

Ibrahim Muhammad Ashour

Sociolinguistic Analysis of Some Selected Feature Stories of Egyptian Nile News Channel during Coronavirus Pandemic

**Submitted by
Ibrahim Muhammad Ashour**

Abstract

The study is conducted to provide a linguistic analysis of the feature stories presented by the Egyptian Nile News channel during the Coronavirus pandemic. It delves into the pivotal role these stories play in society, elucidating how they contribute to people's understanding of the severity of the situation and guide appropriate behavior. Additionally, the research endeavors to examine the strategies employed by the feature stories to achieve their objectives, with a specific focus on the prevalent theme of fear as a natural response to the pandemic, influencing people's comprehension and behavior during these challenging times. The study employs Fairclough's three-dimensional framework to examine the feature stories in a comprehensive way. The findings underscore the crucial role played by these stories in conveying the seriousness of the pandemic, prompting individuals to adopt precautionary measures for self-protection and to curb the spread of the Coronavirus. The research reveals that the Nile News channel's feature stories strategically employ a dual approach, combining a fear strategy to underscore the impact of the virus with reassurance to convey effective management of the situation by the country. This balanced messaging aims to encourage people to act rightly for their well-being and the collective good of the nation.

Keywords: Feature Story, Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework, pandemic, Media, Nile News

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1. Introduction

COVID-19, according to the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI), is a highly contagious infectious disease caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It has had a devastating impact globally, resulting in over 6 million deaths worldwide. This pandemic is considered one of the most significant global health crises since the influenza pandemic of 1918. As the virus undergoes mutations, treatment guidelines are continuously updated to incorporate the most effective therapies (Casella, 2023).

The disease primarily affects the respiratory system, leading to symptoms that range from fever, cough, and mild shortness of breath to severe desaturation, which can cause respiratory failure. In addition to lung damage in the form of adult respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), there are reports of the new virus causing thromboembolic conditions such as myocardial infarction and pulmonary embolism. Kidney failure has also been observed in several patients. The modes of transmission vary from droplets, airborne particles, and feco-oral to contact spread. The virus can remain viable on surfaces for varying durations, ranging from a few hours to several days. This diverse range of disease manifestations is a cause for concern and contributes to the increased fatality rate of the disease.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic due to its widespread impact on nearly all countries and the millions of deaths associated with it.

Since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11th, global attention has been focused on obtaining information and updates about the virus. While various media outlets serve as sources of information, news reporting, including feature stories, remains a primary and reliable means for people to stay informed. Media discourse, as highlighted by van Dijk (1993), shapes knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies among both elites and ordinary citizens. Through the dissemination of information, interpretation of events, and framing of narratives, media influences individuals' understanding of the world and their beliefs. It can shape public opinion, steer discussions, and impact decision-making processes. While other factors contribute to the formation of perspectives, media discourse remains a significant force in shaping public opinion and influencing societal attitudes and beliefs.

During pandemics, media coverage serves as a vital source of information and updates, enabling people to stay informed about the ongoing situation.

Feature stories

Feature stories, also known as "features" in media circles, serve a different purpose than delivering breaking news. While they may contain news elements, their primary function is to humanize specific situations, add depth and color, educate, entertain, and provide illumination. Typically, feature stories summarize major news events that have recently been reported (Itule & Anderson, 1994). In the context of this study, the focus is on TV feature stories.

2. Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive linguistic analysis of selected feature stories from the Egyptian Nile

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News TV channel, examining the role of these stories during the critical time of Coronavirus pandemic in Egypt, and exploring the techniques that these stories have employed to convince the audience of the information they convey, ultimately achieving their intended objectives.

3. Rationale of the Study

Pandemics are frequently marked by heightened levels of fear and uncertainty, driven by factors such as the perceived severity of the disease, the absence of a cure or vaccine, and the potential for widespread societal disruption. Television feature stories play a crucial role in molding public perceptions of pandemics, so it is significant to comprehend how these stories use fear. Through the examination of the Nile News channel's feature stories during the Coronavirus pandemic, the study focuses on the theme of fear and how the feature stories utilize it.

4. Questions of the Study

1. What functions do the feature stories of the Nile News channel serve in pandemics?
2. What are the strategies that the Nile News channel uses to achieve its goals through its feature stories?
3. To what extent do the semiotic resources in the feature stories contribute to achieving the goals of the feature stories?

5. Research Data

The data analyzed in this study comprises eight feature stories collected during the initial five months of the pandemic, starting from March 11th, which marked the World Health Organization's official declaration of Coronavirus as a global pandemic. The deliberate selection of feature stories from this early phase of the Coronavirus pandemic is driven by the overarching theme of "fear" chosen for data analysis. This period offers valuable

insights into the immediate shock and intensity of people's reactions to the crisis, allowing for a proper understanding of societal sentiments in the face of a pandemic. The focus of the feature stories under investigation is the local situation in Egypt during the pandemic.

The examination period was limited to five months due to the Nile News channel's inconsistent production of feature stories after this period of time. Consequently, there was a lack of relevant content available for inclusion in the study.

6. Theoretical Framework

CDA, or Critical Discourse Analysis, has emerged as the most progressive area in Discourse Analysis in recent decades. Numerous papers and conference manuscripts have been published, demonstrating the thriving nature of CDA within the broader field of discourse analysis. Fairclough (1995) defines CDA as a specialized discipline that systematically examines the intricate and often obscure causal and determinative links between discursive practices, events, and texts, and the broader social and cultural structures, relations, and processes. The fundamental goal of CDA is to scrutinize how these practices, events, and texts arise and are ideologically influenced by power relations and struggles for power. Moreover, CDA critically examines the inherent opacity of these discourse-society relationships, recognizing it as a mechanism that reinforces power and hegemony.

Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Framework

In 1989, Fairclough introduced his model of CDA, positioning it at the core of Critical Discourse Analysis (Awawdeh, 2021). In his book "Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language," Fairclough argues against limiting discourse analysis to the study of individual texts, advocating for consideration of the social context in which language is used. His approach emphasizes language-in-use, giving prominence to the study of language in its

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real-life context. He also states that language serves not only as a medium for conveying information but also as a means of social action, necessitating an examination of the social and political implications of language in specific situations (Lusiana, 2018).

Fairclough introduces his CDA approach to expose instances when language is used to construct or maintain structures of power in society. He contends that language is a social practice and underscores the interrelation between texts, interactions, and context. His approach, as outlined in his book "Language and Power," is based on three interrelated dimensions: text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. The text dimension involves the analysis of language as a semiotic system, encompassing grammar, vocabulary, and text structure. The discourse practice dimension delves into the analysis of how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed in social contexts. The sociocultural practice dimension entails the analysis of the broader social and cultural context in which discourse practice is embedded.

He argues that these three dimensions are interconnected and influence each other. Texts are created and interpreted within specific discourse practices, which, in turn, are shaped by the broader sociocultural context. By analyzing context through these interwoven lenses, researchers can unravel the complex threads connecting language, power, ideology, and social customs.

7. Analysis

Analysis of the first feature story

This feature unveils how Egyptian medical centers are fortifying their defenses against the surge in COVID-19 cases. The story spotlights the rapid deployment of essential resources: a network of PCR testing laboratories, expanded intensive care units, and dedicated beds for infected medical staff. These proactive measures aim to not only tackle the rising tide of infections but also safeguard both healthcare personnel and the public from the

pandemic's grip. The emphasis remains on preventive measures, reminding us that vigilance and responsible behavior are crucial allies in this ongoing battle.

Text dimension

The feature story employs emotive language to convey a sense of urgency and fear. Phrases like "الحالات المتزايدة من المواطنين - increasing number of citizens infected with the virus" and "خطورة المرض - danger of the disease" underscore the severity of the situation, eliciting fear and anxiety. Terms such as "المصابين المعزولين - isolated patients" and "الحالات المشتبه فيها والمصابة" - suspected and infected cases" contribute to the emotive tone by portraying critical healthcare aspects with an inherent sense of fear and concern. This use of emotive language aims to engage readers emotionally, fostering shared concern and wakefulness amid the ongoing health crisis.

In contrast, several phrases and sentences promote reassurance. Statements like "كل المستلزمات المطلوبة موجودة عندنا" - all the required supplies are available to us", "توفير معامل تحاليل PCR - provision of PCR testing laboratories" convey that hospitals are fully equipped to handle COVID-19 cases, providing a sense of comfort.

Repetitions of phrases such as "إجراءات احترازية" - precautionary measures" and "أسرة العناية المركزة" - intensive care beds" reinforce fear and worry, urging people to take the situation seriously and protect themselves against the virus.

Metaphorical imagery, such as "مواجهة الحالات المتزايدة من" - Confront the increasing number of citizens infected with the virus", portrays the virus as an adversary, emphasizing the need to confront and combat it. While "around-the-clock" may not be a literal hyperbole, it has implication of an exaggerated emphasis on continuous government supervision, reassuring the public of effective pandemic management.

Implicit contrastive rhetoric highlights extraordinary hospital measures, contrasting them with normal procedures. This includes increasing the intensive care beds, PCR testing laboratories, and

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available beds for infected staff. The story emphasizes precautionary measures to prevent infections among hospital personnel.

Footage in the feature story showcases hospital actions, such as diligent disinfection procedures, providing visual reassurance of the situation being managed well.

Discourse practice dimension

The feature story delves into the adoption of new preventive and therapeutic measures, particularly within medical centers, especially hospitals, in response to the rising number of citizens affected by the Coronavirus. The story underscores the heightened availability of PCR testing units, intensive care beds, and designated beds for medical members infected with the virus. These measures are portrayed as strategic responses to combat the virus, intending to convey a message of assurance that the situation is well-managed.

The Director of Shebin El-Kom Fever Hospital underscores the significance of approaching the disease with precautionary measures. He details the intensive care unit's capacity and daily patient intake. The Deputy Director explains the treatment protocols and the criteria for determining a patient's recovery and discharge, contingent upon negative PCR results. The health and safety officer emphasizes providing essential protection and personal protective measures for the medical team, with a specific emphasis on advising the public to wear masks.

Additionally, the story highlights the presence of follow-up officers at medical centers, ensuring the availability of medical supplies and assessing health services presented to people. The Deputy Governor of Menoufia talks about inspections conducted to ensure adherence to planned procedures.

Footage within the story captures diligent workers conducting disinfection and sterilization procedures in the hospital. The visuals showcase cleaning activities in various areas, including hallways, rooms, and equipment, utilizing disinfectants and cleaning tools. The story further includes footage of intensive care beds and

PCR testing rooms, intending to evoke worry and fear, motivating individuals to adopt all available precautionary measures against the spread of the Coronavirus.

The story seeks to strike a balanced course between fear and reassurance, emphasizing the availability of necessary supplies, medical facility capacity, and the application of the precautions. Through interviews with officials, including the Director of Shebin El-Kom Fever Hospital and the safety and health officer, the story aims to establish credibility and assure the public that the government deals with the situation well.

Sociocultural practice dimension

The feature story begins by highlighting a critical reality: the widespread presence of the Coronavirus throughout the country, marked by a continuous rise in cases. This blunt acknowledgment serves to alert the public to the gravity of the situation, urging them to adopt necessary precautions to safeguard themselves and others from the virus.

Moreover, the story affirms the preparedness of hospitals to deliver adequate services to those affected by the Coronavirus, including provisions like PCR laboratories and intensive care beds. The director of Shebin El-Kom Fever Hospital assures that all essential supplies are readily available, and medical professionals are well-equipped. This demonstration underscores the government's attentiveness and effective efforts in combatting the virus within the healthcare sector on a nationwide scale.

The feature story also notes the continuous presence of monitoring and follow-up officers at medical centers, ensuring continuous assessment of the availability of medical and therapeutic supplies, as well as the health services extended to citizens. This underscores the government's commitment to ongoing oversight, quality control, and the meticulous implementation of precautions. These measures are implemented for the collective well-being of the public, emphasizing the government's dedication to ensuring public health and safety.

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Analysis of the second feature story

The feature story brings attention to the continuous disinfection and sterilization efforts at the Basatin slaughterhouse, forming a crucial component of the government's strategy to counteract the spread of the Coronavirus. It underscores the meticulous execution of disinfection measures by dedicated workers, their adherence to protective measures such as masks and gloves, and the paramount importance of upholding cleanliness and safety within the slaughterhouse to safeguard the health of people. The story highlights the consistent preventive measures undertaken by various sectors of the Egyptian government, encompassing sterilization measures, all aimed at averting the spread of the virus within the population.

Text dimension

The feature story adeptly employs emotive language, skillfully balancing reassurances and fear appeals to communicate with the public amid the Coronavirus pandemic. A phrase like " للمحافظة على صحة المواطن المصري - to preserve the health of the Egyptian citizens" is strategically woven in to send reassurance to the public, instilling confidence in the government's dedication to their welfare. These expressions, carrying positive connotations, aim to deliver a sense of safety and good planning in response to the health crisis. Conversely, the story integrates fear-inducing appeals such as " مواجهة انتشار فيروس كورونا" - confront the spread of the Coronavirus" and " على قد ما يقدرُوا مايقاش في تجمعات" - not to make gatherings as much as they can". This assertive language positions the virus as a serious threat, confirming a call to action and stressing the urgency of everyone responsibility in addressing the pandemic.

Repetition is utilized throughout the story to underscore key points. Phrases like " إجراءات احترازية" - precautionary measures" and " تطهير" - disinfection" are repeated to support the story's focus on properly implementing precautions in the slaughterhouse. Additionally, the recurrent use of " فيرس كورونا انتشار" - spread of Coronavirus" serves to instill fear and worry, reinforcing the

narrative of parable danger and the necessity for vigilance. This emphasis reinforces to the overall fear discourse, balanced against reassuring messages about government control and available resources.

The phrase " في مواجهة ومنع انتشار فيروس كورونا " - in the face and prevention of the spread of Coronavirus" presents a metaphorical image of the virus as an adversary needing confrontation. While hyperbole is not explicitly presented, the mention that "المجازر تقدم - خدماتها لآلاف المواطنين - the slaughterhouse provides services to thousands of citizens" presents hyperbole, subtly highlighting the vital role the slaughterhouse plays in providing for the community and implying the government's effectiveness in managing the pandemic.

Though not explicitly stated, subtle contrastive rhetoric is employed through the depiction of slaughterhouse workers. The introduction of special and stringent safety measures, previously absent, underscores the stark contrast between pre-pandemic normality and the current situation formed by the virus. This implicit contrast confirms the severity of the pandemic and underscores the importance of adapting behavior to mitigate its risks.

The footage displaying workers actively conducting disinfection measures in the slaughterhouse presents a visual semiotic resource, confirming the gravity of the situation and the concerted efforts to fight against the virus's spread. The repeated inclusion of this footage throughout the story reinforces and emphasizes this message.

Discourse practice dimension

The feature story delves into the continual disinfection and sterilization measures underway at the Basatin slaughterhouse, forming part of the government's strategy to combat the spread of the Coronavirus. It emphasizes the rigorous measures in place to guarantee the health and safety of citizens.

Interviews with the head of the Basatin slaughterhouse and a supervising veterinarian detail the precautionary procedures

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implemented, encompassing the use of masks, gloves, and disposable coats. Subsequent cleaning and sterilization of all slaughterhouse areas with chlorine are outlined, aiming to reassure the public that the country's food sector is under meticulous care.

Providing insights into the Basatin slaughterhouse, consisting of ten wards overseen by veterinarians, the story notes its significant role in slaughtering an average of one thousand livestock daily. These meats are then distributed to Greater Cairo, underscoring the slaughterhouse's crucial contribution to people's daily lives.

The inclusion of footage within the slaughterhouse, showcasing the implementation of precautionary and protective procedures, conveys a compelling message of credibility to the public.

The overarching goal of the feature story is to apprise the public of the continuous measures and instill confidence in the steps taken to safeguard their well-being amid the pandemic. It also draws attention to the potential vulnerability of anyone to the spread of Coronavirus, serving as a reminder for individuals to adhere strictly to recommended measures.

Sociocultural practice dimension

The feature story draws attention to the impact of the Coronavirus on daily activities, emphasizing the necessity for precautionary measures even within the setting of a slaughterhouse.

It underscores that precautions persist across all government sectors, particularly in slaughterhouses, as part of a nationwide effort to uphold public health. The continuous disinfection measures at the Basatin slaughterhouse serve as a focal point in the narrative.

The story aims to reassure society that the country diligently maintains the hygiene and safety standards of meat supplied to Greater Cairo, a significant segment of the Egyptian populace. This contributes to the country's approach to societal well-being, particularly in economic terms.

Consistently, the feature story emphasizes the pivotal role of the government in managing the pandemic throughout society. It

highlights the employment of official oversight procedures designed to curb the spread of the Coronavirus and ensure the population's safety in this critical period. Significantly, the narrative also portrays the government's delicate balance between prioritizing public health and addressing economic concerns. This balanced depiction effectively communicates the government's comprehensive strategy in navigating the crisis.

Ultimately, the story subtly urges the people of society to adhere to preventive measures as a collective effort to mitigate spreading the Coronavirus.

8. Findings and conclusion

During the Coronavirus pandemic, the feature stories from the Nile News channel highlighted a shared commitment to the implementation of the precautionary measures, establishing new societal norms such as social distancing, mask-wearing, and rigorous disinfection. These changes, from avoiding casual handshakes to the widespread use of hand sanitizers, portrayed both societies prioritizing collective well-being over individual habits. Navigating through Cairo's markets and streets, citizens faced a new reality marked by vigilance and heightened awareness. Such response to this global threat created new norms and resilient communities in the face of difficulty.

The findings also show that the feature stories played a crucial role in conveying the gravity of the situation during the pandemic, urging people to embrace precautionary measures for self-protection and to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus to others.

Amid the pandemic, various problems and crises emerged as direct responses to its influence on society. Feature stories played a pivotal role in illuminating these issues and actively working towards finding solutions.

The Nile News channel did not delve deeply into the problems and crises emerging in Egyptian society due to the

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pandemic. Its coverage primarily centered on warning people about the risks of the Coronavirus, encouraging them to apply the protective measures for self-protection and preventing the spread of the virus.

Similarly, it did not provide comprehensive coverage of the challenges faced by healthcare workers and their protective measures, despite their crucial frontline role in managing the crisis and undertaking one of the most significant responsibilities during the pandemic.

The feature stories on the channel employed diverse strategies to effectively combat the fight against the Coronavirus, heighten awareness of its danger, and alleviate its significant impact on society. A pivotal strategy involved instilling fear and concern to motivate people to implement necessary precautionary measures and treat the situation with gravity.

Even as it utilized the fear strategy, the Nile News channel consistently integrated a sense of reassurance to convey that the situation was well-managed. The channel assured the public that the country was effectively overseeing its various sectors, including hospitals, transportation, schools (particularly during examination periods), archaeological sites, and slaughterhouses, with a focus on implementing the preventive measures. This balanced approach aimed to urge people to act rightly in their interest and the interest of the country.

As society gradually returned to a semblance of normality, the channel's feature stories illuminated the content and optimistic mood of the populace. They reflected the strong collective yearning of societies to revert to their pre-pandemic lives, emphasizing people's eagerness to safeguard the progress achieved through adherence to precautionary measures. Furthermore, business owners conveyed their enthusiasm and excitement about implementing necessary precautions in their shops, aiming to reassure people and urge them to visit. The feature stories also depicted vibrant scenes

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of people filling the streets, patronizing malls and restaurants, and using positive language to express their joy.

It is noteworthy that, the Nile News channel effectively bolstered the credibility of their feature stories by filming on location and capturing footage from within pertinent establishments such as hospitals, schools, business shops, and more. This hands-on visual experience provided viewers with a firsthand understanding of the situation, enabling them to delve into the details and acquire valuable insights.

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