, Harun Khan. As the secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain, Khan immediately condemned the violent act, commiserate the victims and their family and express the hope that the bomber, Abedi will receive the punishment he deserves. In addition, the article also includes that the similar sentiments asserted by Khan are reiterated throughout the Muslim community in Britain. It was also added in the article that the incident had raised fear among the Muslim community that their faith (Islam) will be condemned by the prejudice and stereotypes. Thus, instead of one dimensionally reporting the issue, the article on Al Jazeera also reports on the need for the heterogeneous community in Britain to come together in the wake of the horrific incident and address the need to eradicate the instigation of radical movements within the community. Hence, the headline, “Manchester United”.

Another issue that emerged while comparing the two articles by The Washington Post and Al Jazeera was the overall tone of the articles. While both articles tried to not take sides and show obvious inclination to either groups of the audience, the tone of the articles are quite the opposite. The different tones of the two articles were presented

in choice of words and the writers' viewpoint on the issue. In a single glance, The Washington Post might appear unbiased and neutral about the issue. But after the disquisition of the content of The Washington Post article in the analysis section, it can be seen that the choices of words in the article paved the passage for the audience to establish negative association of the incident to Islam as a whole. In contrast, the Al-Jazeera article expresses concern of the possible judgmental and bigotry opinions for the people with preconceptions of the connection of Islam and terrorism. Without defending the violent act done by the suicide bomber, Abedi, Al Jazeera article articulates a clarification of the stance of the Muslim community in Britain.

Lastly, from both of the articles, it can be deduced that the media played a strong role in influencing the audience's ideology towards the issue. The different media representation of the Manchester bombing incidents were seen from how both the analyzed media sources framed the issue. The Washington Post framed the issue in a singular perspective where the article was a general outlook on the issue but at the same time tenuously hinting on the correlation of Islam and terrorism. Al Jazeera in the meanwhile, tried to provide a necessary clarification on the relation between Islam and terrorism. The issue was approached in a diverse manner. The details on the incident was stated, along with the opinions from both sides, the Muslim community and the public and authorities of Britain and a clarification of the stance maintained by the British Muslim community that they denounce the act of violence and expect the justice would be served dully for the suicide bomber.

8. CONTRIBUTION OF STUDY

This study contributes in the existing literature of Islam and terrorism.

This study uses new estimated methodology of discourse analysis centring on Rhetorical Structures and Grammatical Analysis.

This study is one of very few studies which have investigated Manchester Bombing attack.

The paper's primary contribution is finding that Islam is negatively framed in online news.

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