# ARABIC AND ENGLISH NEWS COVERAGE ON ALJAZEERA.NET

MUHAMMAD M. ABDUL-MAGEED
*Department of Linguistics*
*Indiana University, Bloomington*

AND

SUSAN C. HERRING
*School of Library and Information Science*
*Indiana University, Bloomington*

**Abstract.** The controversial Al Jazeera network, with its Arabic and English news websites, is an interesting object for comparative study. This study compares the two language versions in terms of their layouts and the structural features, regional and thematic coverage, and ideological perspective reflected in the headlines of news reports. Content analysis and critical discourse analysis revealed differences between the two versions for all aspects except for thematic coverage, indicating systematic biases in coverage, alongside efforts to present ideological balance.

**Résumé.** Le réseau Al Jazeera, avec ses sites d'information en arabe et en anglais représente un objet intéressant pour une étude comparative. Cette étude compare les versions dans les deux langues, en ce qui concerne la présentation et les caractéristiques structurelles, la couverture régionale et thématique, ainsi que la perspective idéologique telle qu'elle est reflétée par les grands titres. L'analyse du contenu et l'analyse du discours révèlent des différences entre les deux versions sur tous les aspects, sauf pour la couverture thématique et pointent un biais systématique pour les domaines couverts et des efforts pour assurer un équilibre idéologique

## 1. Introduction

News websites, especially those related to satellite television networks with global coverage, are playing an increasingly significant role in today's world. The news site of the Qatar-based bilingual network Al Jazeera has in the last few years emerged as one of the main sources of global news. Al Jazeera's visibility increased especially after it broadcast statements by Bin Laden and other Al Qaeda leaders after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S. The network's controversial coverage of the subsequent wars on Afghanistan and Iraq has also, for better or for worse, raised its international profile.

Competing satellite networks such as CNN International and the BBC, like Al Jazeera, have associated news sites and provide coverage both in Arabic and in English.

What each of these news sites covers and whether or not their coverage is ideologically balanced are questions of considerable interest. However, despite the interest in, and the importance of, Al Jazeera, its news site has been surprisingly under-researched thus far. As far as we know, no study to date has attempted to identify how the Al Jazeera Arabic and English news sites are similar to, or different from, each other in what they cover.

This study is a first attempt to fill this research gap, by comparing the two versions of Al Jazeera in terms of their layouts and the structural features, regional and thematic coverage, and ideological perspective reflected in the headlines of their news reports. We analyze these phenomena in a corpus of news reports collected from the Arabic and the English news sites at www.aljazeera.net. Our overall research question is thus:

RQ:  How, and to what extent, do the Arabic and the English news sites of Al Jazeera resemble and/or differ from each other in their coverage?

Specifically, we seek to address the following six questions:

1) How do the layouts of the two sites resemble and/or differ from each other?
2) What is the report refresh rate for each version?
3) How do the news reports of each version compare with their counterparts in the other version in terms of their basic structural features?
4) What themes are covered in each version, and to what extent is each covered?
5) What regions are covered in each version, and to what extent is each covered?
6) What is the ideological perspective of each version, as represented in its headlines?

Content analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA) methods were used to analyze the data. The analyses reveal differences between the two versions for all aspects except thematic coverage, suggesting that the two language versions of Al Jazeera are editorially distinct and target different audiences. In concluding, we interpret and discuss some of the implications of these differences.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. NEWS DISCOURSE

News-making is a practice that influences the social construction of reality (Fowler, 1991). Accordingly, considerable scholarly attention has been directed toward the construction and reproduction of (dominant) ideologies in newspaper discourse (e.g., Fowler, 1991; Trew, 1979). The work of these scholars belongs to the tradition known as *critical discourse analysis* (CDA), an approach that integrates insights from various disciplines, especially linguistics, into the study of discourse (e.g., Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Wodak, 2002).

Especially relevant to the current study is the work of van Dijk (1988a, b), who relates the textual structures of news reports to their cognitive, social, and political contexts. Van Dijk (1988b) examined the international news coverage of the assassination of Lebanese president-elect Bechir Gemayel on September 14, 1982. More than 700 articles from 138 newspapers were selected from a sample of 250 newspapers from 100 countries; these articles were analyzed both quantitatively and

qualitatively to identify whether news reporting differed in developed and developing nations. The number of articles, the amount of coverage, and story content in the developed and developing nations were found to be very similar. However, newspapers from developing countries provided less background coverage, and the third world press was highly dependent on the transnational news agencies, whereas developed countries had many sources. The "homogeneity" of the news, concludes van Dijk, can be explained by two main factors: (1) the internationally shared system of news discourse and production rules and (2) the then-dominant role of the transnational agencies.

## 2.2. AL JAZEERA

The Al Jazeera network was launched in 1996 as a news satellite channel broadcasting in Arabic. Since its start, Al Jazeera has been rattling governments in the Arab world by its controversial coverage of sensitive issues related to religion, politics, the role of women in society, sex, poverty, unemployment, and so forth. Its treatment of such issues, as well as the free platform Al Jazeera offers intellectuals, opposition figures—islamists as well as secularists—and lay persons, boosted the network's popularity worldwide. The programs offered on Al Jazeera featured persons with (sometimes extremely) opposing views, and these, as well as talk shows where anybody could call and talk directly on the air to the audience, were novel, bold, and challenging in a region whose audiences' minds have for a long time been bombarded with messages launched exclusively from state-owned television channels (see, e.g., Ghareeb, 2000). Some claim that Al Jazeera's hard-hitting programs and on-the-ground news reporting have revolutionized media work in the Middle East (El-Nawawy & Iskander, 2003; Zayani & Saraoui, 2007) and have educated the Arab world about democracy (Miles, 2005).

   In November 2006, the Al Jazeera network launched Al Jazeera English, with an aim to "revers[e] the North to South flow of information" (Wikipedia, 2008). According to Josh Rushing (2007), a former U.S. marine who joined Al Jazeera English in 2005, Al Jazeera English's mission is to cover the developing world, which has been largely ignored by other global networks. Al Jazeera English hired a number of anchors and media experts who had formerly worked at CNN, the BBC, and other large networks.

   Even before its launch, Al Jazeera English attracted heavy coverage from media organizations around the world. The website also drew heavy traffic, especially during the early stages of the Iraq war. The English news site was originally launched in 2003 and relaunched with the launch of the English television channel in 2006. In March 2003, an estimated one million unique U.S. visitors visited Al Jazeera's website; one-third of them went to Al Jazeera English (Kawamoto, 2003). In April 2004, the Webby Awards nominated Al Jazeera as one of the five best news sites worldwide (Bond, 2004). Not all the attention has been positive, however. Both the Arabic and English sites have been attacked several times (Lettice, 2003). The English site has also been forced to change Internet hosting providers a number of times, due, in Al Jazeera's opinion, to political pressure (Wikipedia, 2008).

   The goal of much of the research on Al Jazeera so far has been to describe it, its mission, and its impact on the Arab world and globally (e.g., El-Nawawy & Iskander,

2003; Ghareeb, 2000; Miles, 2005; Rushing, 2007). Other research has addressed the network's organizational culture (Zayani & Saraoui, 2007) and the news frames it used during the Iraq war (Dimitrova & Connolly-Ahern, 2007).

More directly related to the topic of the current study is research done by Leon (2006) and Kutz and Herring (2005). Leon (2006) compared the language used in the Middle East-related stories from the Arabic version of the Al Jazeera website to that of the Arabic versions of the websites of the BBC and CNN. Leon also investigated the way both the CNN and the BBC channels rendered into English the Arabic used in the Al Jazeera Arabic channel. The results, as interpreted by Leon, indicate that Al Jazeera shows respect for the religion, culture, traditions, and aspirations of its audience, whereas Al Jazeera's competitors, CNN and the BBC, do not show similar respect.

Over a three-week period, Kutz and Herring (2005) mined text and images from the front pages of CNN, the BBC, and the English-language version of Al Jazeera at one-minute intervals, in order to identify the frequency and motivations for updating site content. Similar to the present study, Kutz and Herring used both content analysis and CDA. They found that about 50% of the textual changes in the three sites added substantial new information; the remaining changes mostly refined wording, especially in CNN and the BBC. They also found that Al Jazeera published the same number of new stories as the BBC and CNN, but once the story was published, Al Jazeera editors were less likely to go back to update or modify what they had published. In this way, ideological revisions in Al Jazeera were less frequent than in the BBC and CNN. Kutz and Herring also found that Al Jazeera used more images to accompany its new stories.

The English and the Arabic news sites of Al Jazeera are said to be editorially distinct (Wikipedia, 2008). As yet, however, no study has systematically compared the coverage of the two sister sites. This study aims to fill that gap.

## 3.  Methodology

### 3.1. DATA SAMPLING AND COLLECTION

The primary data for this study are top stories collected from the Arabic (http://www.aljazeera.net/news) and the English (http://english.aljazeera.net/English) Al Jazeera news sites, both of which were accessed from www.aljazeera.net. For seven consecutive days, from May 12th to May 18th, 2007, the main news pages of each of the two versions were downloaded twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. The full reports for the top stories linked to from the two sites were also collected twice a day during the same period. Top stories are defined as stories that appear near the top of the page and that are accompanied by photographs. Each site has a section dedicated to top stories (Figure 1). After excluding repeated reports, the sample consisted of 114 Arabic reports totaling 38,078 words and 74 English reports totaling 29,348 words.

### 3.2. ANALYTICAL METHODS

#### 3.2.1. Content Analysis
This study makes use of three types of content analysis—layout analysis, structural analysis, and thematic analysis (Bauer, 2000; Herring, forthcoming)—to compare the

presentation and content of the two language versions of the Al Jazeera news site. To analyze the layout, the interfaces of each version were compared and described, with special attention to the number and placement of top stories. An analysis of report refresh rates was conducted by dividing the total number of actual reports by the total number of potential reports. The movement of the various reports from one position to another on the page was also tracked over time, and the rate of repetition for the reports that occurred more than once was calculated.

A quantitative analysis of basic structural features in the Arabic and English versions was also conducted. The average lengths of reports, headlines, blurbs, leads, and captions were calculated for the top stories. Additionally, the source(s) of each report were identified and counted. Moreover, since some reports contained more than one story, the frequency of stories per report was counted. Image frequency per report was also counted, and the source(s) of images were identified. The average length of captions accompanying the images was also calculated.

A thematic analysis of the reports was conducted using a modified version of van Dijk's (1988b) news categories. The modified coding scheme included the following categories*: military and political violence* (MP), *politics* (P), *foreign relations* (FR), *religion and culture* (RC), *economy* (E), *police and crime* (PC), *health, education, and welfare* (HEW), *disaster and human affairs* (DHF), and *other* (O). The category RC includes news about arts and the media; HEW includes news related to social affairs; and O subsumes news about science and technology, as well as sports.

Finally, we conducted an analysis of regional coverage. Two main categories were developed: *Arab* and *non-Arab*. The non-Arab category was further subdivided into *first world*, *second world*, and *third world*. Independent of this, we also coded the coverage of each non-Arab report as *Muslim* or *non-Muslim*. The various sub-categories were identified in order to address the claim that Al Jazeera English "revers[es] the North to South flow of information" by giving more coverage to the developing world (Wikipedia, 2008), and to gain insight into the extent to which Al Jazeera, in both versions, places emphasis on issues and events related to Muslims.

### 3.2.2. Critical Discourse Analysis

A close qualitative critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the headlines of all the news reports in the sample was conducted to uncover the ideological underpinnings of reports on the two news sites. Our analysis focused on the ideological connotations of grammatical representation of agency and action (e.g., transitivity, voice, nominalization), lexical choice (Fowler, 1991), and scripts and their associations (van Dijk, 1988b).

The data were coded by both authors. The first author, a native speaker of Egyptian Arabic, translated the Arabic headlines into English for the second author, a native speaker of American English, and they drew on their combined cultural perspectives in interpreting the texts. After several sessions spent refining the study methodologies, both authors coded 15% of the data for the content analyses and the critical discourse analysis; inter-rater reliability exceeded 95%. The few disagreements were discussed and resolved. After coding the rest of the data, inter-rater agreement exceeded 98%.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. LAYOUT

The main page of each of the two news sites can be seen to be composed of two areas, a main area (MA) and a secondary area (SA). The MA is at the top of each site and incorporates the top stories, which are accompanied by images. The SA in each version presents reports under several labeled categories, either with or without images. During the collection period, the MA of the Arabic news site was composed of a report with one large image (L) occurring on the upper part and eight other reports occurring in two columns, with four reports per column, on the bottom part of the MA. Each of these eight reports was accompanied by a small image (S). For ease of reference, we labeled the S stories in the right-hand column of the Arabic site S1, S3, S5, and S7, and those in the left-hand column were labeled S2, S4, S6, and S8, moving from top to bottom.

As for the English news site, it was composed of one report with one large image (L) in the upper left-hand side of the MA, two reports with two medium images (M) in the bottom part of the MA, and four other reports accompanied by small images in one column in the upper right-hand part of the MA. We labeled the medium image on the left M1 and the one on the right M2, and the reports with small images were labeled S1, S2, S3, and S4, from top to bottom. Figure 1 below shows screenshots of the layouts of the two versions; the top stories are labeled in the MAs, which we have outlined in red:



*Figure 1.* Screenshots of the English (left) and Arabic (right) layouts.

### 4.2. REPORT REFRESH RATE

The Arabic site refreshed its content more often than the English site did. Out of the 126 reports that could have appeared on the Arabic news site during the 14 collection periods, 114 reports actually appeared, meaning that 90.5% of the stories were fresh. Only 74 reports out of the potential 98 in the English version were realized, for a freshness rate of 75.5%. Thus, more English than Arabic stories were repeated. The repeated stories on the Arabic site remained for an average of two time slices, whereas the English stories that were repeated remained for an average of 2.6 time slices. Moreover, while in the Arabic version, repeated stories skipped no time slices, in the

English version, the repeated stories skipped an average of 0.2 time slices, meaning that some stories appeared, disappeared, and then appeared again later on the site.

## 4.3. STRUCTURAL FEATURES

The Arabic reports were shorter than the English reports, with an average of 334 words per report, as compared to 397 words per English report. However, the Arabic reports had longer headlines: 7.5 words on average, as compared to 5.7 words in the English headlines. Relatedly, the Arabic reports sometimes combined more than one story, whereas this did not happen in the English reports. The Arabic reports also included more images, even when multiple stories per report were taken into account. However, the English reports had longer image captions. In addition, some of the stories on the Arabic site had "leads," headline-like sequences that preceded the headline. These and other structural comparisons are summarized in Table 1.

*Table 1*. Average counts of basic structural features.

|  | Arabic | English |
|---|---|---|
| Stories per report | 1.14 | 1 |
| Images per report | 1.81 | 1.29 |
| Images per story | 1.59 | 1.29 |
| Length of report (words) | 334.01 | 396.59 |
| Length of headline (words) | 7.46 | 5.74 |
| Length of lead (words) | 6 | n/a |
| Length of blurb (words) | 40.21 | 13.44 |
| Length of image caption (words) | 8.67 | 11.62 |

Each report was followed by an indication of the source(s) of the stories. In the majority of the cases (57% in the Arabic site and 76% in the English site), the source was not specified as a certain news agency, but only the label "agencies" was given as the source. In other cases, the source was given as "Al Jazeera and agencies." The breakdown of sources for each site is given in Table 2. The Arabic site derived stories from more diverse sources, with some stories derived exclusively from Al Jazeera.

*Table 2*. Percent frequencies of story sources.

|  | Arabic | English |
|---|---|---|
| Agencies | 57.01 | 75.67 |
| Al Jazeera and Agencies | 30.70 | 24.32 |
| AP | 7.01 | 0 |
| Al Jazeera | 4.38 | 0 |
| AFP | 0.87 | 0 |
| No source given | 1.75 | 0 |

Most of the images that accompanied the stories were from Agence France-Presse (AFP) in both the Arabic and the English sites. However, the Arabic site used more AFP images (70%) than the English site (45%). The Arabic site also used slightly more images from Reuters and Al Jazeera, while the English site used more from The

Associated Press (AP) and the European Pressphoto Agency (EPA). The sources and frequency of the images in the reports in the two sites are given in Table 3 below. The English site drew images from more diverse sources.

*Table 3.*  Percent frequencies of image sources.

|              | Arabic | English |
|--------------|--------|---------|
| AFP          | 69.56  | 44.79   |
| Reuters      | 20.28  | 19.79   |
| Al Jazeera   | 9.66   | 7.29    |
| GALLO/GETTY  | 0      | 9.37    |
| AP           | 0      | 11.45   |
| EPA          | 0      | 7.29    |
| European     | 0.48   | 0       |

## 4.4. THEMATIC COVERAGE

The distribution of top story themes was roughly similar for the two sites. The most common themes were military and police violence (MP), foreign relations (FR), and politics (P). However, the set of stories occurring in the English version (the *all-English set*) had somewhat fewer stories of the first two types than either the *all-Arabic set* or the set of stories found on both sites, and the all-English set included more coverage of economics (E), health, education, and welfare (HEW), and disaster and human affairs (DHF) themes. Figure 2 shows the percentages of each news category for the Arabic-only, English-only, and the shared stories data sets. The shared stories generally occupy a middle ground between the Arabic-only and the English-only stories, except that they privilege coverage of military and police violence more than the other stories do.
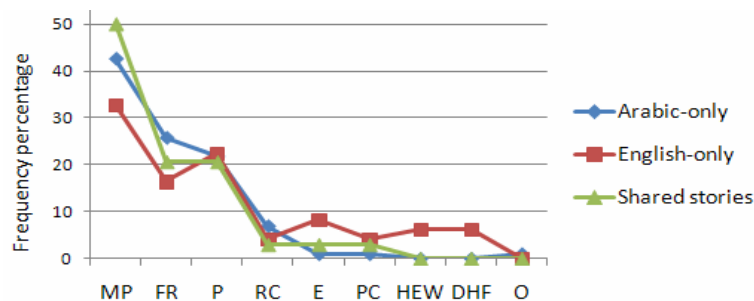


*Figure 2.*  Coverage of news categories.

## 4.5. REGIONAL COVERAGE

In contrast to the thematic analysis, the analysis of regional coverage shows striking differences between the two language versions of the Al Jazeera news site. Most stories in the Arabic-only set cover the Arab world; most stories in the English-only set cover the third world; and the shared stories cover both the Arab world and (to a lesser extent) the third world. Figure 3 shows the coverage in the three data sets.
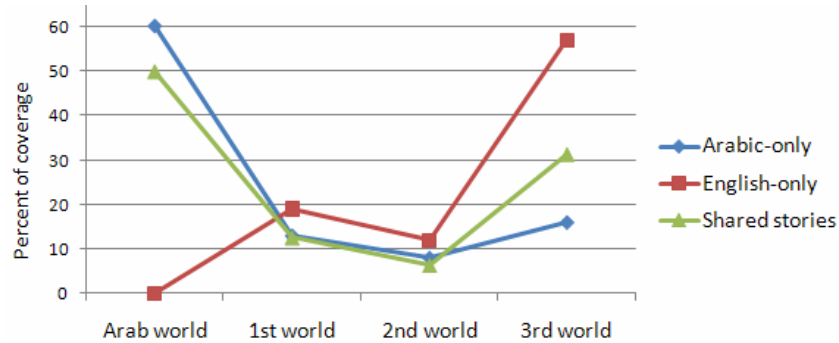
*Figure 3.*  Regional coverage of Arab, first, second, and third worlds.

With respect to coverage of the (non-Arab) Muslim world, all the language-specific story sets (and especially the English-only stories) favor the non-Muslim world. However, the stories in the shared set favor the Muslim world (34% Muslim vs. 16% non-Muslim), as shown in Table 4.

*Table 4.*  Percent frequencies of regional coverage.

| Data set | Arab world | Non-Arab regions | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1st world | 2nd world | 3rd world | Muslim world | Non-Muslim world |
| All-Arabic | 57.69 | 13.08 | 8.46 | 20.77 | 20.00 | 22.31 |
| All-English | 28.38 | 16.22 | 9.46 | 45.95 | 32.43 | 39.19 |
| Arabic-only | 60.20 | 13.00 | 8.00 | 16.00 | 15.31 | 24 |
| English-only | 12 .00 | 19.00 | 12.00 | 57 | 30.95 | 57.14 |
| Shared stories | 50.00 | 12.50 | 6.30 | 31.30 | 34.38 | 15.63 |
| All stories | 47.06 | 14.22 | 8.82 | 29.41 | 24.50 | 28.40 |

## 4.6. CDA OF HEADLINES

At first inspection, the report headlines in the two versions appear ideologically balanced. Blatantly pro- or anti- Western or Arab headlines are not in evidence on either news site. Nonetheless, some differences emerged from the critical discourse analysis. First, the Arabic headlines are typically more informative (contain more detail) than the English headlines, as illustrated by the following example (Arabic headlines have been translated into English; the position and date of each story are given in parentheses):

1.  ARABIC: "3 Afghans killed in ambush targeting governor of Qandahar" (S1: 05/17/2007)
    ENGLISH: "Blast wounds Afghan minister" (M1: 05/17/2007)

In the English version, we learn only that there has been a "blast," as a result of which an (unidentified) Afghan minister was wounded. The Arabic version is considerably more informative, relaying the information that the minister was the "governor of Qandahar," that he was caught in an "ambush," and that three other Afghans were killed

in the incident. The tendency for the Arabic headlines to include more information is evident throughout the shared story set, as well as in the Arabic-only stories.

Second, the English headlines use more simple nominalizations; this is the principal way in which they omit detail. While nominalization is common in headlines in both languages (e.g., "ambush" and "blast" in example 1; "clashes," "injuries," "dispute," and "clash" in example 2 below), the nominalizations in the Arabic headlines are more often elaborated by descriptive qualifiers, as in example 2.

2.  ARABIC: "Christian-Muslim clashes south of Cairo result in injuries" (S7: 05/12/2007)
    ENGLISH: "Church dispute sparks Egypt clash" (S4: 05/11/2007)

The simple "church dispute" in English corresponds to the elaborated "Christian-Muslim clashes" in Arabic, and "Egypt clash" in English is presented more elaborately in Arabic as "clashes south of Cairo." If anything, the preference for simple nominalization in the English headlines is greater in the English-only than in the shared story set. English-only examples include, "*Violence* mars Philippine *vote*," "*Attack* follows Pakistan-Nato *talks*," and "*Bombings* on eve of Algeria *election*."

The more detailed Arabic headlines provide greater scope for ideological expression. For instance, the modified noun phrase "secularism supporters" in example 3 below in the Arabic version is more precise than the simple noun "Turks" in the English version, and the modifier "secularism" itself is ideologically loaded. Not all Turks are secularists and not all of them demonstrated, the wording of the Arabic headline entails, potentially giving rise to the interpretation that secularism supporters are apart, "other" than the news source and its readers. Moreover, the fact that Turkey has been secularized and its constitution has been judged in certain aspects to be "anti-Islamic" is usually condemned in the Arab and the Muslim world. Thus, the Arabic headline invites the inference that demonstrations by secularism supporters are problematic.

3.  ARABIC: "Huge demonstration by secularism supporters in Turkish Izmir" (S7: 05/14/2007)
    ENGLISH: "Turks rally in Izmir despite blast" (M2: 05/14/2007)

Third, lexical choices in each version show a slight systematic pro-Arab bias in the Arabic headlines and a slight pro-West bias in the English headlines. For example, the use of "hostage" versus "aid worker" in example 4 below illustrates how a Western participant is presented more positively in the English than in the Arabic version:

4.  ARABIC: "Taliban free French hostage" (L: 05/12/2007)
    ENGLISH: "Taliban free French aid worker" (M1, S1: 05/12/2007)

The French "hostage" is a passive victim in the Arabic version, whereas in the English version, the "aid worker" is represented as a constructive, empowered agent.

Lexical choices also reflect political alignments. While the Arabic version in example 5 clearly takes a stand against the Israeli strike by employing the term "martyrs" to describe the Hamas (Arab) victims, the English version refers impersonally to "targets," effectively downplaying the loss of human life caused by Israel, which is a close ally of the U.S.

5. ARABIC: "Two martyrs in new raid" (L: 05/14/2007)
ENGLISH: "Israel hits Hamas targets in Gaza" (L, M1: 05/14/2007)

Ideological associations were also generated through the invocation of cultural scripts. The following Arabic headline, for instance, invokes the battle script, which in the Arab world implies courageous death: Dadullah and other Talibanis are represented as fighters who fell in the battlefield, rather than as helpless victims. Being killed in the battlefield is not a shame in Arab culture, so long as one shows persistence and courage until the very end, and as long as the fighting is for a "just" cause. No such associations are invoked by the neutral English "Taliban military commander killed."

6. ARABIC: "Dadullah and 55 Talibanis killed in two battles against allies" (L: 05/14/2007)
ENGLISH: "Taliban military commander killed" (L, S1: 05/14/2007)

Similarly, in the following story that was reported in both versions, the English headline activates the Western cultural script of political criticism being a positive act, and further supports this interpretation by characterizing the jailed Syrian critic as "prominent" (i.e., statusful). In contrast, the Arabic version refers to those imprisoned simply as "Syrians" and cites the charge that they "weaken[ed] national pride," thereby presenting them somewhat negatively.

7. ARABIC: "4 Syrians sentenced to imprisonment for 'weakening national pride'" (S3: 05/14/2007)
ENGLISH: "Prominent Syrian critic jailed" (S4: 05/14/2007)

Finally, transitivity and voice (active or passive) also conveyed ideology in the headlines. In some cases, an agentless passive construction was used to downplay the agent of an undesirable (from a particular ideological perspective) action. In example 8 below, the Arabic headline employs an agentless passive, in contrast to the active transitive clause in the English headline:

8. ARABIC: "5 US soldiers killed and 3 missing south of Baghdad" (L: 05/13/2007)
ENGLISH: "Iraq attack kills five US soldiers" (M1: 05/13/2007)

The presumed agents of the killing are Iraqis (Arabs) or Al Qaeda (also Arabs), and they are not mentioned in the Arabic version. The nominalized subject in the English version also leaves the exact agents unspecified, but attributes the responsibility for the killings directly to "Iraq attacks."

Simple intransitive clauses were sometimes also used to downplay agentivity, in contrast to transitive clauses, as for example in the following headlines reporting a somewhat tense visit by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice with Russian president Vladimir Putin:

9. ARABIC: "Rice rejects Moscow's opposition to the missile defense shield in Europe" (S3: 05/16/2007)
ENGLISH: "Putin and Rice 'tone down rhetoric'" (S3: 05/16/2007)

Rice appears more agentive (and more aggressive) in the transitive Arabic version, in which she "rejects" Moscow's position, than in the functionally intransitive English version, which represents Putin and Rice as equally engaged in a peaceful goal. In these and the other ways noted above, the English headlines tend to employ vaguer and/or less controversial wording, and both language versions reflect the perspectives and values of their associated cultural groups.

## 5. Discussion

A surprising number of differences were found between the two language versions of the Al Jazeera news site, considering that both are part of the same network. Some of the differences are perhaps of no great significance, but others point to differences in content coverage and perspectives through which the news is filtered that potentially construct different social realities for readers in each language (cf. Fowler, 1991). The main differences are discussed and interpreted below.

Some of the differences between the *layouts* of the Arabic and the English news sites (see Figure 1) are due to differences in the way the two languages are written and read, Arabic being a right-to-left language and English a left-to-right language. Cultural differences may also be reflected in the fact that the Arabic layout is more hierarchical than the English layout: The large image (L) story in the Arabic site dominates the page; the other top stories are relegated to positions below it and have smaller images; and minor news items with no images appear near the bottom. In contrast, the English large (L) and medium (M) top stories are not much different in size, and the top stories with small (S) images appear next to, rather than below, the largest story. Moreover, some of the stories in minor categories that appear toward the bottom of the page also have small images. Arab countries are characterized by high power distance, and the U.S. by more egalitarian values, according to the cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede (1980). The layout differences observed in this study are consistent with Hofstede's findings.

Although the L-position story in the Arabic site had exclusive prominence, it did not remain as long as its counterpart in the English site, due to the faster *refresh rate* in the Arabic version. The English version had fewer stories, and they were displayed for a longer period of time. Readers of the Arabic version thus have access to more, and more frequently-updated, top news stories than do readers of the English version. In both versions, repetition of stories involved demotion rather than promotion, i.e., stories were repeated in positions less salient than the positions in which they originally appeared.

A number of differences in *structural features* were found. Perhaps because reports were refreshed more frequently in the Arabic version, Arabic reports were shorter than English reports. The shortness of the English headlines may be accounted for by what seems to be an excessive concern for neutrality on the part of the English version, resulting in headlines containing more nominalizations (which condense entire clauses into a single word) and fewer details of the reported events. Arabic headlines were also longer because some of the Arabic reports covered more than one story, a practice not found in the English news reports.

As for the original *sources* of the stories reported, the Arabic version depended more on stories originated by Al Jazeera itself, as a news-making institution. This may be due to the fact that the Arabic version covered the Arab world more than the English version, and Al Jazeera originated many of the stories related to the Arab world due to its greater focus on the region. It is unclear whether the English version actually depends on fewer sources for its news or simply judges it unnecessary to spell out the exact sources, referring to sources only as "agencies."

The Arabic Al Jazeera site employed more *images* per report, perhaps since, as an established news agency, it already has a large archive of images, especially of the Arab world. The English version, however, employed images from a wider variety of sources. This may be explained by its focus on third world regions, which span a wide area of the globe. In order to find appropriate images, the English version may need to draw on more varied sources.

*Thematic coverage* shows few differences across the two language versions: Both favor military and police violence (MP). This finding can be accounted for by considering that Al Jazeera prioritizes covering a turbulent region (the Arab world and the Middle East) in which military and political violence are frequent occurrences, whether it be in Iraq, the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, or elsewhere. Foreign relations (FR) was the second most frequent category in the two versions, perhaps due to the energetic political maneuvers and attempts to build alliances taking place today in the world generally and in the Arab world, specifically, post-9/11. The category of politics (P), a mainstay of major news networks, was also frequent in both versions.

Categories other than MP, FR, and P tended to take a back seat among the top stories. Although their numbers were small, some suggestive differences in their frequencies in the two versions were found. E, PC, HEW, and DHF stories were more frequent on the English site; the Arabic site, indeed, had no stories in the categories HEW or DHF. The English version may be following a Western model of reporting, in which these two categories are more significant than they are in Arab news reporting.

Conversely, religion and culture (RC) figured more in the Arabic version, perhaps because stories related to religion are thought to be of interest to Arab readers. Religion in the Arab world seems to play a greater role than it does in the West, where church and state are two separate, and sometimes, historically, opposing, entities. Although many Arab countries have secular constitutions, governing bodies rely on religion in justifying some policies. In addition, there seems to be a growing religious revival movement in the Arab world at the present time.

*Regional coverage* of the Arabic version focused more on the Arab world than on any other region and more than all other regions combined. This is presumably the case because the Arabic-speaking audience to which this version is directed is more concerned with the Arab world and its relationships with the rest of the world than with other regions. Al Jazeera Arabic has succeeded in winning a wide audience in the Arab world in large part through its regular and sometimes daily coverage of stories from "hot spots" within the region, for instance, Iraq and the Palestinian territories. In addition, the Arabic version covered the third world more than the first and second worlds, perhaps because the Arabic version also interests itself in the non-Arab Muslim world, most of whose countries belong to the third world.

Consistent with its stated goals (Rushing, 2007; Wikipedia, 2008), the English version covered regions belonging to the third world more than any other region. However, the English version gave second priority to the Arab world. Consequently, Al Jazeera English differs in its regional coverage from its sister counterpart—Al Jazeera Arabic—and also from other major English-language news sites such as CNN and the BBC, which focus more on the first world.

As regards religion, although the stories about the non-Arab world presented in both languages favored Muslim regions, non-Muslim regions received more coverage in all the other data sets (see Table 4). Overall, it can be concluded that Al Jazeera does not prioritize regional coverage outside the Arab world based on religious background.

Finally, the critical discourse analysis of headlines from the two versions reveals that Al Jazeera's coverage is relatively balanced, and that the English version, especially, seems to go to great lengths to avoid any appearance of ideological bias, including at the expense of being informative. This may be a reaction to allegations from some Western critics that Al Jazeera is pro-terrorist; the results of the present analysis suggest that such allegations are entirely unfounded. If anything, the English headlines sometimes encode a slight Western bias. Similarly, the Arabic headlines sometimes reflect a slight Arab bias, as would be expected in an Arab news source.

It may be that the journalists are unconsciously reproducing their own cultural biases. Al Jazeera Arabic is headquartered in Doha, Qatar and staffed by Arabs, whereas Al Jazeera English is created by a staff that includes former employees of CNN and the BBC, and news management rotates to include Washington, D.C. and London, as well as Doha and Kuala Lumpur (Wikipedia, 2008). Alternatively, the journalists may be consciously aiming to make their reporting palatable to different audiences that they believe to hold particular worldviews. Whatever the explanation for the biases encoded in grammatical and lexical choices in the headlines we analyzed, the ideological associations are for the most part subtle, and many rely on culture-specific scripts for their interpretation. This suggests that ideology is in the eye of the reader to some extent, since readers from different cultural backgrounds and living in different parts of the world might not draw the same inferences from the same headlines, regardless of what the journalists may or may not have intended. This possibility deserves further study, given that news networks are increasingly accessed worldwide.

## 6. Conclusion

Critical discourse analysts have long claimed that different newspapers construct different social realities (Fowler, 1991; Trew, 1979). The possibility that different language "versions" of the same news site do so as well is intriguing, and has implications for cross-cultural understanding, diplomacy, and foreign policy. At the heart of these is the issue of translation: Our findings make it clear that despite the existence of an English version of Al Jazeera, its coverage is sufficiently different that translating the Arabic content will continue to be important for non-Arab governments, politicians, etc., in light of the major role played by Al Jazeera Arabic in the Middle East. However, the CDA findings suggest that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to capture the differences in ideological nuance of coverage using machine translation.

Rather, human translators who have deep cultural and linguistic knowledge of both the Arab and the Western world are needed, and this need is growing, as Al Jazeera and other Arabic-language news sites take on increased global importance.

A limitation of this study is that it analyzed only the manifest content of news sites; it did not interview journalists about their intentions or readers about their interpretations. Future research should address these and other issues, in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of multilingual news coverage in this global Internet age.

## References

Bauer, M. (2000). Classical content analysis. In M. Bauer & G. Gaskell (Eds.), *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound* (pp. 131-151). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bond, P. (2004, April 23). *Webby Awards*. Retrieved December 27, 2007 from http://www.webbyawards.com/press/article.php?id=2

Chouliaraki, L., & Fairclough, N. (1999). *Discourse in late modernity: Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

Dimitrova, D. V., & Connolly-Ahern, C. (2007). A tale of two wars: Framing analysis of online news sites in coalition countries and the Arab world during the Iraq War. *The Howard Journal of Communications, 18*, 153-168.

El-Nawawy, M., & Iskandar, A. (2003). *Al-Jezeera: The story of the network that is rattling governments and redefining modern journalism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Ghareeb, E. (2000). New media and the information revolution in the Arab world: An assessment. *The Middle East Journal, 54*(3), 395-418.

Herring, S. C. (forthcoming). Web(log) content analysis: Expanding the paradigm. In J. Hunsinger, M. Allen, & L. Klastrup (Eds.), *The International Handbook of Internet Research*. Heidelberg: Springer Verlag.

Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Kawamoto, D. (2003, April 25). *Americans went overseas for war news.* Retrieved December 27, 2007 from http://news.zdnet.co.uk/itmanagement/0,1000000308,2133893,00.htm

Kutz, D., & Herring, S. C. (2005). Micro-longitudinal analysis of Web news updates. *Proceedings of HICSS-38.* Los Alamitos, CA: IEEE.

Lettice, J. (2003, April 4). Al Jazeera and the Net - free speech, but don't say *that*. *The Register*. Retrieved Jan 1, 2008 from http://www.theregister.co.uk/2003/04/07/al_jazeera_and_the_net

Miles, H. (2003, April 4). *Watching the war on al-Jazeera*. Retrieved December 25, 2007 from http://www.lrb.co.uk/v25/n08/mile01_.html

Rushing, J. (2007). *Mission Al-Jazeera: Build a bridge, seek the truth, change the world*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Trew, T. (1979). "What the newspapers say": Linguistic variation and ideological difference. In R. Fowler, R. Hodge, G. Kress, & T. Trew (Eds.), *Language and control* (pp. 117-156). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

van Dijk, T. A. (1988a). *News as discourse*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

van Dijk, T. A. (1988b) *News analysis: Case studies of international and national news in the press*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Wikipedia. (2008, January 12). *Al Jazeera English*. Retrieved January 12, 2008, from http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Al_Jazeera_English&oldid=183822842.

Wodak, R. (2002). Aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis. *Zeitschrift für Angewandte Linguistik*, *36,* 5-31.

Zayani, M., & Sahraoui, S. (2007). *The culture of Al Jazeera: Inside an Arab media giant*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.