

## A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF RAPE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE REPRESENTATION IN YAZIDIS' SEX SLAVES STORIES

**DR. FARAH ABDUL JABBAR MAHDI ALMNASEER**

**Abstract:** This paper involves a discourse analysis of the representation of rape and sexual violence in Yazidis' sex slaves stories. It aims at investigating the linguistic devices used to represent ISIS perpetrators' sexual violence against the Yazidi women and girls through a mixed methods approach. The sample of the study tackles a corpus of selected reported stories published in 2015 and 2016 in three British National broadsheets (The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian and The Independent). The analysis was carried out through a content and discourse analysis. The study concluded that these different news broadsheets reported the Yazidis' stories using almost all similar linguistic devices due to the point that such language represents common aspects as far as sexual violence is concerned.

**Keywords:** Discourse Analysis, ISIS, Newspaper broadsheets, Rape, Sexual Violence, Yazidis

**Introduction:** Reference [1] clarifies that feminist movements looks for women rights to vote, to work, to own property and above all to protect women and girls from rape, sexual abuse and domestic violence. Iraq is one of the countries which called for the liberalization of women but the change in the political situations affected a lot on women's rights specifically, after 2003 with the emergence of the Islamic and political parties to finally ISIS invasion of the country. When ISIS invaded the north of Iraq in 2014, Yazidis faced a genocide [2]. Yazidis (also, Yezidis) an ethnically Kurdish religious community living primarily in Shekhan and Sinjar. Therefore, a study is needed to state clearly the linguistic features that makes sex slaves stories worthy reading and effective to be watched by the UN

**Aims of the Study:** This paper aims at investigating the different linguistic devices used in a corpus of selected reports from three British broadsheet Newspapers (The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph and the Independent) representing Yazidis' sex slaves stories. Further, it intends to identify the similarities as well as the differences them through a detailed content and discourse analysis.

### **Theoretical Background**

**A. Broadsheet Newspapers:** Broadsheets focus on hard news and specifically stories of a timely nature about events or conflicts that have just happened or about to happen. Broadsheets include many newspapers such as The Times, Daily Telegraph, Guardian from UK, and The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today from USA [3]. In fact, newspapers' language has been of interest to many linguists and media discourse analysts despite its different genres. British National Press are classified into three different categories including: the broadsheet newspapers, the middle range tabloids and the tabloid newspapers. Yet, there are other classifications which have been added such as local

newspapers, newspapers supporting political groups[4].

**B. Rape and Sexual Violence:** The word "rape" is defined as "unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against the will usually of a female or with a person who is beneath a certain age or incapable of valid consent". The definition includes the action against will and hence, it is the meaning adopted for this study, since it deals with presenting rape stories under war crimes and genocide of ethnic groups. Reference [6] states that male violence against women is fed by their sense of their right to dominate and control over group of people. In case of ISIS invasion to the Northern of Iraq and their desire to genocide the Yazidis, their violence related to their ideologies which allows them to commit sexual violence against Yazidi women.

**C. ISIS's Sexual Jihad:** Reference [7] provided a historical background concerning ISIS and their manifesto on women. He clarified that, ISIS was established group from Al-Qaeda, and was rebranded as ISIS. The founder, Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, ruled Iraq branch of Al Qaeda for many years. Further, his methods were more brutal than those of Al Qaeda and he was killed in an American airstrike in 2006 leaving a legacy of well-equipped groups with military expertise on the battleground [7]. In 2015, ISIS published its first manifesto as a guideline for women under the title: Women of the Islamic State: Manifesto and case study[8]. The manifesto which has 41 pages included enforceable rules. Regardless of the many forcible requirements listed in the manifesto, education and marriage were the hardest. The term Fatwa stands for a legal opinion given by Mufti or Cleric in a situation in which Islamic law is not clear or can be interpreted differently and hence, it is considered as a tool for understanding the message of God clearly [5]. When ISIS invaded the North of Iraq, they declared 'Nikkah

ul Jihad' [5]. It suggests that a man has the permission to marry a woman for a week or for a few hours, to have 'halal' sex with her, so that he is able to pursue his Jihadi mission more effectively on the battlefield [8]. Sinjar, in the North of Iraq, was conquered in August 2014 forcing almost 50,000 Yazidis to escape. Yazidis are a minority of whose religions similar to Zoroastrianism which is an old religion related back to Iran about 3500 years ago [7]. ISIS considered them as evil worshipper's and hence, enslaved their women arguing that they have the right to keep them slaves to be abused [9].

### Research Methodology

**A. Data Collection:** This study is build up on a corpus of data collected from three UK broadsheet newspapers (The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian and the Independent). The data involved reported stories of Yazidi women and girls survived from ISIS sexual violence. The period examined runs from 2014 to 2016 standing for the dates the Yazidi women and girls escaped from ISIS.

**B. Method and Data Analysis:** The analysis of the data was carried out through a mixed methods approach including both a qualitative and a quantitative analysis. Content analysis and discourse analysis were adopted. The analysis was carried out through identifying themes, determining the presence of certain words or concepts with the selected texts and interpreting the use of words through a discourse analysis approach.

### C. Analysis and Discussion:

**1. Headlines and Age Reference:** The Daily Telegraph begins the report with the headline "Yazidi girls as young as eight raped as ISIL sex slaves". It informs us of the identity of the actors in the report including "Yazidi girls" and "Isil". In addition, the headline tells us of the age of the victims "as young as eight". Moreover, it describes the action taking place in the story using the verb "raped". The Guardian starts the report with the headline "Kidnapped by Isis at 15: I never thought I'd see the day when I was free". This elliptical statement begins with the action verb "Kidnapped" to put more emphasis on the action committed while the subject is omitted. The complement of a preposition "by Isis" puts more emphasis on the actors of the action. The Independent starts its report with the headline "Yazidi woman held as Isis sex slave". The headline is not different from that of the Daily Telegraph since it involves a statement including the subject "Yazidi woman", the verb "held" and the complement "as Isil sex slaves". The headline provides more information concerning the actor "Yazidi woman", the action, its frequent co-occurrence and the duration of performing the action through the elliptical statement, "bused every day for seven months". References [10] [11] state that news stories share some

syntactic features which are not used in other forms of discourse. Clearly, all the three broadsheets present their stories through descriptive statements pointing in short what will be reported including, actors (victims and preparatory), victims ages, the case dealt with. Reference [12] concludes that headlines have special language to convey the information to the reader. Moreover, the principal of any kind of news in the newspaper are to inform the reader about the current issues taking place [12]. The headlines in the Daily Telegraph and the Guardian share the same linguistic features including reference to age and use of speech verbs. The ages mentioned play a very important role in the titles since they imply a reference to a very young ages taken as sex slaves. Reference [13] states clearly that using the verbs "say" and "tell" signal the illocutionary act of "saying" presenting a relationship between who is speaking and the speech verb used.

**2. Naming of Persona and Actions:** The three broadsheets used almost all the same expression to name the actors. The Guardian used the expression "Yazidi women and girls" (7 times) in the story reported. The Independent used this expression (6 times). The Daily Telegraph used the expression "Yazidi women and girls" 8 times. The word "captive", "victim" were used in all the broadsheets either once or twice. [Reference [14] states that some feminists avoid using the word "victim". As far as media representation is concerned, both terms "victims" and "survivors" can be problematic and hence it is better to call them "women and girls" in their reports. Another device used in the reported stories is the use of collocations. The three broadsheets used the word "men" in collocation with "fighters", "Jihadists" and "extremist" to refer to Isis members. Mostly in the Daily Telegraph the two terms "fighters" and "Jihadists" collocated with ISIS men and were used 6 times. Only The Independent used different terms to describe the male actors as in "the terror group ISIS", "captor", "perpetrators" to collocate with "fighters" and "jihadists". Most importantly, is that the Independent revealed the fact that giving them their actual description considering what ISIS members as not only fighters or jihadists but rather perpetrators. The verb "raped" is collocated with the verbs "sold", "resold", "abducted", "dragged", "abused" and "traded" mostly in The Daily Telegraph. In The Guardian the verbs "raped" is collocated with "killed", "kidnapped", "raped", "sold", "beaten", "resold" and "abused". Again, the Independent used more verbs to describe the actions and add more details concerning sexual abuse such as "captured", "abused", "forced", "imprisoned", "touched", "raped", "beaten", "humiliated", "tortured" and "abducted". Clearly, all the verbs used share one common thing which is the action of violence. The most important thing is that

some of these verbs were represented in association with numbers to emphasize the actions performed since verbs are looked for in terms of actions [15]. The Daily Telegraph did not provide any reference to the frequency of actions co-occurrence and imply the fact that no emphasis was given to the action itself. The independent put more focus on the verbs occurrence particularly through using the adverb “every day” (4 times) even in the headline and as is shown below: (1): “abused every day for seven month” (2): “..she says she was abused every day by her captor.”(3): “They were very violent and shouting every day”. (4): “He humiliated me every day”[16].

**3. Harrowing Scenes of Sexual Violence:** The Daily Telegraph used different adjectives: (1): “...provides details of one of the most systematic instances of sexual violence in the 21<sup>st</sup>. Century.”(2): “...the women and girls points to one of the most large-scale instances of sexual slavery in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” [17]. The Guardian reported the stories through using different adjectives and superlatives [18]. The report of The Independent put less emphasis on using adjectives and only once an adjective has been reported from the speaker herself: “**I cannot tell how awful these people are**”. In addition, the stories were reported using personal pronouns through providing many narrative statements. The mostly used pronouns are “they, we, and us” It is obvious that these personal pronouns stand for the ideological representation of the actors themselves. The women and girls refer to themselves as “we”, “us” as an in-group identifying marker to refer to all other Yazidi women and girls who still face the same horrible fate. In addition, the reference “ISIS members” stands to all the members performing the crimes of rape, kidnap and sexual violence against the Yazidis [19]. Further, the use of declarative statements to tell the stories conveys different messages to the population since they provide details through their linguistic structures [20]. Another linguistic feature used to represent ISIS members and

their terrible action is through metaphoric expressions as in the statements, “They were like animals”, “they killed my mind”, “Not like humans”.

**4. Justifying the Crimes:** The Daily Telegraph ended the report with direct reference to ISISs documents and manifesto that legalizes their actions. One linguistic device used is the use of nominalization including “permissible” (2 times) to justify all their crimes. In addition, the use of the expression “to have intercourse with” is used to describe sexual violence deflecting from its true nature and accordingly in media discourse it is considered as inappropriate and erotic language [21]. The Guardian, mentioned nothing concerning ISIS documents and instead of condemning their actions and calling for justice, they end up their report talking about offering thereby to the women and girls. The Independent also makes reference to ISIS justifications of sexual violence and again through using the expression “having sex with” (2 times) as is shown in the quoted lines.

**Conclusions:** 1. The three broadsheet Newspapers use almost all similar linguistic devices. Further, all the selected broadsheets described ISIS men who kidnapped, raped and traded children of 8 and younger as sex slaves not as criminals or rapists.

2. On the other hand, the Yazidis are not described as victims and this is a justification of what is happening to them to be permitted and accepted.

3. Moreover, the broadsheets reported the stories through four themes including: “Headlines and Age reference”, naming of persona and actions”, “Harrowing scenes of sexual violence” and justifying the Crimes”.

4. The language used is only informative since it is presented through many narrative and descriptive statements. Metaphorical descriptions are given by the victims to describe the extremists. Use of collocations, passive voice, quantifiers, personal pronouns, adjectives and nominalizations are the mostly used linguistic devices to reveal Isis brutality and ideological perspectives.

## References:

- Echols, A. (1989). *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. ISBN 0-8166-1787-. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yazidis>
- Li, Y. , Zhang, D. & Du, W. (2014). A Case Analysis of Lexical Features in English Broadsheets and Tabloids. *International Journal of English Linguistics*; Vol. 4, No. 4; 2014 ISSN 1923-869X E-ISSN 1923-8703. Published by Canadian Center of Science and Education.
- Reah, D. (1998). *The Language of Newspapers*. London: Routledge. [www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/rape](http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/rape)
- Pharr, S. (1997). *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism*. Berkeley: Chardon Press.
- Trupti Ratnaparkhi, A Different Take on Women’s Sexuality: ‘Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni’; *English Studies International Research Journal* : ISSN 2347-3479 Volume 4 Issue 1 (2016), Pg 40-45

6. Ali, M. (2015). *ISIS and Propaganda: How ISIS Exploits women*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
7. Winter, C. (2015). *Women of the Islamic State: A manifesto by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade*. The Quiliamfoundationorg [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genocide\\_of\\_Yazidis\\_by\\_ISIL](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genocide_of_Yazidis_by_ISIL).
8. Crystal, D. & Davy, D. (1969). *Investigating English Style*. London: Longman
9. van Dijk, Teun A. (1988) *News as Discourse*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
10. T. Venkata Lakshmi, Dr. K.B. Glory, touch in the Select Works of Ruskin Bond: A Study on 'the Guardian Angel' and 'the Kite Maker'; *English Studies International Research Journal : ISSN 2347-3479 Volume 4 Issue 1 (2016), Pg 46-48*
11. Metila, R., A. (2013). *A Discourse Analysis of News Headlines: Diverse Framing for A Hostage-Taking Event*. University of the Philippines: College of Education.
12. Caldas-Coulthard, C. R. (1994) "On reporting reporting: the representation of speech in factual and factional narratives". In M. Coulthard (ed.) *Advances in Written Test Analysis*. London: Routledge.
13. Marhia, N. (2008). *Just representation? Press Reporting and the Reality of Rape*. Evas: Lincoln House.
14. Dr Naresh Kumar Vats, *Issues of Change, Disclosure and Loneliness in Milan Kundera's Novel Slowness ; English Studies International Research Journal : ISSN 2347-3479 Volume 4 Issue 1 (2016), Pg 49-51*
15. O'Donnell, M. B., Ellis, N. C., & Corden, G. (2012). *Exploring semantics in verb argument constructions using community identification algorithms*. The International Conference on Network Science NETSCI, Northwestern University.
16. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/yazidi-woman-isis-sex-slave-islamic-state-jihadist-a6930251.html>. Last retrieved in Mar-14-2016.
17. Rajasi Ray, "We" in the Indian Milieu; *English Studies International Research Journal : ISSN 2347-3479 Volume 4 Issue 1 (2016), Pg 52-56*
18. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11539492/Yazidi-girls-as-young-as-eight-raped-as-Isil-sex-slaves-finds-report.html>. Last retrieved in April-15-2015.
19. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/mar/17/kidnapped-by-isis-at-15-i-never-thought-id-see-the-day-when-i-was-free>. Last retrieved in Mar- 17-2016.
20. Brewer, P. (2001). *The many Faces of Social Identity: Implications of Political Psychology*, 22(1), 115-125.
21. Li, Z. (2002). *Interpersonal Meaning in Discourse*. Shanghia: Shanghia Foreign language education press.
22. Bismita Pradhan, *Maya Angelou: A Caged Bird Singing; English Studies International Research Journal : ISSN 2347-3479 Volume 4 Issue 1 (2016), Pg 57-58*
23. Braber, N. (2014). *Representation of Domestic Violence in two British Newspapers, The Guardian and the Sun, 2009-2011*. Nottingham: Nottingham Trent University.

\*\*\*

Dr. Farah Abdul Jabbar Mahdi Almnaseer  
 Al-Mustansiriya University,  
 College Of Arts, Department Of English Language And Literature  
 Baghdad, Iraq