

Discourse Manipulation and Ideological Representation in the Political Speeches of Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al-Sudani: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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the research examines how linguistic and rhetorical structures function as instruments of ideological control within Iraq's socio-political context. The analysis is based on six carefully selected speeches that exemplify key manipulative strategies used to influence public perception and legitimize authority. By integrating semantic, pragmatic, and rhetorical perspectives, the study identifies recurring patterns such as ideological polarization, positive self-presentation, and the negative portrayal of political opponents. The findings reveal that Al-Sudani's discourse strategically constructs a narrative of unity, legitimacy, and reform, while subtly reinforcing existing power relations and shaping public cognition. Situated within the broader Iraqi political and cultural landscape, this study contributes to the understanding of how language operates as a tool of manipulation and power in contemporary Middle Eastern political discourse.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Van Dijk, political manipulation, ideological polarization, Muhammad Shia Al-Sudani, Iraqi political discourse.

1.Introduction

Discourse analysis is commonly defined as the study of the relationship between language and the context in which it is employed. Discourse analysis involves

المستخلص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة التلاعب الخطابى والتمثيل الأيديولوجي في خطابات رئيس الوزراء العراقي محمد شياع السوداني، مع التركيز على الفترة الممتدة من عام ٢٠٢٢ إلى عام ٢٠٢٥. واستناداً إلى نموذج فان دايك للتحليل النقدي للخطاب (2006a)، تبحث الدراسة في كيفية عمل البنى اللغوية والبلاغية كأدوات للسيطرة الأيديولوجية ضمن السياق الاجتماعي والسياسي في العراق. وتعتمد الدراسة على تحليل ست خطابات مختارة بعناية تمثل أبرز الاستراتيجيات التلاعبية المستخدمة للتأثير في الإدراك الجماهيري وإضفاء الشرعية على السلطة. ومن خلال دمج المنظورات الدلالية والبراغماتية والبلاغية، تحدد الدراسة أنماطاً متكررة مثل الاستقطاب الأيديولوجي، وتقديم الذات بصورة إيجابية، وتصوير الخصوم السياسيين بصورة سلبية. تكشف النتائج أن خطاب السوداني يُعيد بناء سردية الوحدة والشرعية والإصلاح بصورة استراتيجية في الوقت الذي يعزز فيه بمهارة علاقات القوة القائمة ويعيد تشكيل الإدراك العام. ومن خلال التحليل ضمن الإطار السياسي والثقافي الأوسع للعراق، تسهم هذه الدراسة في فهم كيفية عمل اللغة كأداة للتلاعب والسلطة في الخطاب السياسي المعاصر في الشرق الأوسط. الكلمات المفتاحية: التحليل النقدي للخطاب، فان دايك، التلاعب السياسي، الاستقطاب الأيديولوجي، محمد شياع السوداني، الخطاب السياسي العراقي.

Abstract

This study explores the discourse manipulation and ideological representation in the speeches of Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammad Shia Al-Sudani, focusing on the period from 2022 to 2025. Drawing on Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis framework (2006a),

at studying language using an interdisciplinary approach (that is a combination of the Humanities and the Social Sciences) (Van Dijk, 1985: 1). Schiffrin et al (2001: 1) identify three major aspects of Discourse Analysis: 1- the analysis of Language beyond the sentence level 2- the Functions of language in context, and 3- the study of Social Interaction through language which may or may not be strictly linguistic.

Critical Discourse Analysis looks at how users of language use language to create and maintain social inequalities by using structural mechanisms of control, power and dominance to do so explicitly or implicitly. It looks at how the relationship between language and society is constructed and justified via discourse (Wodak, 2001: 2).

According to Baker and Ellece (2011: 26) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an analytical approach that theorizes language as a kind of social practice and focuses on how power relationships and ideologies are expressed and maintained through the structure of language. CDA explores the relationship between language use and the wider social and political contexts of use. CDA engages with relevant concepts such as gender, race, cultural differences, ideologies, and identities by examining how they are constituted and reconstituted within specific texts (Paltridge 2012: 186). CDA aims to identify the structures, strategies, and communicative features of a text that either create or support unequal power relationships (Van Dijk 1993: 250).

CDA is based upon two basic ideas: The first idea is that all types of discourse (for example, spoken, written, visual) create multiple ideologies. The second idea is

the description and analysis of the performance of both spoken and written forms of discourse (McCarthy, 1991:12). The main purpose of discourse analysis is to arrive at an understanding of the intended meanings of speakers/writers, as well as the linguistic techniques they employ in order to express these meanings with respect to their particular situational contexts. In summary, discourse analysis investigates who uses language, what forms of language are used, the reasons for the use of language, and the social circumstances in which language is used. Discourse analysis treats discourse as language in use within a sociocultural context, so it can be conceptualized as the examination of how language functions in a society. In other words, it investigates how language operates over the continuum of text, and how the relationship between linguistic choice and contextual variables develop. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002: 1) describe discourse analysis as a collection of interdisciplinary approaches that can be applied to diverse social domains and research contexts. Furthermore, discourse analysis considers how language is shaped by the speaker's identity, age, social class, background, and relationships with others, and how these social factors in turn are reflected in linguistic expression. As Van Dijk (2015: 4) notes discourse analysis should not be viewed merely as a single analytical method but rather as a multidisciplinary field that employs various qualitative and quantitative techniques. (Ali, 2025: 464)

2. Critical Discourse Analysis

In order to better understand critical discourse analysis we must first explore the more general idea of Discourse Analysis. The difference between Discourse Analysis and traditional linguistics is that Discourse Analysis aims

strategic forms of resistance against dominant ideological practices.

3. Discourse, Power, and Ideology

Power plays an essential role in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) because CDA looks at how people with power use language, as well as how this language illustrates the underlying relations of dominance, discrimination and control (Wodak & Meyer 2009 : 9). In essence, CDA investigates the ways in which language reveals and perpetuates the misuse and abuse of power, as well as various forms of social inequality and domination (Van Dijk, 2005: 87). From this perspective, it explores how individuals or groups in powerful positions tend to devalue and marginalize those with less power, exploiting their authority to manipulate or control others. The concept of power is therefore central to critical discourse studies particularly in relation to what Van Dijk (2015: 469) describes as the “social power of groups or institutions.” Moreover, Van Dijk (2006c: 362) conceptualizes social power as a form of control exercised within social interactions and institutional contexts. He claims that : “An analysis of this power dimension involves an account of the kind of control that some social actors or groups exercise over others (Clegg, 1975; Luke, 1989; Van Dijk, 1989; Wartenberg, 1990). We also have assumed that such control is first of all a control of the mind, that is, of the beliefs of recipients, and indirectly a control of the actions of recipients based on such manipulated beliefs.” (Mohammed, 2025: 192)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines the function of ideology in constructing and sustaining unequal power relations. As such, ideology is intrinsically linked to issues of power, dominance, and

that ideologies are often maintained and sustained by those in dominant positions in society (van Dijk, 2001: 352). CDA intends to uncover those hidden and taken-for-granted assumptions within discourse. CDA is not one unified school of thought, but rather it is a multidisciplinary approach with different viewpoints, yet the points of view all have the same objective; that is, to expose and/or challenge social and

political inequalities created by the power structures of the society in which we live (economic, cultural/ religious, or gender-based) (Fairclough, 1995: 132; Wodak, 2001: 2).

According to Van Dijk (1995b: 17), Critical Discourse Analysis represents a socio-politically aware and oppositional framework for investigating language, discourse, and communication. Despite its significance, critical discourse analysis does not adhere to a fixed set of principles, clearly defined methods, or narrowly specified theoretical frameworks. Van Dijk (ibid, p. 18) outlines several key features that characterize critical discourse analysis : (1) its commitment to addressing issues of social inequality, including sexism, racism, and colonialism; (2) its analysis of discourse across multiple linguistic levels pragmatic, semantic, syntactic, rhetorical, stylistic, phonological as well as its engagement with semiotic aspects; (3) its focus on how discourse contributes to the construction and perpetuation of power, dominance, and social inequality; (4) its examination of ideologies embedded within discourse; (5) its exposure of discursive strategies such as manipulation and legitimation which are employed to influence recipients' beliefs and behaviors in ways that benefit elite groups; and (6) its solidarity with marginalized groups by highlighting

explains that manipulative discourse commonly takes place within public communication controlled by dominant political, bureaucratic, media, academic, or corporate elites.

Maillat and Oswald (2009: 355) argue that for manipulation to be effective, it must operate covertly. Van Dijk (2015: 470) suggests that by changing an individual's mental model, i.e., their knowledge, beliefs, or ideology, you change how they behave; therefore, you can also control them indirectly, as with persuasion or manipulation. In this type of manipulation, you do not know the real reason for the manipulator's actions; the control parties do not tell you what their true interests or ideologies are; rather, they disguise them by convincing you that they are trying to help you or promote society (Van Dijk, 2006a: 370).

De Saussure (2005: 5) defines manipulation as the instrumental use of individuals, compelling them to act in ways that fulfill the manipulator's objectives regardless of the manipulated party's own interests.

Van Dijk (2015: 473) states that "Speakers of powerful groups may want to control not only specific knowledge and opinions represented in the subjective mental models of specific recipients as is most typically the case in news reports and parliamentary debates but also the generic knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies shared by whole groups or all citizens for instance through the argumentative structures of editorials or op-ed articles."

Individuals or groups who possess greater influence and control are regarded as more powerful within a social context. Accordingly, various dimensions and structures of context, discourse, and communication may be subject to different

discourse. Fairclough (2003: 218) explains that ideologies are representations of certain aspects of reality that serve to establish and uphold relations of power, domination, and exploitation. Discourse plays a crucial role in manifesting and communicating ideology. van Dijk (2006b: 728) argues that ideology often carries negative connotations, portraying others in unfavorable ways while presenting such depictions as truthful. According to Van Dijk (2014: 132), "ideologies contain the system of collective values and opinions regarding particular problems or interests of the group," suggesting that politics is the field most charged with ideology (Van Dijk, 2006b: 732). Sengul (2025: 5) claims that CDA, in its emphasis on power and ideology, is particularly appropriate for understanding contemporary political communication because it is through political discourse that power is attained, legitimised and exercised.

4.Manipulation, Power, and Mind Control

To manipulate individuals essentially entails influencing their mental processes. This involves shaping their beliefs, including their knowledge, opinions, and ideologies which consequently enables control over their actions to some extent (Van Dijk, 2006c: 365). Unlike legitimate forms of persuasion, manipulation primarily serves the interests of the manipulator rather than those being influenced. According to Van Dijk (2015: 469), dominant groups exercise power in the form of hegemony which manifests across various social domains such as politics, media, education, and everyday life. The nature of power exercised thus varies depending on the context. Van Dijk (2006c: 373) further

as different groups (Van Dijk, 2006a: 359). Further, the usage of reference pronouns is a key element in generating dominant discourse; it is used to strengthen a sense of social control and also influences the cognition and behaviors of the recipients (Van Dijk, 2015: 475).

This research will employ a qualitative research design which applies Van Dijk's (2006a) framework for Critical Discourse Analysis. Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis provides a way of systematically studying the connection between discourse, cognition, and power. One of Van Dijk's major points is that people can be manipulated through both language and the control of their mental models; this in turn affects how an audience understands social realities and political figures. Thus this analysis will examine the linguistic choices made by Al-Sudani that reflect his attempts to influence the ideology of the audience, reproduce his own power, and use subtle forms of controlling the audience's mind. In addition, this study will draw from various aspects of linguistics including pragmatics, semantics, syntax, and rhetoric to create a thorough understanding of the speech and its context. The model provides a means of analyzing how power is present and legitimized through discourse, and how manipulation is a type of cognitive control and/or ideological control.

The study aims at:

1. Analyzing the linguistic and discursive structures in the speeches of Muhammad Shia Al-Sudani to uncover the mechanisms that contribute to constructing political power and legitimizing governmental practices.

degrees of control by dominant speakers or institutions. Such power however can be misused to the detriment of certain individuals, social groups, or society as a whole (van Dijk, 2015: 474).

Van Dijk (2006c: 359) explains that manipulation at the discursive level typically draws upon the common patterns of ideological discourse such as highlighting the positive attributes of the in-group ("us") and emphasizing the negative aspects of the out-group ("them"). Furthermore, manipulation can tangibly influence the formation and modification of individuals' mental models. The principal objective of manipulative discourse therefore is to exercise control over others specifically over their social beliefs, attitudes, and representations. This form of control ultimately extends to shaping people's speech and behavior across various contexts and over prolonged periods of time (Van Dijk, 1995: 20; Van Dijk, 2006a: 369).

5. Methodology

According to Van Dijk (2015: 473), CDA examines how types of discourse organize information in the minds of recipients, influencing their overall mental models or representations, and potentially leading to their beliefs being manipulated. Manipulation, according to Van Dijk (2006a: 360) is defined as a form of communication/interaction that seeks to influence or control people with opposing ideas/interests. An example of this is how often times, when manipulating someone, the manipulator speaks positively about the "in-group" (the "us" group) and negatively about the "out-group" (the "them" group); for example, the manipulator may use group reference pronouns to show the in-group (ex. we, our, etc.) and the out-group (ex. them, etc.)

were selected intentionally based on how well they illustrate various manipulation strategies and how the speaker frames issues ideologically. The methodology employed for analyzing the content of each of the six excerpts involved four different aspects of the analysis being performed on each excerpt: semantic framing (how the meaning structure of the quote serves an ideological function), rhetorical persuasion (how the speaker attempts to persuade their audience using persuasive rhetoric and emotional appeal), pragmatic implications (analysis of implicitly stated intention(s) and presupposition(s)), and syntactic structuring (exploring grammatical structures that help demonstrate manipulation and how express power over others).

The results show that there are patterns in political rhetoric including the use of ideological 'othering', self-representation favourably, and using emotional language to create legitimacy for actions taken, and to reinforce government legitimacy. Using Van Dijk's model of language in social context, we can see how the linguistic choices correspond to the socio-political context, thus creating the greatest persuasive impact. The methodology of this study allows for a strong connection between the selection of data, analytical process, and final conclusions, thus enhancing the robustness/validity of the study.

6-Data Analysis and Discussion

Extract 1

"لن نسمح بالإقصاء والتهميش في سياساتنا، فالخلافات صدعت مؤسسات الدولة وضيعت كثيراً من الفرص على العراقيين في التنمية والبناء والإعمار، وهنا أعلن الرغبة الجادة في فتح باب الحوار الحقيقي والهادف؛ لبدء صفحة جديدة في العمل لخدمة أبناء شعبنا وتخفيف

2. Identifying the discursive manipulation strategies employed by the speaker through language to shape public perception and influence audience attitudes and opinions toward governmental policies.
3. Revealing the relationship between discourse and socio-political domination by examining how language is used to reinforce the government's positive self-representation while portraying others in a negative light.
4. Applying Van Dijk's (2006a) model of Critical Discourse Analysis to the study of Iraqi political discourse as a critical framework that links discursive, cognitive, and social structures in the process of meaning-making and influence.

To fulfill these aims, the research addresses several guiding questions which are:

1. What linguistic and discursive structures does Prime Minister Muhammad Shia Al-Sudani employ in his speeches to construct political power and legitimize his government's policies?
2. How are discursive manipulation strategies used in Al-Sudani's discourse to shape public perception and control audience opinions toward political events and government policies?
3. What is the relationship between Al-Sudani's political discourse and the forms of social and political domination within the Iraqi context?
4. How does Van Dijk's (2006a) model explain the relationship between discourse structure, cognitive structure, and social structure in the speeches of Muhammad Shia Al-Sudani?

This data set contains six excerpts selected from speeches given by Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammad Shia Al-Sudani between 2022 - 2025. The excerpts

Dijk refers to as "the argumentative structure of political communication" connecting critique with solutions. Further, the speech takes a balanced rhetorical approach in that the speaker acknowledges the crisis while at the same time promoting the need for reform, thereby enhancing the speaker's authority and credibility among his audience.

Several discursive strategies, according to Van Dijk (2006a), are employed in this discourse. The first is the positive self-presentation strategy in which Al-Sudani as a collective leader who is committed to justice and political participation uses the plural "we will not allow", reinforcing the concept of the government as a national entity that is inclusive of all. Secondly, the negative other-presentation strategy is used implicitly. The "others" are those who previously engaged in "exclusion" and "marginalization" and have not been named. The use of implicit exclusion permits the speaker to criticize what has occurred in the past so that there are no direct confrontations with the past.

In linking the government's political position to a moral and humanitarian goal of "serving our people by relieving their suffering," the strategy of legitimation is evident in the speech. The moral reasoning behind this reform project is as much a national duty as it is a human duty. Al-Sudani further utilizes conceptual metaphors of "opening up the door to dialogue" and "turning over a new page" to signify renewal and openness, and transform political activity from a battleground to a participatory, collaborative environment. Al-Sudani's frequent use of positive verbs such as open, serve, alleviate, and strengthen

معاناته بتعزيز الوحدة الوطنية، ونبيذ الفرقة، وشطب
.....خطاب الكراهية"

"we will not allow exclusion or marginalization in our policies, as divisions have fractured the state's institutions and squandered many opportunities for Iraqis in terms of development, construction, and reconstruction. Therefore, I hereby declare a sincere desire to open the door for genuine and constructive dialogue in order to begin a new chapter in serving our people, alleviating their suffering, strengthening national unity, rejecting discord, and eradicating hate speech....."

On October 14, 2022, Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani delivered a speech to the nation upon taking office. The speech is intended to re-establish political legitimacy through principles of national unity and inclusion in order to create a foundation for future governance. According to Van Dijk's (2006a) model, the political and social context constitutes what he terms the context model which is the mental framework that guides the speaker's choice of linguistic and semantic strategies. Al-Sudani has organized his speech around three sets of related ideas, or semantic units: a rejection of marginalization and exclusion, both of which are manifestations of the previously dysfunctional political system, an explanation of how political dissension has played a major role in the dysfunction of state institutions and hence their ability to develop, and a description of how he plans to create dialogue, reconciliation, and national unity in advancing the reconstruction of Iraq as outlined in his reform plan. The movement from negating to constructing is presented in what Van

الفساد والإرهاب، فأحدهما يسند الآخر، وهذا ما نحاربه جميعاً."

"We have initiated the pursuit of wanted individuals wherever they may be found, regardless of their positions or affiliations, with the aim of delivering them to justice and eradicating this scourge. In this regard, we call upon our friendly and partner nations to extend a helping hand in combating corruption at all levels, and to facilitate the process of tracking down and prosecuting those involved. It is imperative that we all stand united and cooperate in the fight against corruption and in the recovery of stolen public funds. We firmly believe in the interconnection between corruption and terrorism, as one supports the other, and this is what we are collectively determined to confront."

Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammed Shia Al-Sudani gave a speech at the 78th session of the UN General Assembly on September 22, 2023, in which he expressed his commitment to pursue corrupt persons and hold them accountable. he invited partnership from other countries with similar interests in fighting against corruption while also noting that there is a relationship between corrupt activity and terrorism. The discourse can be deconstructed analytically based on the criteria laid out by a theorist of Critical Discourse Analysis, namely Van Dijk (2006a), to determine how various discursive strategies are utilized to achieve symbolic dominance and reproduce social power through language.

Al-Sudani's strategy is built around the concept of ideological division by categorizing the various participants within his dialog into two opposing camps: "We" (the state/government, the citizenry and the international community who are

develops a metaphorical image that emphasizes the values of reconciliation and unity.

According to Van Dijk (2006a), exerting power in language is about controlling our knowledge and beliefs not so much as through direct political power. Al-Sudani uses symbolic power in his speech to shift people's thoughts from division to unity. Instead of just condemning the past, he is restructuring the relationship between the state and its citizens based on their trust in one another and also as a major unifying force in leading the reconstruction of the nation at this moment.

Van Dijk's Ideological Square is clearly illustrated in that 'us' contrasts with 'them'. The ideological distinction of 'us' versus 'them' is not presented in oppositional terms, but rather as moving from separation to unification. This illustrates what Van Dijk terms as legitimate manipulation through collective perception to support a common, unified national project, without overt use of coercion or force. In achieving this discursive construction, Al-Sudani institutes a type of soft symbolic power founded on moral commitment, willingness to engage in dialogue and rearticulating core values of belonging and tolerance. In doing so he transforms the relationship between ruler and citizen within the context of a unified nation and socially reconciled nation.

Extract 2

"وشرعنا بملاحقة المطلوبين أينما وجدوا، ومهما كانت مناصبهم وانتماءاتهم، وتسليمهم للقضاء، لغرض القضاء على هذه الآفة، ومن هنا نطلب من الدول الصديقة والشريكة أن تمدّ لنا يد العون في مكافحة الفساد، بجميع مراحلها، وتسهيل عملية متابعتها والقائمين عليه، إذ يجب علينا جميعاً أن نتكاتف ونتعاون في محاربة الفساد، ونستردّ الأموال المنهوبة منهم، لأننا نؤمن بالترابط بين

تحمل المسؤولية والمشاركة في حملة وطنية شاملة في مكافحة الفساد.

"I pledge before you that the Service Government is determined to close all avenues of corruption through strict laws and legislation, in cooperation with the legislative and judicial authorities. Combating corruption will be at the forefront of the government's priorities, and we call upon everyone to assume responsibility and participate in a comprehensive national campaign to fight corruption."

In his address to the Iraqi people on October 14, 2022, upon assuming the position of Prime Minister, Muhammed Shia Al-Sudani delivered a speech promising the Iraqi people that he would take action against corruption. In doing so, he said: "I pledge before you that the Service Government is determined to close all avenues of corruption through strict laws and legislation in cooperation with the legislative and judicial authorities..." This statement is an example of political discourse that positions Muhammed Shia Al-Sudani as both a reformer and a savior. Such statements can be analyzed in accordance with Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Theory by examining how they manipulate the listener and use ideological frameworks.

Al-Sudani's initial phrase of "I pledge before you" establishes a personal commitment strategy creating an ethical and emotional dimension to his presentation that makes him appear as a trustworthy and honest leader. Following this, he employs an ideology polarization (Us vs. Them) presenting a newly elected government in a positive manner (determined, reform-minded) versus the presumed "other", who has been identified as the cause of the deterioration of the State due to the rampant spread of

cooperating to combat corruption) and "They" (the corrupt people) who he characterizes as the common enemy. This ideological division serves to produce a positive image of him and his party (Al-Sudani Government) while creating a negative image of "Them" (the corrupt) which then legitimizes both the political and moral legitimacy of the new leadership and the justifications for their actions taken under the rubric of fighting corruption.

Although the language utilized in the speech employs strong action verbs with direct object nouns (e.g., "pursue desired people," "recover misappropriated resources"), it does not identify any particular individuals or organizations by name. The actor deletion strategy, used in this manner, is an example of a strategy of strategic ambiguity often associated with manipulative political rhetoric which allows the speaker to maintain their rhetorical force while at the same time avoiding disclosing identifiable groups or individuals that could potentially be sensitive in nature or generate considerable controversy.

By finishing his remarks with, "This is what we all fight," the speaker uses collective unity as a ruse to create mass compliance and to shift the burden of responsibility onto the broader public. The speaker effectively attempts to place a greater majority of the Iraqi public behind the government's initiative which helps to relieve institutional stress and solidify public accountability within the anti-corruption initiative.

Extract 3

"أتعهدُ أمامكم أنّ حكومة الخدمة عازمةٌ على غلق منافذ الفساد عبر القوانين والتشريعات الصارمة، بالتعاون مع السلطين التشرعية والقضائية، وأنّ محاربة الفساد ستكونُ في مقدمة أولويات الحكومة، وندعو الجميع إلى

foresight and responsibility. We are committed to a precise balance in order to free Iraq from the consequences of being bound to actions that fail to consider the interests and will of our people.”

In his speech delivered at the 7th Baghdad International Dialogue Conference on February 22, 2025, Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammed Shia Al-Sudani presented a political discourse reflecting his government's orientations. The speech of Prime Minister Muhammad Shia Al-Sudani adopts a rhetorical strategy that seeks to legitimize the political stance of the government by constructing a positive self-image that highlights balance and responsibility while portraying the “others” as reckless and unrealistic. His use of expressions such as “We adhered to a policy of balance” and “unrealistic proposals” reveals a clear application of what Van Dijk (2006a) terms ideological polarization whereby the speaker and his group are represented as embodying rationality and patriotism whereas the opposing side is implicitly excluded and stripped of vision and responsibility. The collective pronoun “we” serves as a linguistic device of inclusion, suggesting unity between the government and the people thus creating a false collective identity that leads the audience to believe that the voice of authority is identical to the voice of the nation.

Using Van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework and principles of communication, the speaker aims to influence the audience's understanding of the situation in Iraq by presenting the idea that the concept of “balance” is the best way to restore Iraq as well as portraying the government as the only logical choice for national security. The discourse subtly manipulates cognitive processes in order

corruption. The speaker creates a use of actor deletion by not identifying who committed the acts causing the problems (i.e. agent deletion), allowing him to take advantage of moral superiority while also benefiting from not having to name the guilty parties by missing out on using actions as a motive and or reason for his or her actions. Additionally, there is a semantic vagueness present throughout the presentation as the speaker uses phrases such as “avenues of corruption” without providing specific definitions or specific examples.

Furthermore, there is cognitive manipulation by asking people to “take on the responsibility and participate in a comprehensive national campaign,” thus shifting some of the accountability from the government to citizens. This strategy is further enhanced by making a national appeal in which national identity is invoked as a way of framing citizens' participation in the civic engagement activities as a patriotic duty. The speech tries to create a perceived collective agreement around the government's anti-corruption agenda. Importantly, the speech does not provide any empirical evidence, quantifiable data, or descriptions of specific actions that can be undertaken by institutions to deal with corruption, rather, it focuses on being rhetorically, emotionally persuasive and not substantively based.

Extract 4

“إلتزمنا سياسة التوازن، وواجهنا الكثير من المزايدات والطروحات غير الواقعية، الخالية من بعد النظر والمسؤولية ونبني التوازن الدقيق من أجل تخليص العراق من تبعات الارتهان لخطوات لا تأخذ بالحسبان مصالح شعبنا وإرادته.”

“We have adhered to a policy of balance, despite facing numerous overstatements and unrealistic proposals that lack

Sudani's discourse reflects the turbulence of the region as a result of war and conflict. The audience also includes both Iraqi and regional populations. Al-Sudani attempts to position Iraq as a moderate, responsible state and to affect the thought and emotional responses of the audience through words such as "occupation," "defense of the brethren" and "peace." These representations reconstruct the audience's understanding of the world so that they see the events of the day in a manner that is consistent with government goals.

According to van Dijk's model, three principal strategies are used in the speech: firstly, positive self-presentation of the government displaying rational and responsible behaviour by stating: "We worked diligently to spare Iraq the fires of this war"; secondly, negative other-presentation of the enemy as inhuman using terms such as ("the usurping entity," "occupation forces"); and thirdly, using justification as a strategy that provides legitimacy to the concept of positive neutrality and emotional persuasion as a means of creating greater solidarity for just causes. The discourse, therefore, considers both the intellectual and emotional effects on the audience without imposing directly on them.

Extract 6

"لقد آن الأوان لاسترداد هيبية الدولة، وفرض احترام القانون، وإيقاف نزيف التدهور والانفلات بجميع مسمياته وأشكاله، والانتصار لقيم المجتمع العراقي الأصيلة؛ فالدولة هي صاحبة الحق الشرعي في نشر الأمن وبسط القانون والدود عن السيادة الوطنية عبر مؤسساتها العسكرية والأمنية الرسمية."

"The time has come to restore the state's prestige, enforce respect for the rule of law, and put an end to the ongoing deterioration and disorder in all its forms

to create moral and rational justification for power and maintain political control in the minds of the general public through language instead of force. Therefore, the speech provides an illustration of what Van Dijk calls an ideology through discourse where the speaker is able to exert symbolic influence over the perceptions of individuals while convincing individuals that the decisions made by the government are representative of their needs and desires as citizens, and therefore in the best interests of the nation.

Extract 5

"تمر منطقتنا اليوم بمرحلة تحولات كبرى لم نشهد مثلها منذ عقود. فقد شهدت غزة ولبنان حرباً قاسية شنتها قوات الاحتلال في الكيان الغاصب واستهدفت فيها كل مقومات الحياة، وقد عملنا بجهد نحو تجنب العراق نار هذه الحرب، بالإضافة إلى الحرص على دعم الإخوة في لبنان وفلسطين بالمساعدات والدعوة، في كل المحافل التي حضرنا فيها، بضرورة إنهاء الحرب."

"Our region is currently undergoing a period of profound transformations, the likes of which have not been witnessed in decades. Gaza and Lebanon have endured a brutal war launched by the occupying forces of the usurping entity, targeting every aspect of life. We have exerted considerable efforts to spare Iraq the devastation of this conflict, while also maintaining a firm commitment to supporting our brothers in Lebanon and Palestine through aid and advocacy. In every forum in which we have participated, we have consistently called for an end to the war."

This excerpt from the speech by Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammed Shia Al-Sudani at the Third Erbil Forum on March 20, 2025 reflects Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis strategies especially with regard to the manipulation of discourse and the construction of ideology that gives meaning to language. Al-

representing threatening and disorderly. Furthermore, the speech employs strong metaphors such as “restoring the state’s prestige”, which is indicative of a prestige that has been forcibly taken away and “hemorrhage of deterioration and chaos,” a biomedical metaphor suggesting a critical condition threatening the state’s very survival. The use of these metaphors is not just an application of literary technique but also serves as an ideological justification for authoritarian and exceptional measures, which constitute what Van Dijk calls “framing and metaphor manipulation”.

Another striking feature is the strategic deletion of agency. The discourse refers to “chaos” and “deterioration” without naming specific actors responsible. This omission of a specific agent, what Van Dijk (2006a) calls actor deletion (and which is a manipulative device featured in political discourse), permits the speaker to implicitly assign blame for the chaos to others without having to confront anyone directly or assume any responsibility. This creates ambiguity by way of strategic vagueness which allows the audience the flexibility to construct their own interpretations. The speech also illustrates self-legitimation; for example when the speaker states, “the state alone has the legitimate right.....” he gives himself and his government an inherent right to moral authority and legal authority. Thus, the state is considered legitimate because of the inherent nature of the state’s ability (right) to use the force of violence against its citizens which is both legally (by constitutional law) and morally (by nationalistic reasons) justified.

5. Findings and Conclusion

An analysis of six excerpts from the speeches of Iraqi Prime Minister

and manifestations. We must uphold the authentic values of Iraqi society for the state holds the legitimate right to ensure security, uphold the law, and defend national sovereignty through its official military and security institutions.”

On October 14, 2022, Prime Minister Muhammed Shia Al-Sudani gave his inaugural speech to the Iraqi people which included a series of ideologically charged messages related to politics located in a specific historical moment of political transition characterized by significant distrust from the public towards their institutions and high levels of institutional fragility, combined with widespread security breakdowns. Therefore, the Prime Minister could be interpreted as providing the executive authority's discursive repositioning to establish the state as the only legitimate authority able to restore stability to Iraq. This context also provides an excellent opportunity to employ Van Dijk's framework for critical discourse analysis to examine how political language constructs and manipulates the meaning of political texts.

Ideologically laden terminology is employed in the speech, such as “prestige of the state”, “respect for the law”, “security”, “sovereignty” and “legitimacy” form the basis for distinguishing between “Us” (the state, legitimacy, order) and “Them” (chaos, lawlessness, deterioration), thus correlating with Van Dijk’s notion of a polarization strategy where discourse is predicated on a binary opposition of positive self-representation against negative other-representation. In doing so, the speaker implicitly divides the sociopolitical landscape into two mutually exclusive camps; one representing legality and the national interest and the other

combating corruption, defending sovereignty, and supporting just causes.

- National Appeal: Calls for public participation in reform and anti-corruption efforts aim to create symbolic identification between the government and the citizens.
- 3. Cognitive Control and Reshaping of Awareness: The speeches employ mechanisms of cognitive control over audience mental models (Context Models) by directing collective consciousness toward a specific perception of political and social reality. Al-Sudani presents his government as the sole guarantor of stability and the unifying force against corruption and chaos, illustrating Van Dijk's notion of symbolic power.
- 4. Discourse as a Tool of Symbolic Domination: Al-Sudani's discourse exemplifies "soft power," exercising persuasion not through coercion but through the construction of a rational and moral narrative that portrays authority as a natural extension of the people's will. The discourse thus reproduces structures of power in socially and ethically acceptable ways, constituting what Van Dijk terms legitimate manipulation.
- 5. Metaphor as a Cognitive and Persuasive Mechanism: Metaphors such as "opening the door for dialogue," "restoring the state's prestige," and "the bleeding of deterioration" recur throughout the speeches. These structural metaphors embody political struggle in tangible imagery, facilitating comprehension and reinforcing the discourse's ideological orientation.
- 6. Shift from Domestic to International Discourse: In speeches addressed to international forums (e.g., the United Nations and regional dialogue conferences), Al-Sudani adopts a strategy of international legitimacy, employing the

Muhammed Shia Al-Sudani within Van Dijk's framework for Critical Discourse Analysis reveals a multidimensional and systematic use of manipulative rhetorical strategies aimed at shaping public perception, legitimizing authority, and consolidating symbolic dominance. The most salient recurring patterns include:

1. Reconstruction of Legitimacy through Discourse: Through an analysis of Muhammad Shia Al-Sudani's speeches as tools to reconstruct political legitimacy after a time of political division and mistrust. Al-Sudani employs national unity and reconciliation in his rhetoric as a way of reconstructing the relationship between the state and people based on shared goals and trust using Van Dijk's power reproduction model.
2. Dominant Discursive Strategies: Across the analyzed excerpts, a systematic use of several rhetorical strategies emerges forming the ideological structure of the political discourse. The most salient among these are:
 - Ideological Polarization (Us vs. Them): "We" represent the embodiment of legitimacy, unity, and integrity, while "they" represent corruption, chaos, and division.
 - Positive Self-Presentation: Al-Sudani and his government are represented as a reformist, responsible, and just force.
 - Negative Other-Presentation: Political rivals and corrupt figures are implicitly referenced without direct naming, creating indirect criticism without overt confrontation.
 - Actor Deletion: This strategy avoids explicitly naming those responsible for crises, providing the discourse with flexibility and interpretive openness.
 - Moral Legitimization: Political stances are justified through moral and humanitarian principles such as serving the people,

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language of cooperation and partnership in combating corruption and terrorism. This reflects a deliberate use of discourse to construct Iraq's image as a responsible and balanced actor in the global system.

7. Emotional and Value-Based Dimension: The discourse draws on cultural, religious, and national values such as dignity, sovereignty, and authenticity to frame political messages thereby enhancing their emotional resonance and fostering affective identification between the audience and the state's project.

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