



Media Discourse Analysis of the Second Prisoner Exchange during the Israeli Genocide against Gaza: Lexical Choices

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Abstract Objective: Media coverage of the Gaza war has been characterized by competing ideological narratives that shape public perceptions of the conflict. The prisoner exchange conducted between Israel and Hamas on 25 January 2025 provides a valuable case for examining how lexical choices reflect ideological positioning in news discourse. This study investigates how the English-language websites of Al Jazeera and CNN represented the prisoner exchange between Israel and Hamas, with the aim of identifying the ideological implications of their lexical choices.

Methodology: Adopting a qualitative research design, the study applies Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model, focusing on micro-level lexical analysis. Two news articles, one published by Al Jazeera and the other by CNN on 25 January 2025, were selected for comparative analysis. **Key Findings:** The analysis revealed substantial differences in lexical framing between the two news outlets. CNN's coverage reflected a pro-Israeli orientation by delegitimizing Hamas's act of taking prisoners, portraying the exchange as permanent, minimizing the intensity of the conflict, legitimizing Israel's detention practices, centering Israeli perspectives, and providing detailed specification of Israeli prisoners. In contrast, Al Jazeera's reporting demonstrated a pro-Palestinian orientation by legitimizing Hamas's actions, framing the exchange as temporary, emphasizing the scale of the war, delegitimizing Israel's detention practices, and representing both Palestinian and Israeli perspectives.

Conclusions: The findings demonstrate that both news outlets consistently aligned their reporting with their broader editorial and ideological positions. The study highlights the influential role of lexical choices in constructing competing narratives and shaping public understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. **Recommendations:** The study recommends conducting further comparative research in critical media discourse analysis using broader datasets that include additional news outlets, different time periods, and multiple linguistic levels beyond lexical choices to develop a more comprehensive understanding of ideological representation in media discourse.

Keywords: Media discourse, critical discourse analysis (CDA), prisoner exchange, lexical choices, ideology, Israeli-Palestinian conflict

تحليل الخطاب الإعلامي لصفقة التبادل الثانية للأسرى خلال الإبادة الجماعية الإسرائيلية في غزة: دراسة في الخيارات المعجمية

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المخلص الهدف: اتسمت التغطية الإعلامية للحرب على غزة بتباين الخطابات الأيديولوجية التي أسهمت في تشكيل التصورات العامة للصراع. وتُعد عملية تبادل الأسرى التي جرت بين إسرائيل وحركة حماس في 25 يناير 2025 نموذجاً مناسباً لدراسة الكيفية التي تعكس بها الاختيارات المعجمية التوجهات الأيديولوجية في الخطاب الإعلامي. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل كيفية تمثيل المواقع الإلكترونية باللغة الإنجليزية لفتاتي الجزيرة و"سي إن إن" (CNN) "عملية تبادل الأسرى بين إسرائيل وحركة حماس، والكشف عن الدلالات الأيديولوجية الكامنة في اختياراتها المعجمية.

المنهج: اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج النوعي، ووظفت نموذج فيركلوف (Fairclough) للتحليل النقدي للخطاب، مع التركيز على التحليل المعجمي على المستوى الدقيق. وتم اختيار مقالين إخباريين، أحدهما من موقع الجزيرة والآخر من موقع "سي إن إن"، وكلاهما نُشر في 25 يناير 2025، لإجراء تحليل مقارنة. **أهم النتائج:** أظهرت النتائج وجود تباينات واضحة في التأطير المعجمي بين الوسيلتين الإعلاميتين. فقد عكست تغطية "سي إن إن" توجهاً مؤيداً لإسرائيل، تجسد في نزع الشرعية عن احتجاز حماس للأسرى، وتصوير عملية التبادل بوصفها إجراء دائماً، والتقليل من حدة الصراع، وإضفاء الشرعية على ممارسات الاعتقال الإسرائيلية، وتركز السردية حول وجهات النظر الإسرائيلية، واستخدام توصيفات تفصيلية عند الإشارة إلى الأسرى الإسرائيليين. في المقابل، أظهرت تغطية الجزيرة توجهاً مؤيداً للفلسطينيين، تمثل في إضفاء الشرعية على أفعال حماس، وتأطير عملية التبادل بوصفها إجراء مؤقتاً، والتأكيد على حجم الحرب، ونزع الشرعية عن ممارسات الاعتقال الإسرائيلية، وتمثيل طرفي عملية التبادل. **الاستنتاجات:** خلصت الدراسة إلى أن كلا المؤسسات الإعلاميتين حافظتا على اتساق واضح مع توجهاتهما التحريرية والأيديولوجية في تغطيتهما الإخبارية. وتؤكد النتائج الدور المحوري للاختيارات المعجمية في بناء السرديات الإعلامية المتنافسة، وفي تشكيل تصورات الجمهور تجاه الصراع الفلسطيني-الإسرائيلي. **التوصيات:** توصي الدراسة بإجراء مزيد من البحوث المقارنة في مجال تحليل الخطاب الإعلامي النقدي، مع توسيع نطاق العينة لتشمل وسائل إعلام متعددة وفترات زمنية مختلفة، ودراسة مستويات لغوية إضافية إلى جانب المستوى المعجمي، بما يساهم في تطوير فهم أوسع لآليات بناء التمثيلات في الخطاب الإعلامي. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** الخطاب الإعلامي، التحليل النقدي للخطاب، تبادل الأسرى، الاختيارات المعجمية، الأيديولوجيا، الصراع الفلسطيني-الإسرائيلي

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1. Introduction

In times of conflict, the role of the media extends far beyond relaying facts; it actively constructs competing realities shaped by ideology and power (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 2006). News discourse, in particular, has been shown to frame events in ways that privilege certain actors while marginalizing others, thereby influencing how global audiences interpret political struggles (Barkho, 2007). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long been a focal point of such discursive struggles, where international and regional media outlets adopt divergent narratives to legitimize or delegitimize the actions of each side (Abid et al., 2024).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been widely employed to interrogate how language reproduces power and ideology in conflict reporting. Scholars such as Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (2008) emphasize that lexical choices, naming strategies, and framing devices are never neutral; they reveal the ideological positions of the media institutions that deploy them. Building on this tradition, research has compared the discursive practices of *Al Jazeera*, *CNN*, and other international outlets, highlighting persistent asymmetries in their coverage of the Gaza wars and prisoner exchanges (Alhossary & Abdullah, 2014; Kareem & Najm, 2024). Such studies demonstrate how discourse surrounding prisoners functions as a symbolic battleground, where terminology and narrative focus can either humanize or dehumanize the actors involved.

Despite this growing scholarship, relatively little attention has been paid to the linguistic representation of prisoner exchanges during the Gaza War of 2023–2025. While previous studies have examined media framing of earlier exchanges, most focus on broader themes of violence, ceasefires, or negotiations (Sarwar et

al., 2023). The second prisoner exchange, which took place on 25 January 2025 during the first phase of the ceasefire, remains underexplored. This event is particularly significant because of its timing, symbolic resonance, and its potential to influence international perceptions of the conflict. Examining how *Al Jazeera* and *CNN* framed this exchange provides insight into how language continues to serve as a tool for constructing political legitimacy and shaping public understanding.

Accordingly, this study applies Fairclough's (1989, 1995) CDA framework to analyze lexical choices in *Al Jazeera*'s and *CNN*'s coverage of the January 25 exchange. By focusing on the micro-level of discourse, the study highlights how subtle linguistic strategies can signal broader ideological alignments. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How did *Al Jazeera* and *CNN* use lexical choices and naming practices to represent Palestinians and Israelis in their reporting of the prisoner exchange on 25 January 2025?
2. What ideological implications can be inferred from the divergent discursive strategies employed by these two outlets?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Framework

This study analyzes the different lexical choices in news coverage by *CNN* and *Al Jazeera*. To facilitate this analysis, this section outlines key concepts relevant to the research objective, including media discourse, the role of media in conflict, ideology and discourse, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

2.1.1. Media Discourse

Media discourse is spoken or written communication distributed through broadcast platforms to a non-present audience of readers, viewers, or listeners (O’Keeffe, 2011). The analysis of media discourse involves the systematic study of such texts, focusing on the social and ideological contexts of their production (Van Dijk, 2008). Fairclough (1989) observes that the power relations present in media discourse are often not explicit, yet they are central to understanding how meaning is constructed. Similarly, Flowerdew and Richardson (2018) emphasize that attitudes are learned rather than innate and that language contributes to the construction of social reality. The media, therefore, can function ideologically by reinforcing and reproducing unequal power relations within society, which explains its frequent examination in critical discourse analysis (Greenberg, 2022). In this capacity, media discourse reflects the ideological preferences of influential individuals—politicians, journalists, and members of the elite—who shape and circulate dominant narratives.

2.1.2. Ideology and discourse

Ideology can be understood as a basic set of beliefs shared by members of a group, forming the foundation of social representations that can be constructed either positively or negatively (van Dijk, 2006). Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009) note that while ideology was once viewed as a guiding principle, it has increasingly acquired negative connotations associated with distorted or vague consciousness. Discourse, in contrast, refers to the use of spoken or written

language through which individuals interact, express themselves, and construct meaning within a society. It shapes perspectives of other cultures, individuals, and communities, thereby embedding ideologies that legitimize social structures and define relations with others (Fairclough, 1989). The relationship between ideology and discourse is reciprocal: as van Dijk (2005) argues, any theory of ideology is incomplete without a corresponding theory of discourse. Similarly, Wodak et al. (2009) emphasizes that national ideologies are articulated and actualized through discourse, which is always ideological and reveals underlying power contests within society.

2.1.3. Media and conflict

The media holds an influential role in conflict situations, shaping public perception and affecting political and social outcomes. Fairclough (1989) contends that the power of media discourse originates from the producers' control over content, as they decide what information to include or exclude and how events are represented. This control over the narrative can be highly consequential. Hamilton-Tweedale (1987) suggests that media can exert an influence comparable to that of military forces, making it an important instrument in modern warfare. This influence means that the language choices of the media can either heighten tensions or contribute to peaceful resolutions (Kempf, 2014).

Within media studies, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach used for understanding how the media constructs meaning and maintains power imbalances through its texts (Adane & Amara, 2024). Because public support is a key objective in

conflict, media narratives take on strategic importance. This process can transform news platforms into symbolic battlegrounds where different interpretations of events are contested and, in some cases, resolved (Adane & Amara, 2024).

2.1.4. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an analytical approach for examining the cultural and ideological dimensions within language use. It extends beyond descriptive analysis to expose how power and ideology influence meaning (Ramanathan & Hoon, 2015). The utility of CDA is evident in its application to multifaceted social issues, which often require a multi-methodological approach to address their various components (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). According to van Dijk (2005), CDA investigates how the abuse of power, dominance, and inequality are enacted and reproduced through discourse in social and political settings.

From this perspective, discourse is not merely reflective but is also constitutive, contributing to “meaning structures” that build social, political, and cultural realities (KhosraviNik, 2014). Wodak and Fairclough (1997) characterize CDA as a form of intervention in social practices, intended to expose the interests supporting particular narratives. Such an intervention often provides visibility to the perspectives of both dominant and marginalized groups (Santoso, 2018). Wodak and Meyer (2009) argue that CDA aims to demonstrate the connections between social phenomena and to produce knowledge that can facilitate social change by exposing the ideologies that perpetuate inequality.

2.1.5. Al Jazeera and Lexical Power

Since its establishment in November 2006, Al Jazeera English has become a prominent international news outlet, receiving both praise and criticism. The network's stated objective is to challenge the dominance of Western perspectives in global news, offer alternative narratives, and provide a platform for underrepresented communities, countries, and regions (Al-Najjar, 2009). In its language use, Al Jazeera utilizes specific vocabulary as a method to support its ideological positions. This practice is consistent with Fairclough's (1989) concept of “oppositional wording,” whereby the network adopts a counter-narrative, which is evident in its coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Al Jazeera's reporting frequently presents Palestinians as victims of disproportionate state power while describing Israelis as aggressors (Barkho, 2006, 2007). This framing is supported through consistent lexical patterns: Palestinian combatants are referred to as “martyrs,” their activities as “resistance” or “Muqāwama,” and their groups by culturally and religiously significant names like the “al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades” and the “Islamic Resistance Movement.” These lexical selections are not neutral. Instead, they position Al Jazeera's reporting in a way that resonates with Arab-Muslim audiences and emphasizes a dichotomy between “victim” and “victimizer” (Sheikh, as cited in Barkho, 2006).

2.1.6. CNN and Lexical Power

CNN maintains a prominent position among North American broadcasters for international news coverage (Pew Research

Center, 2012) and is recognized for its capacity to shape public opinion (Firdous, 2009). The term “CNN effect” describes the ability of independent news media to influence policy responses to reported events by promoting public discussion and raising awareness (Robinson, 1999).

Analyses of its coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict suggest that CNN frequently presents the events from an Israeli perspective. Its reporting has been shown to frame Israeli actions as legitimate measures of self-defense while portraying Palestinians as aggressors or sources of instability (Mamona et al., 2024; Shahzad et al., 2023). This is achieved by emphasizing Israeli responses and victimhood while marginalizing Palestinian narratives (Mamona et al., 2024). This reporting pattern is attributed to a broader structural bias, which is influenced by the political relationship between the United States and Israel and by the framing of Israeli statehood in the region (Al-Muhtaseb et al., 2025). Such practices can be seen as a contemporary application of the “CNN effect,” wherein the network’s global influence is used to shape public opinion and, consequently, policy outcomes related to the conflict (Robinson, 2005).

2.2. Previous Studies

This study analyzes the media discourse of CNN and Al Jazeera and their coverage of the second prisoner exchange during the first phase of the second ceasefire in the Gaza War (2023–2025) by utilizing the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. It also seeks to identify the ideologies that inform each outlet’s discourse by employing an inductive approach and qualitative data. To contextualize this research, it is necessary to review previous

studies that have examined how media discourse is constructed through ideology, often employing CDA as the primary analytical method. A significant amount of research has focused on representations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, specifically in relation to Gaza’s wars, ceasefires, and prisoner exchanges (Kareem & Najm, 2024; Alhossary & Abdullah, 2014; Karniel et al., 2017; Yeini, 2018; Sarwar et al., 2023).

Several studies highlight a pattern in Western media of framing the conflict in a manner that favors Israeli perspectives. Kareem and Najm (2024) examined Western media coverage by applying CDA and van Dijk’s (2015) concept of the “ideological square” (us vs. them). The findings showed that Palestinians were consistently represented as threats to Israelis through labels such as “combatants” and “terrorists.” The study also identified double standards in language, where Palestinian deaths were often described with the verb “dying,” suggesting a natural occurrence, while Israeli deaths were reported as “killed,” implying deliberate action (Kareem & Najm, 2024). This trend was also observed by Abid et al. (2024), who found that between October and November 2023, outlets such as BBC, France24, and VOA predominantly framed the conflict from an Israeli standpoint, portraying Israeli military actions as counter-terrorism while labeling Palestinian fighters as “terrorists.” In contrast, Al Jazeera’s coverage was found to give more prominence to Palestinian perspectives and the humanitarian conditions of civilians (Abid et al., 2024).

Direct comparisons between Al Jazeera and other news agencies further illustrate these divergent ideological approaches. Alhossary and Abdullah (2014) examined coverage of the “Palestinian Prisoners–Shalit Swap” in Al Jazeera and Haaretz. Their findings revealed that Al Jazeera portrayed Palestinian prisoners as heroes and Hamas as a force equal to Israel, whereas Haaretz depicted Hamas negatively and the prisoners as criminals. The study also noted that Al Jazeera included sources from both sides, while Haaretz relied almost exclusively on Israeli sources (Alhossary & Abdullah, 2014). Similarly, Sarwar et al. (2023) compared coverage in BBC and Al Jazeera, finding that Al Jazeera provided more detailed accounts of Palestinian casualties and offered more balanced reporting overall. In contrast, BBC’s coverage included more negative reports about Palestinians and generally favored Israel (Sarwar et al., 2023).

Broader quantitative analyses have also identified differences in international coverage. Karniel et al. (2017) analyzed 2,162 news reports on the 2011 Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange from CNN, BBC, Fox, and Israeli channels. The findings indicated that Israeli media focused heavily on the Israeli perspective and broadcast more content on the deal than foreign networks. Among international broadcasters, BBC provided five times more airtime to the story than CNN and refrained from taking a position against the deal, unlike CNN and Fox (Karniel et al., 2017).

Separate from media representation, other research has examined the policy implications of prisoner exchanges. Yeini (2018) investigated Israel’s prisoner-

exchange policy through a legal and ethical analysis. The findings suggested that while the policy demonstrated social solidarity, it also produced negative outcomes, such as an increase in kidnappings and the release of militants who subsequently resumed hostile activities. Based on these findings, Yeini (2018) recommended policy reforms, including limiting exchanges to a 1:1 ratio and implementing more transparent decision-making processes to reduce the influence of political or media pressure.

3. Methodology

This study analyzes the coverage of the second prisoner exchange between Hamas and Israel on January 25, 2025, by CNN and Al Jazeera. The research uses a qualitative approach, applying Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The analysis concentrates on the micro-level, focusing specifically on lexical choices to examine the linguistic features used in constructing the discourse surrounding the event. The objective is to identify the ideological implications of word choice and phrasing in the news reports.

3.1. Data Analysis

The data consists of two online news reports published on the official English-language websites of CNN and Al Jazeera on January 25, 2025. Both articles report on the second prisoner exchange that occurred during the first phase of the second ceasefire, which began on January 19, 2025. This date was selected to allow for a direct comparison of the linguistic and discursive strategies used by the two outlets in their coverage of the same event. The justification for this date is further supported by the significant media

attention the exchange received, making it a key moment in the ceasefire process.

3.2. Method of analysis

This study utilizes Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which comprises three interconnected dimensions: the micro-level (textual analysis), the meso-level (discourse practice), and the macro-level (sociocultural practice). The research focuses on the micro-level, which involves a detailed examination of linguistic features such as lexical choice, grammar, semantics, and cohesion (Fairclough, 1995). For this study, the analysis is specifically narrowed to lexical choices (Fairclough, 1989) to determine how language was used to construct meaning and convey ideological positions in the coverage of the prisoner exchange.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Lexical choices

An examination of the data shows that CNN and Al Jazeera employed different lexical choices when reporting on the events of January 25, 2025. These differences, influenced by the outlets' respective ideological orientations, resulted in two distinct representations of the same prisoner exchange.

4.1.1. Legitimizing vs. Delegitimizing the Taking of Prisoners by Hamas

CNN and Al Jazeera used distinct lexical items that implied different moral evaluations of the act of taking Israeli prisoners. Both outlets used politically significant terms, but their choices served to frame the action in opposing ways for their audiences. Al Jazeera consistently used the word *captive*, while CNN used the

word *hostage*. These terms possess different connotations that frame the actions of Hamas as either a component of armed resistance or as an act of illegitimate violence.

A *hostage* is defined as "someone seized to compel a third party to meet a condition for release" (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1949). In contrast, a *captive* is "someone held under the control of a power during armed conflict, including prisoners of war, detainees, or civilians" (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2016). Al Jazeera's use of *captive* is consistent with the Palestinian narrative, which presents Hamas as a resistance movement and situates the Israeli prisoners within the context of a wider armed conflict (Omar, 2020). Conversely, CNN's use of *hostage* aligns with the Israeli perspective, which portrays Hamas as a terrorist organization and emphasizes the civilian status of the prisoners. As Omar (2020) observes, the term *hostage* has emotive connotations that suggest harm to civilians and reinforce the delegitimization of Hamas.

These lexical choices are demonstrated in the following examples from the news reports:

1. "The release of the Israeli **captives** in Gaza City's Palestine Square" (Al Jazeera, 25 Jan. 2025).
2. "Four **hostages** freed but Israel blocks people in Gaza returning north" (CNN, 25 Jan. 2025).

4.1.2. Stabilizing vs. Temporizing the Peace

The analysis shows that CNN and Al Jazeera used different lexical choices to describe the suspension of hostilities, which framed the prisoner exchange as either a temporary measure or a more structured agreement.

Although both outlets used terms like *truce* and *ceasefire deal*, the selection of one over the other carries distinct connotations regarding the durability of the arrangement.

Al Jazeera predominantly used the word *truce*, which presents the pause as provisional and suggests that the broader conflict remains unresolved. A *truce* is generally understood as an informal, short-term suspension of fighting that does not imply a long-term commitment to peace (Lyons, 2016). In contrast, CNN consistently used the term *ceasefire deal*, which suggests a more formal and negotiated effort aimed at establishing stability. A *ceasefire* typically implies an enforceable agreement that may include specific measures like the withdrawal of weaponry (Lyons, 2016).

Al Jazeera's use of *truce* offers a more descriptive representation of the agreement's temporary nature. CNN's choice of *ceasefire deal* aligns with Western and Israeli narratives by framing the U.S.-backed agreement in more favorable and durable terms. These lexical differences are illustrated in the following examples:

1. " Hamas freed four female Israeli soldiers in a second round of releases under a **ceasefire deal**" (CNN, 25 Jan. 2025).
2. "200 Palestinians released under Gaza **truce** deal" (Al Jazeera, 25 Jan. 2025).

4.1.3. Minimizing vs. Maximizing the Scale of War and its Replication

The analysis of lexical choices regarding the Gaza War indicates that CNN and Al Jazeera framed the conflict with differing degrees of intensity, thereby minimizing or

maximizing its perceived scale and severity. The outlets used the contrasting terms *Gaza offensive* and *a ferocious war*, which influenced how the nature, context, and consequences of the fighting were understood. These choices affect perceptions of responsibility and the justification of military action.

An *offensive* is defined as an organized military campaign aiming to achieve a particular political objective (Collins Dictionaries, 2024). In contrast, a *war* is defined as a state of armed conflict between different states or groups within a country, causing large-scale fighting and destruction (Oxford University Press, n.d.). The distinction is therefore ideological. Al Jazeera's use of the term *war*, intensified by the adjective *ferocious*, emphasizes the scale of destruction. This framing aligns with the Palestinian narrative by portraying the conflict as devastating and disproportionate. CNN, however, used the term *offensive*, a more technical military phrase that reduces the conflict to a campaign with defined objectives. This framing is more consistent with the Israeli narrative, which tends to present the military action as a targeted operation and diverts attention from its wider impact on the civilian population.

The contrasting lexical choices are shown in the following examples:

1. "In response to the attack Israel launched a **ferocious war** on Gaza" (Al Jazeera, 25 Jan. 2025).
2. "In what seemed to be a message to Israeli that it remained powerful despite being battered by the **Gaza offensive**" (CNN, 25 Jan. 2025).

4.1.4. Legitimizing vs. Illegitimizing Israel's Acts of Taking Prisoners

The analysis shows a contrast between CNN and Al Jazeera in their descriptions of Israeli correctional facilities, with each outlet's language framing Israel's carceral system as either legitimate or oppressive. Al Jazeera used specific terms such as *Israeli jails*, *Ofer military prison*, and *serving life sentences*. These lexical choices identify the state actor (Israel) and the geographical location of the facility ("Ofer"). The phrase *serving life sentences* also works to humanize the prisoners by emphasizing the severity of their punishment. Through this language, Al Jazeera's reporting underscores the power imbalance between Israel and the Palestinians.

In contrast, CNN employed more generalized terms like *detention centers* and *detainees*. A *detention center* is defined as a facility for short-term custody, often for political reasons (Collins Dictionaries, 2024). This terminology serves to neutralize the context of Palestinian imprisonment and presents Israel's actions in legally conventional terms, thereby legitimizing its practices. A discursive inconsistency arises in CNN's reporting, however, as it refers to Palestinians as both *detainees*—implying temporary custody—and as individuals *sentenced to life imprisonment*, which suggests judicial finality. Overall, CNN's lexical choices align with the Israeli narrative by using language that normalizes the imprisonment of Palestinians.

These differences are evident in the following examples:

1. "200 Palestinian prisoners have been released from **Israeli jails**" (Al Jazeera, 25 Jan. 2025).
2. "Israel has released 200 Palestinian prisoners from **detention centers**" (CNN, 25 Jan. 2025).

4.1.5. Centralizing the Deal on Israelis vs. Depicting Both Sides in the Deal

The analysis revealed a clear difference in how CNN and Al Jazeera framed the prisoner exchange, with each outlet privileging a different perspective through its lexical choices. Al Jazeera described the event as a "**hostages-prisoners swap**," a phrase that communicates the reciprocal nature of the agreement involving both Israeli captives and Palestinian prisoners. In contrast, CNN consistently referred to the event as a "**hostage release deal**," a term that centers the release of Israeli captives while omitting the corresponding release of Palestinian prisoners from the description of the deal itself.

This framing was reinforced by CNN's use of emotive language when reporting on the Israeli side. Words such as "hug," "joy," "elated," and "emotional" were used to describe the reactions of released Israelis and their families. These lexical choices are intended to create an emotional response in the reader and underscore the Israeli experience. In contrast, Palestinian prisoners were described in more neutral and bureaucratic terms, often defined only by their legal charges without reference to their personal or emotional experiences. By focusing the narrative on Israeli relief, CNN's lexical choices align with the Israeli perspective.

Al Jazeera, however, adopted a more balanced tone, avoiding overtly emotive language for

either side and presenting the event in terms that acknowledged both parties in the exchange. The different lexical choices are exemplified in the following excerpts:

1. “as part of a **hostages-prisoners swap** and a ceasefire deal in Gaza between Hamas and Israel” (Al Jazeera, 25 Jan. 2025).
2. “as part of the ceasefire and **hostage release deal.**” (CNN, 25 Jan. 2025).
3. “The family of Daniella Gilboa expressed their **joy** at her release from Gaza.” (CNN, 25 Jan. 2025).

4.1.6. Depicting Palestinian and Israeli Prisoners through Generalization and Specification

The analysis showed that CNN and Al Jazeera employed different representational strategies for Israeli and Palestinian individuals, specifically regarding naming practices. Both outlets explicitly named the four Israeli captives—Karina Arie, Daniella Gilboa, Naama Levy, and Liri Albag—and often included personal or medical details. This practice of specification served to humanize the Israeli captives by highlighting their individual identities. Both news sources also gave special focus to another hostage, Arbel Yehud, due to her political significance. CNN further individualized this portrayal by including quotes from Daniella Gilboa’s family, which added emotional context to the coverage.

In contrast, Palestinian prisoners were primarily represented through generalization. Al Jazeera did not mention any individual names, while CNN named only three—Mohammad Odeh, Wael Qassim, and Wissam Abbasi. In the

instances where names were provided, the focus remained on their criminal charges rather than personal attributes. This use of collective reference removes the individuality of Palestinian prisoners, presenting them as a single group instead of as distinct people. As Simonsen (2023) notes, such discursive practices can obscure specific roles and create an asymmetry in representation.

While this imbalance may be partly explained by the large number of Palestinian prisoners released, the consistent naming of Israeli captives alongside the generalization of Palestinians results in skewed coverage. By specifying and quoting Israeli individuals while reducing Palestinians to undifferentiated groups, the media gives precedence to the experiences of one side. These representational differences are evident in the following examples:

1. “The four hostages freed Saturday – Karina Arie, Daniella Gilboa, Naama Levy, all 20 years old, and Liri Albag, 19” (CNN, 25 Jan. 2025).
2. “The four women – Karina Arie, Daniella Gilboa, Naama Levy and Liri Albag – were marched onto a podium where they waved and smiled” (Al Jazeera, 25 Jan. 2025).

4.1.7. Using Determiners to Humanize or Dehumanize the Number of Israeli and Palestinian Prisoners

The analysis indicates that both CNN and Al Jazeera used determiners to influence reader perception of the prisoner exchange, but with different approaches. CNN was precise and consistent when reporting on the number of Israeli captives but was inconsistent when reporting on Palestinian prisoners. Al Jazeera, in contrast, applied a

consistent reporting method for both groups.

In its reporting, CNN used determiners such as *four* and *female* to describe the Israeli captives, providing specific details that focused attention on the Israeli side of the exchange. Conversely, Palestinian prisoners were represented with less consistency. While CNN sometimes stated the total figure of "200 Palestinian prisoners," it also introduced subcategories, such as "including 121 prisoners who had been sentenced to life imprisonment." This method of breaking down the total figure can obscure the collective scale of the release. CNN's use of qualifiers also extended to military actions, as seen in the reporting of an Israeli military claim that its troops "*only* fired warning shots" and were "unaware of *any* harm." The use of *only* mitigates the severity of the action, while the phrase *any harm* downplays the potential consequences.

Al Jazeera employed determiners more consistently for both groups. Its report mentioned the release of "four female Israeli soldiers" and "200 Palestinian prisoners" without fragmenting the number of Palestinians. Furthermore, Al Jazeera's use of a broader determiner in the phrase "more than 15 months of war" served to emphasize the duration and scale of the conflict as a whole, rather than focusing on one group's experience. This approach reflects a more balanced application of language.

The differences are evident in the following examples:

1. " Hamas freed **four female** Israeli soldiers in a second round of releases under a ceasefire deal" (CNN, 25 Jan. 2025).

2. " Hamas has released **four female** Israeli soldiers held in Gaza and **200** Palestinian prisoners have been released from Israeli jails as part of the ceasefire agreement that halted **more than 15 months** of war" (Al Jazeera, 25 Jan. 2025).

4.1.8. Depicting of Territory and Control: The Lexicon of Spatial Power

The analysis indicates that CNN and Al Jazeera used different lexical choices to represent the legal status of Israel's presence in the Palestinian territories and the broader power relationship between Israel and Palestine. These choices frame Israel as either an occupying power or as an independent state engaged in legitimate defense.

Al Jazeera explicitly used the term *occupied* in reference to the Palestinian territories. The Cambridge Dictionary defines *occupied* as "controlled by people from another country using military force." By using this term, Al Jazeera places Israel's presence within the context of international law, which designates the territories as occupied. This lexical choice presents the occupation as illegitimate, positions Palestinians as the subjects of this occupation, and highlights the power imbalance between the two parties. The use of *occupied* when referring to the West Bank signals Al Jazeera's alignment with UN resolutions and international legal standards, thereby framing the conflict in terms of legal and humanitarian issues.

In contrast, CNN consistently avoided the word *occupied* when describing the West Bank or other territories under Israeli control. This lexical omission avoids

assigning Israel the legal status of an occupying power and sidesteps the corresponding obligations under international law. This reflects a decision not to take a legally defined political position on the status of the territories.

Differences were also present in the reporting of population movement. Al Jazeera used the terms *displaced* and *return* to describe the movement of Palestinians, which suggests a forced displacement by Israel and invokes the Palestinian right of return. The Cambridge Dictionary defines a *displaced person* as a person who has been forced to leave their country or home, because of war, a natural disaster, etc. This terminology frames the displacement as a coercive and violent act. The verb *displaced* portrays Palestinians as victims of forced movement, which can elicit sympathy from the audience. CNN, on the other hand, used verbs such as *travel* and *move*, which imply voluntary action and temporary relocation. This choice obscures the coercive nature of the displacement, minimizes the extent of Palestinian hardship, and frames the movement as a matter of choice rather than compulsion.

The divergence in lexical framing is exemplified in the following excerpts:

1. “Emotional scenes played out in the streets of Ramallah, in the West Bank” (CNN, 25 Jan. 2025).
2. “The releases on either side were welcomed by cheering crowds of Palestinians in the city of Ramallah, in the **occupied West Bank**” (Al Jazeera, 25 Jan. 2025).

5. Conclusion

This study analyzed CNN and Al Jazeera’s coverage of the second prisoner exchange

that occurred on January 25, 2025. By concentrating on lexical choices, the research showed how language is used not only for stylistic purposes but also for ideological ones, shaping narratives of legitimacy, victimhood, and power. Both outlets used distinct lexical patterns in their representation of the Palestinian and Israeli sides, which resulted in subjective portrayals consistent with their broader editorial policies and established positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although some neutral language appeared in limited contexts, the overall framing in each report was largely biased toward one side.

The findings are consistent with previous scholarship that has identified systematic lexical choices as indicators of ideological bias. CNN’s coverage favored the Israeli perspective, using emotive terms such as “hostages,” “hug,” and “joy” to describe the release of Israelis, while using more bureaucratic language—such as “Gaza offensive,” “detention centers,” and “sentenced to life imprisonment”—when referring to Palestinians. In contrast, Al Jazeera’s reporting favored the Palestinian perspective and international legal discourse, using terms like “ferocious war” and determiners such as “more than 15 months” to emphasize the intensity and duration of the conflict’s impact. Al Jazeera also applied widely accepted international terminology to the Israeli context, including “Israeli captives,” “Israeli jails,” and “the occupied West Bank,” which demonstrates linguistic consistency with global legal frameworks.

Overall, this study shows the utility of critical media discourse analysis in identifying how systemic linguistic choices reflect ideological commitments. By examining lexical framing, it is possible to

recognize how media outlets construct different realities of the same events. Such analysis contributes to a greater understanding of the media's role in shaping perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and illustrates the need for readers to approach news coverage with a critical awareness of the biases embedded in language.

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Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate

N/A

الموافقة الأخلاقية والموافقة على المشاركة
لا ينطبق

Availability of Data and Materials

The data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article and the cited sources referenced therein.

توافر البيانات والمواد

تتوفر البيانات الداعمة لنتائج هذه الدراسة ضمن المقال والمصادر المشار إليها في قائمة المراجع.

Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to this study and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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