

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Complaining and Criticizing Speech Acts in

Iraqi Political Discourse

تحليل نقدي للخطاب المتعلق بأفعال الشكوى والنقد في الخطاب السياسي العراقي

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**Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Complaint, Speech Acts,
Political Discourse**

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الخطاب النقدي، الشكوى، أفعال الكلام، الخطاب السياسي



Abstract

This study examines the linguistic and discursive strategies employed by Iraqis to express complaints and criticisms regarding governmental shortcomings and foreign interference in the country's affairs. Employing Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) alongside Homi Bhabha's postcolonial concepts such as hybridity and mimicry, the research investigates how acts of dissent are articulated, negotiated, and circulated within a complex socio-political landscape. The study also adopts a postmodern lens to highlight the fragmentation of identities and the instability of power relations reflected in these complaining and criticism. Through a critical discourse, this paper aims to reveal the rhetorical structures, ideological tensions, and cultural dynamics that shape Iraqi public discourse in a postcolonial context.

The paper reveals that Iraqi citizens make complaints and criticism through a powerful range of rhetorical and lexical strategies. In addressing the national government, public discourse frequently employs strongly negative lexical items such as *corrupt*, *thieves*, and *mafia* to criminalize the political class. The analysis of the data also reveals the recurrent use of metaphorical language that frames the government as predatory and incompetent, for instance by depicting it as a *sinking ship* or as an entity that *sucks the blood of the people*. These discursive strategies involve deep and severe criticism and reflect negative image of the government in terms of exploitation and incapable of effective governance.

المستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة الاستراتيجيات اللغوية والخطابية التي يستخدمها العراقيون للتعبير عن شكواهم وانتقاداتهم بشأن أوجه القصور الحكومية والتدخل الأجنبي في شؤون البلاد. وباستخدام نموذج نورمان فيركلو ثلاثي الأبعاد لتحليل الخطاب النقدي، إلى جانب مفاهيم هومي بابا ما بعد الاستعمارية كالهجينية والمحاكاة، يبحث البحث في كيفية صياغة أفعال المعارضة والتفاوض بشأنها وتداولها ضمن سياق اجتماعي سياسي معقد. كما تتبنى الدراسة منظوراً ما بعد حدثي لتسليط الضوء على تفتت الهويات وعدم استقرار علاقات القوة التي تنعكس في هذه الشكاوى والانتقادات. وتهدف هذه الورقة، من خلال الخطاب النقدي، إلى الكشف عن البنى البلاغية والتوترات الأيديولوجية والديناميات الثقافية التي تشكل الخطاب العام العراقي في سياق ما بعد الاستعمار.

وتُظهر الدراسة أن المواطنين العراقيين يُعبّرون عن شكواهم وانتقاداتهم من خلال مجموعة واسعة من الاستراتيجيات البلاغية والمعجمية. عند مخاطبة الحكومة الوطنية، غالباً ما يستخدم الخطاب العام مفردات سلبية قوية مثل "فاسد" و"الصوص" و"مافيا" لنشويه صورة الطبقة السياسية. كما يكشف تحليل البيانات عن الاستخدام المتكرر للغة المجازية التي تصوّر الحكومة على أنها استغلالية وغير كفؤة، على سبيل المثال من خلال تصويرها كسفينة تغرق. تنطوي هذه الاستراتيجيات الخطابية على نقد لاذع وعميق، وتعكس صورة سلبية للحكومة من حيث الاستغلال وعدم القدرة على الحكم الفعال.



1. Introduction

The political scene in Iraq has been marked by significant instability and widespread opposition, disappointment, and criticism. Therefore, Iraqi people suffered from enduring many problems and challenges related to the government's deficiencies, and the endless influence and intrusion of foreign powers in local concerns. Thus, Iraqis have become a big fan of complaining and criticism about the government's deficiencies and foreign interference.

Complaint and criticism can be classified as commissive speech acts (Trosborg, 1994, 1995). Through complaining and criticism, we can realize the socio-political dynamics in Iraq. In other words, they can reveal the nature of sociopolitical and power relations. Accordingly, this paper is concerned with the patterns and dynamics of complaints and critical speech among Iraqis, focusing specifically on their grievances against government failures and foreign intervention.

Despite the increased previous studies on political dissatisfaction in Iraq, less attention was paid to exploring speeches of complaining and criticism from a critical discourse analysis perspectives. In other words, there has been less focus on examining linguistic and rhetorical strategies of complaining and criticism. This paper therefore aims to bridge this gap by exploring the strategies of these two speech acts and exposing further implications behind these two voices of dissatisfaction.

This paper aims to answer the following research questions

- a) How do Iraqis linguistically construct complaints and criticism against their governments and foreign intervention?
- 1- What do the discursive strategies reveal about evolving power dynamics and identities in post-2003 Iraq?
- 2- To what extent do the themes and strategies identified exemplify postcolonial concepts such as hybridity and mimicry, particularly in the blending of nationalist rhetoric with the political language of Western interveners?

This study has adopted a qualitative analysis in the form of critical discourse analysis and postcolonial theory. The critical discourse analysis has been conducted on data yielded by a written questionnaire involving questions about social services, foreign intervention and political disorder. The analysis is conducted in terms of Fairclough's (1994) three dimensional model and Bhabah's postcolonial model (1994). Both models offer a solid base for analyzing the Iraqi voices of dissatisfaction. CDA supports the analysis of discursive strategies used by Iraqis to expose their voices of dissatisfaction. Postcolonial model works as a lens to realize and understand the robust impact of foreign intrusions on modern Iraqi society. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the socio-political dynamics in Iraq by revealing the voices of dissatisfaction and protest that are almost disregarded in conventional linguistic analysis.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework



Fairclough and Wodak (1997) show that CDA is a common notion used in the social science to provide a solid analytical basis for examining speech acts in political and social contexts, specifically about power dynamics, ideology, political change, war speech, etc. By following CDA, we can expose hidden ideologies and linguistic manipulations used by Iraqi citizens. By adopting this model, we applied the two dimensions: *discursive practice*, and *social practice*. These dimensions combine language use with the broader sociopolitical framework and concepts. In terms of textual analysis, we examine the cohesion and coherence of the text. While discursive practice focuses on the production and assumption of the text, social practice contextualizes the discourse within a broader social and political framework (Gee, 2014). This approach enables researchers to examine the linguistic structure of the discourse and the power dynamics and social behaviors. This methodology reveals how ordinary individuals linguistically direct their voices towards authority and external intrusion in Iraq.

Postcolonial theory can be considered the basis in examining the social, cultural, and economic changes that developing countries witnessed after the end of European colonialism. Previous literature, from foundational thinkers like Said (1978) and Spivak (1988) to creating theorists like Bhabha (1994), shows that postcolonial theory has been developed as a reaction to colonialism that also seeks to interpret its long-term impact on colonized individuals. The intricacies of power relations between colonists and the occupied, including the long-term impacts of colonial discourses on identity, rules, and struggle, are major issues posed by postcolonial theory. In addition, it concerns the perception related to the philosophy of colonialism which determines modern politics in many colonized contexts including Iraq (Brydon, 2006). In terms of this theory, this research reflects how foreign intrusion is perceived, criticized and exchanged by Iraqi individuals in terms of their communicative voices of complaining and criticism. The Postcolonial theory involves two major concepts: hybridity and mimicry which are employed as tools of examining how cultures, identities and discourses evolve under the realm of colonization. In terms of the concept of hybridity and mimicry, we focus on the socio-cultural dynamics found in Iraqi discourse. Hybridity as a major element of postcolonialism refers to the cultural relationship between frequently revolutionary and identities determined by resistance and collaboration (Bhabha, 1994).

This study provides empirical evidence of Bhabha's mimicry in the digital political sphere, illustrating how Iraqi citizens adapt global democratic discourses with a subversive intent, thus demonstrating a dynamic form of agency not fully explored in earlier theoretical applications of mimicry, leading to breakthrough insights.

In the Iraqi context, these concepts manifest not merely in the adoption of Western lexical items, but in a more complex thematic negotiation where nationalist rhetoric is often strategically blended with, or subverted by, the very



discourses of democracy and modernity associated with the former occupiers, a dynamic that contrasts with the more culturally assimilative mimicry observed in other postcolonial settings. Hybridity is apparent in the manner in which Iraqis align between native cultural frameworks and imposed political structures, frequently resulting in discourse that embodies both resistance and settlement. Similarly, Bhabha's concept of mimicry reflects the inconsistency of the colonized individual imitating the colonizer, yet producing a copy that is "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). what is more, this incomplete copy demonstrates the instability and absence of colonial authority. Thus, people in Iraq may use formal language or criticism that match Western democratic standards when discussing politics; however, they may also modify these models to accommodate their circumstances. This is referred to as mimicry. Accordingly, in this study, we will integrate Fairclough's CDA model with Bhabha's postcolonial concepts in order to examine how speech influences and transforms power dynamics in a postcolonial and post-invasion Iraq.

2.1 Complaining and Criticizing Speech Act

To complain, an individual expresses dissatisfaction or grievances about a particular issue, situation, or treatment experienced. This form of discourse can be produced in several contexts, including personal relationships, workplaces, customer service interactions, and public protests. Scholars confirm that such speech act behaviour involves expressing one's frustration and dissatisfaction in reaction to an act that is undesirable (Kasper, 1993; and Clyne, 1994).

The successful performance of complaining involves "an individual A addressing their dissatisfaction with individual B's behavior, which A finds unsatisfactory" (Laforest, 2002, p. 159). A complaining act can essentially be a face-threatening act (FAT), as it threatens the addressee's positive face in terms of accusing him/her of their mistakes or wrongdoings, and it also threatens the addressee's negative face by asking them for some kind of reform or compensation. The complex nature of this speech act can shape the social objective of sustaining politeness and agreement between the complainer and the complaine (Leech, 1983).

A complaining act is a face-threatening act (FAT). It threatens the addressee's positive face, which is the desire to be approved of, and their negative face, which is the desire to be unimpeded. However, the strategic use of mitigation in complaining, as discussed in pragmatics literature (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987; Boxer, 1993; Laforest, 2002) indicate that its complex nature can also shape the social objective of sustaining politeness and agreement between the complainer and the complaine. This is because the complainer may use certain strategies to soften the force of the complaint to maintain the relationship.



Previous research has shown two main types of complaints: direct complaints and indirect complaints. The former regards the addressee as responsible for the mistakes or the offenses. Such a type of complaint is expected to accept a reform and an apology. In addition, these complaints can be noted when a speaker expresses displeasure or annoyance face-to-face, perceiving the addressee's actions as unfavorable. Not only this, Boxer (1993) shows that direct complaint can be seen as an indirect accusation to the addressee, which threatens the addressee's positive face or their need to be approved. Conversely, the latter, indirect complaint, is viewed as a repeated statement not always intended to reform unpleasant situations. Native speakers often make indirect complaints to build rapport and mitigate the offence committed by the wrongdoer. Thus, it can be considered an emotional release for negative feelings. Consequently, people often use indirect complaints to build relationships instead of using them as face-threatening acts (FTAs). However, in commercial communications, for instance, clients typically file complaints to voice their displeasure and want compensation for the offense.

Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) assign pragmatic functions for complaining. In their classification, they depend on the degree of complaining speech act behaviour. The first category is minimizing responsibility, through which the complainer is devoid of direct responsibility for the crime. For example, when someone shatters a glass during a party, the speaker may respond, "Don't worry about it, such things happen". In such a situation, the speaker gives signals that indicate disapproval without explicitly showing that the addressee is guilty. In addition, the speaker expresses complaints in the form of accusations and warnings, for example, "Next time, you will pay for it with your own money". This means that the complaining speech act implies expressing some kind of penalty in terms of threatening the interlocutor. For example, if you don't finish the project today, I'll have to discuss it with the boss" (p.202).

Complaining is viewed by Brown and Levinson (1978 and 1987) as a face-threatening act (FTA) that threatens the addressee within the context of impoliteness or negative politeness. This view is shaped by Goffman's (1967) definition of "face." Brown and Levinson state that the foundation of politeness theory is a Model Person (MP) with two primary characteristics: "rationality" and "face." MPs are seen to be rational actors who select strategies that further their goals. Trosborg (1995) classifies complaints as impolite speech act behaviour in terms of causing conflict with the hearer. In the same way, Leech (1983) argues that politeness is non-negotiable, and it is almost illogical to threaten while maintaining politeness. This perspective, however, focuses on the *inherently* threatening nature of the act itself. The earlier claim that complaints can "shape politeness" is not a contradiction but refers to the strategic use of *redressive action* the very politeness strategies (e.g., indirectness, hedging, giving reasons) that Brown & Levinson themselves detail which are employed to *offset* the intrinsic threat of the complaint. Consequently, while the core act of complaining is a threat, it is the application of these mitigating strategies that allows



a speaker to perform the FTA while simultaneously demonstrating a commitment to politeness.

On the other hand, concentrating on the undesirable events and their effects rather than the offending agent is a face-saving mitigation strategy. Utilizing mitigating measures is essential for preventing interpersonal problems in communication, even if complaints are inherently impolite actions. The complainant might lessen the effect of their complaint on the complaine by using such devices.

From the other hand, criticism can also be realized by different strategies. Tracy, et al. (1987, p.56) define criticism as the act of finding fault” which compromises showing a negative evaluation of a person or an act for which he or she is deemed responsible”. In the same way, criticism is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction or negative comment” (Hyland, 2000, p. 44).

According to Nguyen (2005), criticism is viewed as a negative evaluation of the addressee’s choice, speech, products and so on. It can be realized by pragma linguistic conventions used to show people’s faults or mistakes. One of these conventions is a direct acknowledgment of the problem, which is used to express criticism such as “stop smoking”. Another semantic formula is a request for repairing the problem such as “would you stop smoking? These strategies embody the illocutionary force of criticism. Similar to a complaining speech act, criticism is divided into two types: direct and indirect. The performative verb formulates a direct criticism as the function and form are interrelated, for example, "I criticize this behaviour". Accordingly, direct criticism is the explicit expression of negative evaluation without reservation. Indirect criticism can be performed by employing another speech. In this sense, the criticizer's real intention can be partially hidden. This can result in an effective and acceptable means with positive consequences (Wierzbicka, 2003). Previous research has shown that criticizing speech acts can be realized via direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies include negative evaluation, identifying problems, and showing negative penalties. Indirect strategies include demand for change, correction, sarcasm, and presupposition.

3. Methodology:

The data collection methods employed in this study is the *a written questionnaire*. We use this method to collect real-time data on complaints and criticisms of government deficiencies and foreign intervention in Iraq. We have collected more than 100 respnses and then we categorize the collected data based on themes like corruption, lack of basic services, sovereignty, military presence, and economic exploitation. The analysis identifies recurring themes, linguistic patterns, and discursive strategies employed by Iraqi users in expressing dissatisfaction with the government and foreign intervention.

4. The Data Analysis

This study employs critical discourse analysis and postcolonial theory to explore how Iraqis produce complaints and criticisms against their government. The focus



is on how these language dynamics reflect underlying social tensions and the unhappy relationship between the public and the state.

To quantify the occurrence of specific complaints and criticism, a thematic analysis of data was conducted. The table below presents the frequency of major complaint and criticism categories identified in the data.

COMPLAINTS AND CRITICISM PERC.

Bad Services	40%
Failed Solutions	16%
Foreign And Arab Interference	67%
American Interference	33%
False American Promises	7%
Turkish Military Interference	23%
Iranian Interference	20%

TABLE (1)

It is clear that the Iraqi discourse employs a many-sided selection of strategies for complaining and criticism their government, closely examining the frameworks identified in prior sociolinguistic and political communication research. Firstly, Iraqis use attribution of failure to systemic moral collapse, as in "corruption has destroyed all state institutions" الفساد دمر كل مؤسسات الدولة aligns with Niebuhr (2012) identifies as "Moral complaint". It is worth mentioning that "corruption" in this context refers to the administrative mess, problems. However, such strategy frames complaints and criticism as an evidence of a deep moral breach within the governing class, by this means shifting discourse from technical fixes to a crisis of legitimacy. This has been compounded by the lexical repetitions of markers like "false promises" وعود كاذبة which functions as a linguistic strategy to establish a narrative consistence of infidelity.

This result can be aligned with Higgins (2016) who notes that the repetition of such delegitimizing expressions and phrases in public discourse produce a "representation of deceit" permanently coloring public perception of governmental communication and fostering deep-seated political pessimism. Secondly, a common strategy of direct accusation is used in utterances like "no one cares about the poor citizen; it is all about personal interests. This strategy exempifies a strategy of "accountibility positioning" noted by Kampf (2009). By comparing the miserable livign conditions with the perceived self- interest of politicians, Iraqis formulate a plain moral dichotomy. This can be compatible with previous studies on complaints and criticism discourses in other post- conflict societies in which politicians are normally framed as a self- serving isolated from the public suffering of people (Wodak, 2021).

Moreover, the emergence of intense representation of deterioration as in "*the streets are dreadful and water is undrivable*" الشوارع تعبانة والماء غير صالح للشرب serves as a powerful confirming strategy. In this regard, Scott (1990) in his study on "infrapolitics" shows how citizens share their tangible suffering into a public



political act. Such classification of failure provides an unquestionable counter narrative to official accounts of progress, grounding abstract criticism in the undeniable reality of political system.

Significantly, these strategies combine to formulate a collective voice and shared identity. This can also be noted in utterances such as "*we are tired of false promises*" *تعبتنا من الوعود الكاذبة*. The use of plural pronouns in such examples functions what is highlighted by Dayter (2018) as complaintive jointness". In the same vein, this strategy transforms individual complaint into a collective attitude, creating an "imagined community" of the wronged (Anderson, 1983). The shared framing can be regarded as a defensive strategy against fragmentation and a basic step for collective action, as it changes individual powerlessness into unified public demand.

Rhetoric questions are also used as discursive strategy of complaining and criticism in this article. *وين راحت أموال الشعب؟ أين هي واردات النفط؟* (*Where did the people's money go? Where are the profits of petrol?*) Are examples of rhetoric questions that serves as interactive strategy to show the public refusal and opposition. As Lie (2015) argues, such questions in political discourse are criticism-eliciting and answer-implying. The questions also urge the audience and invite them to formulate the accusation of the ruling authorities. This interactive strategy arises cognitive engagement and solidarity among citizens, making passive listener active participants in shared criticism, thus supporting the shared ties established through other complaints strategy.

The Iraqi participants expressed their disillusionment with authority through their repeated phrases of frustration. The repeated phrases like "سنة كل" (every year) and "تغيير مako" (no change) highlight a sense of frustration with governmental promises. This attitude reflects a power imbalance. The pattern is that citizens feel powerless against a government that consistently fails to deliver. Framing responsibilities is also shown via blaming statements such as "الفاسدين" (corrupt individuals), which indicate a clear perception of corruption as a barrier to progress. This criticism change the responsibility of the government as an entire entity into specific entities proposing a rebellion power structure where some politicians are viewed as exploiting the entire formal system. Along these lines, such strategies and patterns of complaining and criticism reveal how language dynamics is implicated in social power and ideological framework. The emergence of such items and expressions such as *مako أي تغيير – أين أموال الشعب الفاسدون* foster intertextuality to demonstrate how discourse is discursively adequate to articulate a collective sociopolitical stance.

The criticisms voiced within these discourses indicate systematic sociostructural issues, including institutional corruption, state neglect, and governance deficiencies. Drawing on Fairclough's (1992) framework, such discourse operates simultaneously reflecting and reconstituting the prevailing social order. In this context, linguistic practices not only act as a means of critique but also serve as a



activating force, contesting hegemonic ideologies that legitimize the failures of the political elite.

From a textual perspective, the use of recurrent phrases exhibit a linguistic strategy that accentuate a repeated and collective ignoring. Similarly, the repetition functions as a strategic device rather than a stylistic function.

The metaphorical expressions *like الفساد نخر كل مؤسسات الدولة (Corruption has damaged all the country institutions)* exemplifies political exploitation as a disease polluted all Iraqi societies. Such rhetorical devices help to support a common political awareness and an intellectual consciousness wherein the administration is seen as essentially negotiated. According to Fairclough (1994), metaphorical expressions involving criticism and complaining are part of a larger discursive activity where people construct meaning and convey illocutionary force. In addition, criticism and complaining expressed by metaphorical expressions also serve as an account for challenging the official channels of communication and redefining the conversation on justice, national identity, and authority.

A further investigation reveals that Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theory of hybridity and mimicry facilitates the examination of social concerns embedded in the data that express complaints and criticism. For instance, while expressing grievances and critiques, the Iraqi individuals often navigates a multifaceted identity influenced by the remnants of colonialism, Western-imposed authority, and indigenous political traditions. This hybridity is seen through the perspective of Iraqis who advocate for democratic reforms and a democratic regime characterized by openness, rooted in liberal ideals, while simultaneously emphasizing the need of preserving cultural and traditional values of justice and social responsibility.

Bhabha's concept of mimicry the act of repeating authoritative discourse with a difference that unsettles its authority further elucidates this perspective. Iraqi discourse frequently mimics the bureaucratic and progressive terminology advocated by governmental and foreign entities, but does so with a sarcastic and subversive undertone that voids the original meaning of its power. For instance, when officials boast of "الشفافية والإصلاح" (transparency and reform), citizens might co-opt this language in a statement like: "نشكر حكومتنا على 'شفافيتها' في نهب الأموال" (We thank our government for its 'transparency' in looting funds and its 'reform' of corruption.). In this context, the mimicry is not a direct question but a satirical performance. The speaker parrots the key buzzwords of the state's legitimacy "transparency," "reform" but places them in a context of "looting" and "corruption." The use of quotation marks, whether implied in tone or explicitly written, is crucial. It frames the official terms as hollow slogans, mimicking them not to endorse but to mock. This subversive repetition strips the official discourse of its authority more effectively than a direct denial could. This is a sort of active opposition. It tactically sheds light upon the gap between governmental assurances and reality that citizens live, thus highlighting the futility of formal discourses. Such widespread use of this mimicry shows the detrimental impact it has on the



level of trust in the population, and it is possible to witness that the level of engagement with socially sponsored content by governments via social media solutions is dismal in comparison to the critical counter-narratives. Such discursive approach is powerful; when these mimetic counter-narratives spread into the public realm, such narratives can trigger more valuable transformations in the general opinion and even encourage defensive reactions of the government, thus, directly affecting the perceived legitimacy of the state. In turn, mimicry is a required postcolonial measure, which involves borrowing the tongue of the mainstream authority not just to debunk it but to destabilise its power, as well. In the case of advocacy groups, knowing these processes is essential, as it enables the formulation of a more effective communication campaign capable of systematically boosting the voices of the marginalised population, as well as of better counteracting state propaganda.

Moreover, people often used a strategy of calls for action to complain and criticize miserable situations in Iraq in general. They demand expertise in examples such as *ليش ما يجيبون خبراء من الخارج* (Tr. *Why don't they bring in experts from other countries?*) Such examples show people's desire for effective solutions and signify the loss of trust in the local authorities. Both CDA and PT expose that Iraqi language in this context is framed by and actively determined by political reality. Thus, the rhetoric of dissatisfaction and responsibility is more than just a reaction; it is part of a wider cultural process of rejecting dominance, negotiating identity, and imagining change.

Iraqi individuals criticize U.S. engagement by accusing America as the cause of the problems in Iraq by questions like, *ماذا قدمت لنا أمريكا؟* "What has America helped us with?" (Tr. "What has America done for us?" and "*America is the cause of all the world's misfortunes.*" Many societal issues are attributed to actions taken by the United States. This manner of discussing issues portrays the U.S. as the primary source of all suffering by expressing a strong anti-American sentiment. They employed expressions such as *لعنة الله على أمريكا* (God's curse on America) and *امريكا تريد ارجاع داعش* (they want ISIS to return) to serve as alternative means of criticizing America. These remarks personalize grievances and portray the U.S. as a hostile entity intent on undermining Iraq's security. Some statements included terms such as *نحن سئناكم وكرهناكم* (we are sick of you and loathe you), reflecting a pervasive animosity for foreign intervention. This anger is integral to a broader social movement seeking to reclaim national power and authority.

Foreign governments and neighboring countries directly receive criticism through speech acts of complaining and criticism. Statements of criticism include examples like *تركيا تستغل الوضع وتتدخل في شؤوننا بدون أي احترام* (Turkey exploits the situation and interferes in our affairs without any respect) *ليش تركيا تتصرف كحامي علينا* "Why is Turkey acting as our guardian? The use of these statements involves accusatory language to highlight perceived deceit and disrespect. The linguistic strategies used



in such examples include rhetorical questions as a way to emphasize frustration and invite collective agreement.

The Iraqi data involved strategies of complaining and criticism that reflect a power inequality, highlighting the perception of the U.S. as a hegemonic force that exploits Iraq under the pretext of democracy. The statement "بحجة بلدنا تحتل أمريكا" (*"America occupies our country under the pretext of democracy, but all it cares about is oil"*) highlights the underlying critique of economic exploitation, suggesting that democracy is a front for resource-driven motives.

The strategies of complaining and criticism employ emotionally charged words like "كذب" (a battlefield and chaos), "ساحة حرب / حرب وفوضى" (destroyed), "خربتوا" (lies and deceit). These lexical choices indicate a strong rejection and delegitimization of the perceived oppressors.

Discursive strategies are in action even beyond the written level. The previous examples create a shared meaning-making process and resistance. This is seen in statements like "لقد سئمناكم وكرهناكم" (*"We are fed up with you and we hate you"*), which highlight group anger aimed not just at the United States but also at a larger history of foreign dominance. Using the collective voice, Iraqis express a frequent political identity in resistance to foreign hegemony. Thus, complaining can be viewed as an activity against politics due to its ability to let oppressed voices question accepted narratives that justify foreign involvement as benevolent or required. These discourses are basically engaged with social practice particularly the impact of colonialism, warfare and foreign intervention that have framed modern Iraqi society.

It can be seen in examples such as "أمريكا سلمت العراق لإيران" (America has presented Iraq to Iran) that Iraq is metaphorically used as a passive victim given to foreign entities. The following table summarizes the discursive strategies and function of complaining and criticism:

Table (2): Discursive Strategies and social Practice

Arabic sentence	Translation	Discursive Strategy	Social Practice	Its function
والله الفساد دمر كل مؤسسات الدولة	By God, corruption destroyed all state institutions	Direct Accusation	Produce a sense of total collapse and systemic fail	Framing the problem as fundamental and irreparable by the current system
وعود كاذبة	False promises	Labelling and simplification	Fosters pessemism and distrust	To dismiss government narratives



				and labelling leaders as dishonest
لا احد يهتم بالمواطن الفقير، كلها مصالح شخصية	No one cares of the poor people; it's all about personal interest	Emotional Appeal	Feeling of abandonment and solidifying in-group	To arise sentiment to highlight political leaders' selfishness and neglect
يستاهلون يتحاسبون على كل الأموال اللي سرقوها	They deserve to be punished for all the money they stole	Call for retribution and justice	Appealing public anger into demand for correction and punishment	Advocating accountability and showing the system is incapable of self-ruling
كل شيء في هذا البلد يسير نحو الأسوء والشوارع تعبانة والماء لا يصلح للشرب	Everything in this country goes to the worst and the streets are bad and water is undrinkable	Categorizing grievance and hyperbole	Making the abstract problems tangible via everyday related suffering	To show concrete proof for the failure of the state in its basic function
وين أموال الشعب ؟ وين الإعمار اللي وعدتونا به؟	Where are the people's money? Where is the construction you promised?	Rhetorical Questions	Showing an implied admission of guilt putting the authorities on the defensive	To show the gap between promise and reality and to call for response and justification
الفساد نخر كل مؤسسات الدولة	Corruption has damaged all the country's institutions	Metaphor /eroded	Creates powerful image of decay from within suggesting a	To reveal the pervasive and destruction nature of political mess in a



			teerminal illness	more impactful way than literal language
نشكر حكومتنا على شفافيتها في نهب الأموال واصلاحها للفساد	We show gratitude for our government for its transparency in looting funds and its reform of corruption	Irony	It mockingly shows the hypocrisy of the government	To express scorn and polite criticism, often resonating with an educated public
ليش ما يجيبون خبراء من الخارج؟	Why don't they bring in experts from other countries?	Prposing solutions and implying disability	Local authorites are either incapable or unwilling to solve problems	To transform the discussion from complaint to solution while further criticisng national government
سئنام وكرهناكم	We fed up with you and we hated you	Expressing direct confrontation and emotional outburst	Expressing direct rejection	To show a complete breakdown of legitimacy and public's final withdrawal of contest
أمريكا سلمت العراق لإيران	America has presented Iraq to Iran	Framing conspiracy and externalization	Transformin g blame from internal failure to foreign actors	Showing the national suffering through a narrative of foreign manipulation and victimhood



Iraqi criticism frequently employs rhetorical questions, such as "أين هي السيادة" (Where is Iraqi sovereignty?), to articulate a profound crisis of agency. Through a Faircloughian lens, this discourse reveals how language refracts societal power imbalances, forming a counter-narrative that challenges dominant geopolitical scripts and affirms the imperative of self-determination.

The postcolonial theory and its interpretation of mimicry by Bhabha can be used as a strong framework to explain this dynamic. The Iraqi case however has a considerable development of the notion. Contemporary research has tended to pay attention to mimicry within the digital-cultural environments. As an example, in their review of K-pop fandoms, Lee (2022) looks at the attempts of non-Western audiences to imitate Western pop aesthetics in order to become recognised globally, a type of cultural negotiation and not a direct confrontation. Likewise, Hroub (2015) examines the ways in which Arab influencers on TikTok criticize government, and shows how mimicry is a tool to integrate into platforms.

However, the Iraqi discourse has a more direct and politically subversive way of mimicry. This quote, "أمريكا تحتل بلدنا بحجة الديمقراطية" (America occupies our country under the banner/under the pretext of democracy), does not apotheosize to fit or be recognized. Rather, it acts performatively to seize the ideological basics, namely, democracy and sovereignty, of foreign countries that come to legitimize their intervention. This, in contrast to the socio-cultural mimicry that is being recorded in these other works, is mimicry as a tool of actual geopolitical warning. It is more in line with the concept of the digital resistance that Chen (2024) describes in their CDA of the Uyghur online discourse, but it is directed towards a different target: where Chen work describes mimicry in an attempt to avoid a state-wielded censorship and maintain the cultural integrity, the Iraqi example faces an external hegemonic force in a more direct and open way.

This is one of the main lessons of postcolonial studies in a digital world: in the modern Iraqi popular culture, the technique of mimicry becomes not just a means of negotiating an ambivalent identity, but a specific instrument of dismantling the authority of world power as such. This changes the main role of mimicry by making the subject ambiguous to definitively unstable the moral authority of the neocolonial actor on the international arena.

We have observed that there is deep hybridity in the nature of the old and the new form of resistance and this is a special way of political discourse in the digital Iraq. This has been demonstrated by some invocative phrases like "لعنة الله على أمريكا" (May Allah curse America) being an intentional weapon of political complaint. This is not just a mere speech act of condemnation but a complex discursive approach combining very deep-rooted religious-cultural identity and the globalized political critique. By this, Iraqis build a new politics of combination of national and religious norms and postcolonial demand of justice, sovereignty, and autonomy.

This perceived mixture provides a new way of defining the concept of Bhabha. Although traditional approaches to the study of hybridity, including the ones that examine colonial literature of the era (Loomba, 2009), tended to emphasise the



mixing of cultural forms and identity under the object, the one of Iraqi proves to be a hybridity of resistance strategies. As an example, research of digital movements community (Patel, 2020) emphasizes the concept of hybridity that underpins the fusion of the homeland and host culture references to create a new identity of immigrants. Likewise, Latin American social movement studies (Gonzalez, 2020) consider the way the indigenous symbols become a part of the contemporary protest art.

The syncretism of the Iraqi case is a different one, strategic and discursive. It is not merely a melting pot of culture to articulate a hybrid identity, but rather a conscious mixture of a traditional, transcendent, and religious mode of speech (the curse) and a secular, contemporary, and geopolitical attack on foreign intervention. The curse is not an emotional outburst, the curse, May Allah curse America. It is a tactful use of a powerful Islamic discursive genre to legitimize and further promote a modern-day political complaint. This is the difference between the hybridities of identity elsewhere which are aimed primarily at identity and this one which is, of essence, weaponized; hybridity with the express purpose of ideological confrontation, making use of the unquestioned ethical authority of faith to impose on the secular geopolitical authority.

On the basis of this discussion, we suggest a hypothetical model of Strategic Syncretism in order to classify and characterize this particular kind of postcolonial digital resistance. This model is characterized by the strategic and strategic combination of two discursive strands: (a) traditional aspect and (b) geopolitical aspect. Traditional aspect appeals to non-secular, culturally rich resources like religious curses, prayers, or prophetic metaphors. These are aspects that have moral authority in the community that is unequivocal and binds the local political complaint to a universal cosmic law. Geopolitical aspect is made up of a sharp, analytical criticism that will interact with contemporary ideas of state sovereignty, international law, human rights, and neoliberal exploitation. It is the language of the world community.

The combination of these aspects produces a strongly special form of resistance. The traditional aspect offers genuine seriousness and appeals to the innermost solidarity of the culture, whereas the modern aspect would make the discourse topical and understandable in the international politics. This Strategic Syncretism is not an organic, passive mixing of cultures (like in much older hybridity theory, such as (Young, 1995) but a weapon-like use of cultural and religious history in particular political agendas of the digital realm.

The rhetorical devices metaphor, personification, and rhetorical questioning emphasize how language is used to recontextualize Iraq's position in global categorization. The phrase "ليش تركيا تصير وصية علينا؟" ("Why is Turkey acting as our guardian?") underscores not just irritation but also a rejection of paternalistic power structures. These inquiries serve as rhetorical devices intended to galvanize public



sentiment and reinforce the nation's entitlement to self-governance; they do not seek resolutions.

Postmodernism views truth as relative and fragmented. These statements reveal a rejection of the dominant narrative that frames foreign interventions as benevolent or progressive. For instance, statement 88 من جاءت أمريكا والبلد صار ساحة حرب وفوضى dismantles the narrative of the U.S. as a peace-bringer, portraying its presence as the root of chaos. The rejection of democracy as a genuine motive (statement 90) aligns with the postmodern skepticism of grand narratives and ideologies. The criticism suggests that ideals like democracy are deconstructed as tools of imperialism. The diversity of complaints showcases the multiplicity of voices, each contributing to a broader narrative of dissent. This aligns with postmodernism's emphasis on decentralization and the validation of localized, subjective experiences. Postmodernism perceives truth as relative and disjointed. These assertions indicate a rejection of the prevailing narrative that characterizes foreign operations as altruistic or progressive. For example, assertion 110 جاءت أمريكا والبلد deconstructs the narrative of the U.S. as a harbinger of peace, depicting its involvement as the origin of turmoil. The dismissal of democracy as a legitimate impetus corresponds with postmodern skepticism towards overarching narratives and ideologies. The critique posits that concepts such as democracy are dismantled as instruments of imperialism. The variety of complaints illustrates the multitude of perspectives, each adding to a larger story of opposition. This corresponds with postmodernism's focus on decentralization and the affirmation of localized, subjective perceptions.

These postings use effective imagery (e.g., a chess game in statement مثل الشطرنج : to elicit emotions and depict the perceived manipulation of Iraqis. The metaphors and parallels are intentional rhetorical devices to emphasize the seriousness of the issue. The consolidation of past complaints, persistent obstacles, and future uncertainty gives rise to a multifaceted exhibition of dissatisfaction. This intricacy embodies the convergence of individual experiences with communal memory and national identity.

Clear negative attributions abound in phrases like (when America arrived, the nation became a battlefield and anarchy) and شفنا بس الدمار (We witnessed nothing but devastation). Framing American involvement as the source of instability rather than its solution helps to explain this. Using the metaphor ساحة حرب (warfield) suggests that war has been accepted under foreign control by reflecting not just physical damage but also a projected perpetual state of anarchy. Such linguistic choices expose a conceptual construction of America as a cause of chaos rather than peace.

In terms of discursive practice, the aforementioned responses illustrate several techniques used by Iraqis to express their discontent and critique the American government's deceptive assurances. The assertions are abundant in emotionally charged terminology such as "دمار" (destruction), "أكاذيب" (lies), "فاشوش" (worthless), and "جديد احتلال" (new employment).



However, these phrases entail negative connotation that defines America as an actual intruder. Also, there is a pragmatic function of the term as well to express a high level of complaining and criticism within the Iraqi context such as *شبعنا من* (we had nothing left of you except devastation). These sentences in the context of social practise entail profound historical discontent brought by the 2003-U.S-led war and its aftermaths. They are also highly socio-political critiques that are metaphorical, repetitive and collective. Ideological meaning in the everyday language brought about by the speech act of complaining and criticism in these sentences is part of the discourse of resistance and nationality at large.

The comments from 156–165 involve approaches for denouncing Turkey's engagement in Iraq. The emphasis is on how rhetorical and linguistic decisions build a story of appeals for action, dissatisfaction, and opposition. Among these decisions is presenting Turkey as an invader. For example, *متى تتوقف تركيا عن انتهاك سيادة العراق؟* (*When will Turkey cease undermining Iraq's sovereignty?*) implies an indication that Turkey is an aggressor and opponent by a metaphor of violating Iraq's sovereignty. This discursive strategy suggests building Turkey's actions as illegal and thus strengthens Iraq's identity as a sovereign state. From a social practice view, Iraqis object to the Turkish interference, for example, *تركيا تستغل ضعفنا لتحقيق مصالحها*. (*Tr. Turkey uses our weakness to accomplish its goals.*) This criticism underlines power relations to stress Turkey's self-serving goal. Another example *وين الحكومة من تدخلات تركيا ايران؟* (*Tr. What is the government's stance on the interference of Turkey and Iran?*) This rhetorical question involves a discursive practice of complaining and criticism, aiming to hold the government responsible for such interference. A collective demand for new leadership is also a tactic of criticism. People in this regard emphasize national sovereignty and autonomy by employing patriotic feelings and emotions. This approach supports the view that proper government depends on the preservation of sovereignty as its main focus.

Iraqi discursive politics actively creates an account of national victimization in a predatory regional order. This is conducted by extending criticism to include other regional actors as opposed to Western powers. As an example, such declarations *as نطالب بإجراءات سريعة لوقف التدخلات التركية والإيرانية.* (*we demand quick actions to stop the Iranian and Turkish interventions*) and similar statements play an important unifying role. With the mentioning of Iran and Turkey in the same sentence, this approach offers a unified attack on the issue of foreign interfering, making Iraq not only the victim of one force, but an arena of competing regional interests. This strengthens the image of the need to have one national stand against all the foreign powers.

Moreover, Iraqis often use rhetorical questions not with an intention to obtain answers, but to influence the public mood and vent their anger in the opinion of the whole population. The frequent repetition of such questions as:



"ليش ماكو مقاومة جدية ضد التدخلات الأجنبية؟" (Why there is no strong resistance to foreign interferences?)

"وين الديمقراطية اللي جبتوها لنا؟" (Where is the democracy you brought it to us? serves a dual purpose. First, they are powerful complaint acts that stress on the passivity and complicity of the Iraqi government. More importantly, they represent a discursive appeal to action. The speaker encourages the people to fill the vacuum by voicing the lack of resistance, or lack of democracy. These questions are not queries, they are mechanisms of replicating and questioning political thoughts, transporting the viewer beyond passive watching to active thinking of resistance. This discussion is well entrenched in the social process of continued sovereignty breaking. The level of anxiety is directly reflected by the accusations thrown against other countries. An example of such statements would be the saying that Turkey takes advantage of us because we are weak in order to serve its interests (turkey exploits our weakness to serve its own interests). Discursively this sets the relationship not as a relationship of equals, but of predatory hegemony. The verb "تستغل" (exploits) has a strong touch of intentionality and hatred, whereas, the phrase "ضعفنا" (our weakness) admits a weakness in us, but puts it at the same time to an external manipulation. This is indicative of an underlying concern of the regional politics of power where the sovereignty of Iraq is always on sale or under assault. The following table shows sample of the strategies of complaining and criticism as used by the participating people complaining and criticizing the foreign interferences:

Table (3): Discursive Strategies of Foreign interference

Arabic sentence	Translation	Discursive strategy	Impact and function
نطالب بإجراءات سريعة لوقف التدخلات الإيرانية والتركية	We demand immediate action to stop Iranian and Turkish interventions	Augmenting the critique	Constructing a narrative of Iraq as a multi-front victim and mitigating a unified national resistance
ليش ماكو مقاومة جادة ضد التدخلات الأجنبية؟	Why is there no serious resistance to foreign interferences	Rhetorical question as call to action	Showing government weakness and implicitly shifting the discourse from complaint to provocation
وين الديمقراطية اللي جبتوها لنا؟	Where is the democracy	Rhetorical Question as	Exposing hypocrisy and dismantling the



	that you brought us?	Ideological Challenge	legitimizing narrative of the powerful.
تركيا تستغل ضعفنا لتحقيق مصالحها الخاصة	Turkey exploits our weakness to serve its own interests	Accusation of Destructive Hegemony	Framing regional relations as exploitative, attributing internal failure ("weakness") to external hatred ("exploits"), reinforcing the theme of sovereign violation.

The examples presented above are full of exploitation at various levels such as by Western influence such as the United States and the neighbors such as Turkey and Iran. At the same time, words like "سيادة العراق" (Iraqi sovereignty) reflect a very strong demand of self-determination, describing foreign presence not only as the violation of the territorial boundaries but also as a true humiliation of a national dignity. This criticism reveals the use of language to constructively create and challenge the power relations that constitutes political influence in Iraq.

Framing and resistance are fundamental discourse strategies used in Iraq. It frames Iraq as a neocolonial territory of exploitation, in which foreign powers, in the pretext of security or regional interest, seize power and eliminate Iraqi agency. A postcolonial approach helps to understand the simultaneous construction of oppositional reality by this language and the questioning of the political and cultural heritage of domination. The condemnations that the United States and Turkey have received as well as those against Iran show how they use symbolic and real power to sustain their power and keep undermining Iraqi sovereignty. These predicaments underscore the uncertain status of postcolonial states which rely on the favor of foreigners, which essentially casts doubt on the principles of these interventions in the name of freedom, democracy and cooperation. The rhetorically powerful language charged with emotional appeal serves as a kind of protest, which has the objective of subverting the mainstream campaigns which represent these interventions as harmless.

This view helps position the Iraqi discourse in extended world power relations whereby those countries, which once colonised and are now regional hegemonies, continue their systems of exploitation under new diplomatic and supportive



pretensions. In this case, the idea of mimicry by Bhabha comes into play. When Iraqis insist on such words as democracy, sovereignty, and transparency of the government, they reproduce the terms of international relations and liberal democratic principles. Nevertheless, they are used in a rather ironic manner. Such a sentence as *كل وعود أمريكا طلعت كاذبة* (The entirety of the statements of America turned out to be lies) is a mimicry of the noble rhetoric of democracy promotion, making it hollow. This mimicry works around the authority of the foreign power by making its own language work against it and making Iraqis active objects of criticism rather than passive ones.

Moreover, the Iraqi discourse is so hybrid that it combines religious, nationalistic and civic registers, which indicate a complicated political identity. The condition of a demand, like *إذا ما الحكومة إذا الحكومة ما تقدر توقفهم ، نحتاج قيادة جديدة* (if the government is unable to stop them, we need new leadership) criticizes both the outside forces and the weaknesses within the government. It articulates a compromised political ideology that incorporates Islamic morality on one hand, and on the other, traditional views on the role of leaders plus current requirements of sovereignty, representative politics.

Overall, Iraqi complaints and criticisms constitute a lively public discourse of government and foreign intervention. The CDA by Fairclough enables us to deconstruct the role of such a linguistic means as a rhetorical question and metaphor in shaping the attitude of the public. We can view this practice of the Iraqis using Bhabha so as to convert the spaces of imperial and regional power into zones of opposition through mimicry and hybridity. The voices, which have their origins in political memory, cultural pride and an assertive claim of agency, neither merely describe the wounds of occupation, but also have a long-standing hope of autonomy. On the postcolonial side, this discourse embodies long-term effects of imperialism and the neocolonial relations that continue to bind Iraqi sovereignty as a collective struggle to self-determination in the world where asymmetrical power relations are still evident.

The analysis of the Iraqi responses on the questionnaires presented in this study shows a complicated picture of the non-satisfaction, which is expressed in the unique linguistic patterns that help to see deep changes in the power relationships and identity in the post-2003 Iraq. The results are summarized as presented below in direct response to the study research questions.

Iraqi people lexically create their complaints by the use of a powerful battery of rhetorical tools. In addressing the national government, the discourses are filled with negative lexical terms like corrupt, thieves and mafia which are used to criminalize the political class. Failures and predation can be commonly found, as the government is likened to a sinking ship, or the government is said to suck the blood of the people. Grammatically, the agency is often simply ascribed to the government by the use of both active and transitive forms (e.g. *They starved us*), which further enhances a direct line of attribution. This is resolved in a drastic



polarization of a righteous "us" (the people) and a righteous identity of a corrupt "them" (the political elite). In foreign intervention complaints, the words used are likely to bring in a colonial past, where words such as occupiers, colonialists, and puppets are used to refer to the local government. The fact that the metaphor suggests something that is not there, something controlling, like, the hand of Iran in everything, or America pulled the strings. Moreover, questions such as, *when will we be free of their influence* presuppose that it is a fact of our day-to-day life that we are dominated by foreigners.

5. Conclusion

The complaining and criticism speech act used in the samples goes beyond the complaint to the statement of deep dissatisfaction with the government and systemic failures of the Iraqi society. These utterances are not solitary outbursts as discovered with the help of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Positioning Theory (PT) but a complicated combination of power, protests, and demand toward the social change. The discussion reveals the critical approach towards the issue of governance which takes into account social acting and the envision of the reform within the context of the society as a whole rather than personal issues and thus, represents greater geopolitical and structural problems.

This analysis has demonstrated a significant degree of disappointment with the international intervention in Iraq, based on harsh criticism of foreign intervention and the government structure itself through the application of CDA and PT. At the same time, the complaints and criticism represent a mass identity, which was not ready to be controlled by the external power, and which tried to support the national dignity and self-determination. This speech act, thus, encloses a complex interaction between the regional geopolitics, governmental criticism, and the nationalistic patriotism.

To expand these results, research may be conducted in the future on the sociolinguistic effects of this collective identity on more formal areas of language, including national education courses or state-funded media, possibly exploiting the ideas of language and power in other works such as Fairclough (2001) and Bourdieu (1991) to see the more general discursive limits of national identity formation beyond direct protest.

Moreover, future studies may explore the ways in which this shared identity is being mobilized through political actors or grassroots movements to affect electoral results or define international relations, which would explain the long-term limits and effects of national identity on the political agency of a postcolonial society. These areas of inquiry would enhance our knowledge of the ways that discursive resistance can be converted into real social and political transformations.

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