# The Representation of Radical Islamists in the NYC and USA Today American Newspapers: A Critical Discourse Analysis Study

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## Abstract

This study fulfills a critical discourse analysis study of the radical Islamist news in American New York Times and USA Today newspapers. The study aims to find how the radical Islamist are represented in American newspapers and whether those newspapers manipulate the language used to serve certain purposes and how this effect on Muslims in general. The hypotheses proposed to achieve the aims of this study are; American newspapers manipulate the language for ideological purposes and that the way radical Islamist are presented effects on moderate Muslims. Moreover, the study presents a brief theoretical background about critical discourse analysis. The model eclectics for this analysis, is made up of van Dijk (1988) for the linguistic level, and van Dijk's Ideological Square (1998) and Yul's (1986) presupposition triggers for the ideological level. The analysis of the data leads to the following conclusions; American newspapers do manipulate the language of the articles and that no difference is made between Radical and moderated Muslims, this effect on moderated Muslims in a negative way.
**Keywords:** CDA, radical Islamists, NYC, USA Today

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, radicalism is one of the most important issues that face the whole world since it directly touch the life of people. A terror attack can take place anywhere since there is no specific target even Muslims are also subjected to attacks made by radicals. It worth mentioning that media is the main source through which people can obtain information about what happen in the world. For this reason, it is important to shed lights on the role media plays in presenting radical Islamists.

Therefore, the current study focuses on analyzing the language used in presenting radical Islamists in American newspapers, namely the New York Time (henceforth, NYC) and USA Today, to highlight the ideologies and the language manipulation that occurs in the discourse of the newspapers.

## 2. What is Critical Discourse Analysis?

Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth, CDA) is a branch of applied linguistics and it has its root in the critical theory of language. CDA has flourished over the last three decades and associated with scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Tuen van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak. It uses linguistic analysis as the main principle for the interpretation of texts. By the 1990s the label 'Critical Discourse Analysis' came to be used as an interdisciplinary approach operating at two levels (micro and macro), incorporating both linguistic and social analysis and therefor proving itself to be a separate theory of language and hence a different kind of linguistics (Kress,1990:94).

It is clear that CDA is a field of study that aims to study and analyze discourses (spoken or written) as a social practice to find out the discursive source of power, inequality, dominance, and racism. It also investigates how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within a political, economic, historical, and social context. Because of this, Van Dijk (2001:252) defines CDA as a type of analytical study that is mainly concerned with the way social issues such as abuse, dominance, and inequality are legislated, reproduced and held by the text and talk in social and political discourses. With this position, CDA aims to understand the nature of social inequality and finally reject it.

According to Fairclough (2001:131), people's social practices are not visible in the discourse, in the sense that they cannot be easily identified. Thus, the critical element, as a consequence, is what makes CDA different in being able to uncover the social discursive practices of the people.

Wodak (2001:2) mentions that CDA may be seen as basically concerned with "analyzing structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as stated in language". In other words, the general aim of CDA is critically examining the effect of the social inequality on the discourse, this mean how the language user or the discourse expresses, shapes, and points out the social inequality.

## 3. Radical Islamists

Al-Qaeda and many other individuals and movements such as ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) constitutes the global jihadist movements. The origin of these movements can be traced back to a group of Muslims known

as "Salafis" (commonly known as "Wahhabist") the term denotes those who follows as an example the companions of Prophet Mohammad who learned the right teaching of Islam. Through time, the teachings of Prophet Mohammed were changed. Some of the Salafis believe that violence "jihad" should be used to establish Islamic State and face the United States and its allies (Wicktorowicz, 2005:75).

The word "jihad" have different meaning : the first is related to the Holly Quran word "Jahidohm" which is derived from "jihad" to refer to the act of preaching people by using words of the Holly Quran, the second meaning which is adopted by the "Salafi" is to attack and use violence to spread Islam (Hamid,2011:34-5). There are other meaning to "jihad" but the two mentioned are the most important, since the first one represents the real teaching of Islam, followed by Moderate Muslims, and the second is the one followed by Radicals.

## 4. The Model of Analysis
The following section presents a brief description for the model elected for the study.

### 4.1 The Linguistic Level
The linguistic level is restricted to the syntactic, semantic and rhetoric features of language.
### 4.1.1 Syntactic Analysis
The syntactic level in this study is expressed through passivization.
4.1.1.1 Passive Voice
Passivization is the first linguistic component of the model followed.    According to Quirk et.al (1985.159), voice is a grammatical category which makes it possible to present the sentence in two different forms without changing the fact reported. For example,
"-The butler murder the detective. (Active)
-The detective was murdered by the butler." (Passive)
In addition, the changing from the active to the passive involves rearranging the two clause elements, and the addition of by. These changes are: (a) the subject of the active becomes the agent of the passive; (b) the object of the active becomes the subject of the passive; and (c) the addition of the preposition by before the agent which is considered as an optional element (ibid.159-160).
Fairclough's studies (1989, 2003) have shown that the ideological effects in discursive discourse. Generally, obscuring the act of the agent is normally achieved by the use of passive voice and nominalization. Passivation gives the speaker or the writer the choice to remove the agent to create what is known as agentless passive voice (Simpson 1993).
### 4.1.2 Semantic and Rhetoric Analysis
This is related to the following semantic features: Modality, Presupposition, and Disclaimer. In addition to Hyperbole which is related to Rhetoric.
4.1.2.1 Modality
According to Quirk et.al (1984:219), modality is defined as the way in which the meaning of the clause is qualified to the decision of the speaker about the probability of the proposition. All scholars investigate modality through examining the meaning of the model verbs. The constraining factors of meaning in model verbs were divided into two types: those that involve people's control on the action such as 'permission', 'obligation', and 'violation'. And those concerned with the people's prediction of what is going to happen such as 'possibility' and prediction'.
4.1.2.2 Presupposition
Yule (2000:27) sees that presupposition has been related with the utilization of an expansive number of words, expressions, and structures. These etymological shapes are thought to be pointers of potential presupposition, which can just wind up noticeably genuine presupposition in setting with speakers. Hence, he states six sorts of presupposition that are: **the existential, the factive, the non-factive, the lexical, the structural** and **the counterfactual.**

Table (1) Types of Presuppositions

| Type of Presupposition | Definition |
|---|---|
| Existential | The existence of an object |
| Factive | Refers to the facts associated with verbs such as know, and realize |
| Non-factive | Assume that what follow is not true, usually related to verbs such as dreamed, and imagined |
| Lexical | The use of the verb with its asserted meaning is interrupted with the presupposition of another non-asserted meaning |
| Structural | Certain structures presuppose that part of the structure is assumed to be true |
| Counterfactual | What is presupposed is  the opposite of truth |

4.1.2.3 Disclaimer
van Dijk (2013:187) states that the classical structure of disclaimer is that the first part focusing on the positive and good characteristic of the in-group, and then followed by the second part which immediately starts with 'but' in which the speakers say negative things about the out-group. There are different types of disclaimers, such as:
"Apparent Concession: They may be very smart, but….
Apparent Empathy: They may have had problems, but…
Apparent Apology: Excuse me, but…
Apparent Effort: We do everything we can, but…
Transfer: I have no problems with them, but my clients…
Reversal, blaming the victim: THEY are not discriminated against,
but WE are!"
4.1.2.4 Hyperbole
Hyperbole is a figure of speech used to describe an object, an idea and other that may look exaggerated. So it is mainly concerned with describing an action or event in an overestimated way (Perrine 1969:110). According to van Dijk (2000:73), the bad qualities and characteristic of others (out-group) are often expressed in a hyperbolic form and sometime these forms are implied in a kind of metaphor.

**4.2 Ideological Level**
The ideological level is expressed by van Dijk's ideological square (1995).  van Dijk (1995:33)  suggested the "Ideological aguare" model which is based on the "twin strategies" of "in-group" positive description and "out-group" negative description. In short, the ideological square has the following possibilities:
"• Emphasize positive things about *us*.
• Emphasize negative things about *them*.
• De-emphasize negative things about *us*.
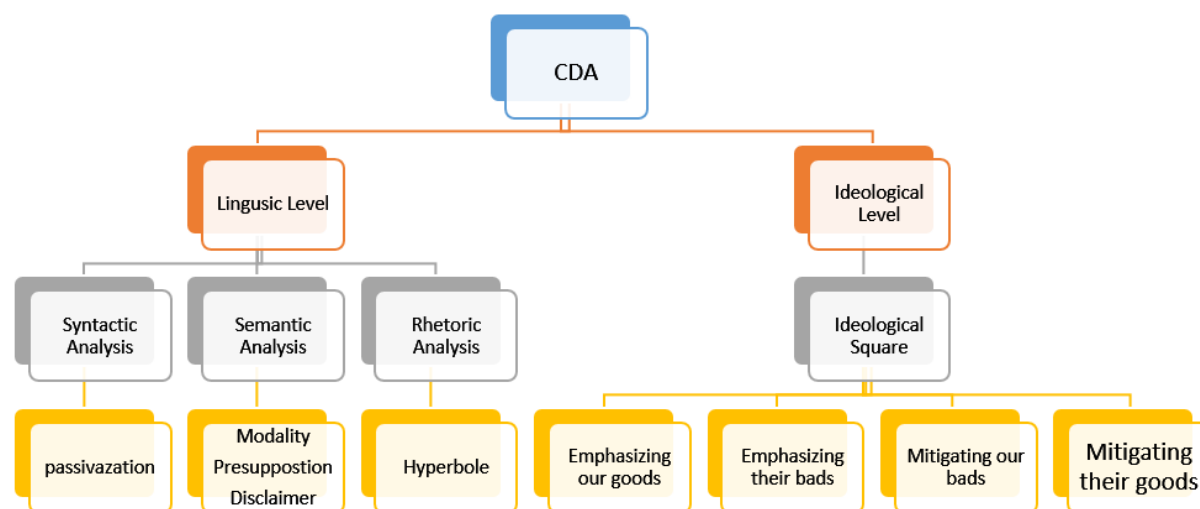• De-emphasize positive things about *them*."



Figure (1) The eclectic model for the analysis

**5. The Analysis**
The study is based on the analysis of 4 articles selected from two American newspapers , namely, the New York Times and the USA Today.

**5.1 The New York Times Articles**
This section deals with the analysis of the New York Times articles. Table (2) summarize the headlines of the articles, in addition to date and source of publication.

Table (2) Summary of NYC articles

| No. | Article's Headline | Date and Source |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Militant Islamists are Suspected in Slaying of Hindu Priest in Bangladesh | Manik, Julfikar and Najar, Nida, June 7, 2017 |
| 2 | At Least 29 Dead After Islamist Attacks on Somali Hotel | Reuters (Biryabarema, Elias and Houreld, Katharine), October 29,2017 |

**Article 1**

"Militant Islamists Are Suspected in Slaying of Hindu Priest in Bangladesh" through this headline, the general meaning of the article may be concluded. In addition, it focuses on the way the priest was murdered to emphasize on the barbarity of that militia.

Table (3) Passivization in NYC Article 1

| Article's Headline | Passive | Active | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Militant Islamists are Suspected in Slaying of Hindu Priest in Bangladesh | 8 | 23 | 31 |
| Frequency | 26% | 74% | |

The passive voice scores (8,26%) out of (30). The use of the passive voice according to (Kriszner & Mandell, 2012:684) is either when the doer of the action is more important than the receiver or when the writer does not know who did the action. In this case, the doer of the action is "the Islamic State" as they claim responsibility in an official announcement, but the writers prefer to give them no importance by using the passive whenever they talk about the murder of the priest "A Hindu priest was hacked to death on Tuesday morning…in a series of killing by Islamic militia". The act of killing is much more important than those who did it. Within the article, the writers refer to two more crimes committed by the militia "on Sunday, the wife of police official known for pursuing Islamist militants was fatally stabbed and shot" and " a Christian grocer was hacked to death". The reason behind such use of passive is that both Al—Qaeda and the Islamic State declare responsibility about the action so it is difficult to determine who did what.

According Fairclough (1992:142) modality shows the degree to which the writer or the speaker is related to the participant in the discourse. This mean that the writer expresses his thoughts about what should happen or how should it happen through the use of modality. This article is a model free; this may mean that writers are much more interested in showing the facts without involving themselves in the discourse.

Table (4) Presupposition in NYC article 1

| Trigger | Type of Trigger | Presupposition |
|---|---|---|
| Mr.Ganguly's throat was slit" and "almost beheaded" | Factive | Mr. Ganguly is dead |
| "The initial targets were secular writers and intellectuals, but recently the victims have included foreigners, gay activities and members of religious minorities" | Structural | All people are threaten by the Islamic State |

Regarding presupposition, the verbs "slay" and "slit" mean to kill an animal in a violent way. Thus, when the article mentions that the priest was *"Mr.Ganguly's throat was slit" and "almost beheaded"*. It presupposes that Mr. Ganguly is dead. Moreover, the verb "slit" suggests that the militia treats people just like animals and that they act with the law of the jungle. In addition, the sentence *"The initial targets were secular writers and intellectuals, but recently the victims have included foreigners, gay activities and members of religious minorities"* presuppose that the target of the Islamic militia is not fixed, they can target any members in society. Since their targets extended to include people who do believe in Allah so it is not a matter of having faith in Allah or not it is a matter of destruction (structural).

Since writers are narrating the actions, no disclaimer is made regarding the Islamic state or the Bangladesh police.

As far as hyperbole is concerned, there is no use of exaggeration throughout the whole article.

**Article 2**

The headline "At Least 29 Dead After Islamist Attacks on Somali Hotel" expresses the overall idea of the article, that Islamist are involved in Somali attacks.

Table (5) Passivization in NYC Article 2

| Article's Headline | Passive | Active | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| At Least 29 Dead After Islamist Attacks on Somali Hotel | 9 | 26 | 35 |
| Frequency | 26% | 74% | |

Passive voice marks (9, 26%) out of (34). In the sentence, for example, "An Islamic attack on a hotel in Mogadishu ended on Sunday", the article focuses on the action and the results made by the Islamic militia rather than on the victims. What is important is that, the lead paragraph begins with "Islamists…" which includes all Muslims whether radical or not. This may create a negative idea towards Muslims in general. Then in the following clause, "after 29 people were killed…" it focuses on the number of the victims to show the enormity

of the attack and to ensure that the identity of the killer is not confirmed since the police also involved in the siege.

Table (6) Modality Analysis in NYC Article 4

| Type of Modality | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Prediction | 1 |
| Possibility | 1 |

As far as modality is concerned, the writer uses model verbs in two occasions: the first one predicts that the insurgents can carry more attacks in Somali and in this case, there is an indirect accusation that the government should step in and take a role in stopping such attacks. In addition, such prediction may refer that Islamic state is about to do more attacks in the area *"The attackers proved once again that insurgents can carry out deadly assaults…"*. The second occasion is related with the possibility that the number of the victims may rise because the attack was massive "*the death toll may raise*".

Table (7) Presupposition in NYC Article 2

| Trigger | Type of Trigger | Presupposition |
|---|---|---|
| "that insurgents can carry out deadly assaults…" | Lexical | All the attacks are carried by Muslims |

Moving to presupposition, the word "insurgent" means a person who fight against the government or against an invading force. So they could be out of any religion, but still they fight against what they believe to be illegal. When the article mention, *"The attackers proved once again that insurgents can carry out deadly assaults…"* and the headline mention that the attack was Islamist related .Thus, this presuppose that all the insurgents against the government are all Muslims. However, no Islamist group claimed responsibility for that attack.

Concerning disclaimer, transfer type occurs in *"Al Shabaab has not claimed responsibility for the attack, but the method- a large truck bomb- is one it has often uses"*. Where the attack was attributed to Al-Shabbab Islamic militia just because the method used is similar to the one they used in their attacks.

Hyperbole in this article occurs in the number of the victims. In all cases, no accurate number was given concerning the amount of people killed or injured in the attacks. The article mentions *"...killed more than 350 people" and "more than 50 people are still missing"*. Therefore, it may aim to exaggerate the number of the victims to draw more attention about how tragic it was.

**5.2 USA Today Articles**

This section deals with the analysis of USA Today articles. Table (8) includes the headline of the articles, date and source of publication.

Table (8) Summary of USA Today Articles

| No. | Article's Headline | Date and Source |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Islamic State claims credit for nightclub attack in Turkey | Bacon, John, January 2,2017 |
| 2 | NYC terror attack: Islamic State group claims responsibility, without evidence | Hjelmgaard, Kim and Bacon, John, November 3, 2017 |

**Article 1**

This article is headed "Islamic State claims credit for night club attack in Turkey". The headline suggest that the Islamic State have the "credit" of the explosion in Reina nightclub in Turkey in which victims were from different countries.

Table (9) Passivization in USA Today Article 1

| Article's Headline | Passive | Active | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Islamic State claims credit for night club attack in Turkey | 5 | 36 | 41 |
| Frequency | 12% | 88% | |

This article is related to the attack on a Turkish nightclub in Istanbul, passivation marks (5, 12%) out of (41).As the number declares the article state the details related to the attack very directly except. In "Reina could have been targeted by Turks who view Reina as a symbol of western elitism" the Penn State professor and Middle East expert, James Piazza, blames Turks who consider Reina, the night club involved in the attack, as a symbol of western influence on the Islamic Turkey and by this he could be clearing the name of Islamic state. The focus was on the idea that Reina is attacked because of its bad influence on the Turkish society.  In addition, it is clearly indicated in the article that the attack as because Turkish involvement in the Syrian crisis and it was made by Jihadist and not a militia as the tradition in almost all news related to the Islamic attacks. However, other use of passivation are related to the witness who does not know the identity of the attacker so his use of passive voice to refer to the attacker is justified by this fact "I was shot in the (expletive) leg, man".

Table (10) Modality Analysis in USA Today Article 1

| Type of Modality | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Obligation | 1 |
| Prediction | 2 |
| Possibility | 1 |

Regarding modality, the model verbs used in this article are: should, will, and could. Stating with "should" which have an obligatory meaning. The Islamic Group in its responsibility declaration insisted that the blood of Muslims shed by the Turkish airplanes will not be forgotten and this and the following attacks are their revenge "*Turkish government should know that the blood of Muslims shed with airplanes and artillery fire will, with God's permission, ignite a fire in their own land*". In addition, they use "will" to firmly state that what Turkey do in Syria is going back to it, and that the Islamic State will revenge to all the Muslims killed in Turkish airstrikes on Syria. Moreover, the Prime Minister Binali Yildirim announced that they will punish anyone supporting or praising terrorism "*praising terrorism could have "criminal consequence""*", the model verb "could" have a predictive tone. The second occurrence of the predictive tone is in "*Association head Metin Feyzioglu said her group would file complaints against all people who praise terror on social media*" the use of "would" to warn those who support terrorism behind the scene. Finally, "*Reina could have been targeted by Turks…*" this suggest the possibility that the nightclub is attacked by Turks who believe that such nightclub could effect the Islamic society in Turkey.

Table (11) Presupposition in USA Today Article 1

| Trigger | Type of Trigger | Presupposition |
|---|---|---|
| "The jihadist group said in a statement released through Amaq News Agency" | Factive | The group is responsible for the attack, and Islam accept the act of killing innocent people |
| "Islamic state's role in the tragedy is unclear" | Structural | Islamic State's claim is not true |

As far as presupposition is concerned, the word "Jihadist" is taken from "jihad" which means to fight against the enemies of Islam, this word is mentioned in the article to describe the militia that attack the nightclub "*The jihadist group said in a statement released through Amaq News Agency*". The use of such word presuppose that this group is accepted as relating to Islam and that killing innocent people is something that Islam accept, this is way far from truth. Moreover, it is included in the article that the "*Islamic state's role in the tragedy is unclear*" this presuppose that the Islamic state claim is considered untrue and that the Islamic State have no clear role in the attack. However, this could be seen as taking the responsibility out from the Islamic State and place it on Turks who see this club as "*a symbol of Western elitism*".

Concerning disclaimer, the apparent apology occurs in the statement of the U.S. embassy in Ankara after warning the U.S. citizen from travelling to Turkey saying that they have no idea that such attack will take place in Turkey. Moreover, the embassy rejects that they have any knowledge about any specific target "U.S. officials had no knowledge of any specific target when issued a general warning about travel to Turkey days before the blast".

Moving to hyperbole, the noun "will"  which means " lust", or " passion" is used to exaggerate the mental state  that the attacker is expressing when he open fires on the victims killing police man and a civilian before he inter the nightclub where more than 500 people were there. Moreover, the number of the people in the crime scene could be considered as a hyperbole.

**Article 2**
The article's headline is "NYC terror attack: Islamic State group claims responsibility, without evidence". It suggests that the attack made by Saipov is suspected to be the responsibility of Islamic State since they lack evidence. This could be considered as clearing the name of Islamic State.

Table (12) Passivization in USA Today Article 2

| Article's Headline | Passive | Active | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| NYC terror attack: Islamic State group claims responsibility, without evidence | 3 | 27 | 30 |
| Frequency | 10% | 90% | |

Passive voice scores (3, 10%) out of (30). The passive voice is used to talk about the details related to the process of keeping Saipove under custody, while other details were made with active voice such as those related with Trump's remarks and the Islamic State claims of responsibility. However, this could be seen as if the article does not want to focus on the doer of the action more than those who were affected by the action and the role of the police. In the sentence "He was shot by police immediately after the attack but is expected to survive"  the role of the police is highly emphasized as they immediately reacted after the attack but at the same time they explain that the shot he get was not deadly and he will survive in the end. However, the fact that the article mentions that his injury is not deadly one could be seen as presenting the In-group in a positive way, even if he

carry out an attack the police did not punish him for what he did by shooting him dead.

Table (13) Modality Analysis in USA Today Article 2

| Type of Modality | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Obligation | 3 |
| Possibility | 2 |

Regarding modality, model verbs are used five times in this article. The first use is in *"repeatedly proclaiming Saipov should receive the death penalty"* which insist on the idea that Saipove, the attacker, should take responsibility for what he did and he must be punished for what he did. The second and third use of the model verb shows the possibility that Saipove has no chance in getting rid from punishment because what he did. In addition, what Trump said makes it difficult for any jury to give him a reduce judgment *"Legal experts say that Trump's remarks may make Saipove successful prosecution more difficult because they could influence any potential jury". The fourth use of model verb is in "should move fast"* which suggests that any legal step concerning Saipove punishment should be made quickly, to prevent others from committing the same mistake. The last use of model verb expresses the obligation that Saipove should pay for the innocent souls that he murdered, not those related with his attack only but all the attacks made against American citizen everywhere in the world. However, it seems that the article blame Saipove for every Islamic State attack though it is mentioned that no clear evidence for his belonging to Islamic State " *They will pay a big price for every attack on us!"*.

Table (14) Presupposition in USA Today Article 2

| Trigger | Type of Trigger | Presupposition |
|---|---|---|
| "it did not provide any evidence for the claim" | Lexical | No evidence to support their claim of responsibility (NOT responsible for the attack) |
| "the newspaper did not name the attacker" | Lexical | Islamic State's claim is not true |
| "domestically radicalized" | Lexical | There is an inactive cells in the United State |

Concerning presupposition, the auxiliaries in the following sentences *"it did not provide any evidence for the claim"* ,and *"the newspaper did not name the attacker"* presuppose that the claim of responsibility made by the Islamic is nothing but a lay made by them to great more impact on people. Moreover, the word "domestically", means activities inside the country, in *"domestically radicalized"* presupposes that there are inactive cells of terrorist in the United State that is responsible for practicing and directing the terrorist and that they are not coming from outside.

Regarding disclaimer, the article declines the Islamic State responsibility for the action saying that their claim lack evidence, this kind of disclaimer is known as apparent empathy. Though the Islamic State claims responsibility for the attack but still the article suspect that because the national channel of the Islamic State failed to give the name of the attacker, even with the existence of Islamic State videos on his phone.

Moving to hyperbole, the repetition of "no evidence" throughout the article is to exaggerate that the claims of Islamic State is nothing but a big lay and that the Islamic State seek to get credit for thing that they did not do. The "no evidence" phrase is repeated more than three times to support their belief that the Islamic State is not behind the attack.

## 6. Ideological Square
Concerning van Dijk's "ideological square", both newspapers represent Muslims, in general, as radical whether they have participated in a supporting terrorism or they were moderated. For this reason, they are considered as an Out-group. On the other hand, western people, whether they have terror tendencies or not, are represented positively as In-group.

## 7. Conclusion
The study concludes the following:
1- At the linguistic level, the analysis shows that American newspapers, represented by NYC and USA Today, manipulate the language in different ways in order to serve their ideologies. The American newspapers use passivization whenever they want to focus on the receiver of the action more than the doer to gain sympathy with the victims and to tell part of the truth only.
2- However, most of the backgrounds and facts related with the radical Islamist are presupposed from the discourse rather than presented directly. Moreover, Neither NYC nor USA Today pays any attention to moderate Muslims and how they think or react to issues related to radicalism. The whole focus is on radical Muslims as representative for Islam and this is far from truth, since Islam reject such hideous acts.
3- In addition, The Out-group represented by all Muslims are always portrayed as barbarous, and people seeking for lust in killing innocents, while the In-group ,with or without terror tendencies, are the victims of such barbarous acts and that's way they are always represented as the side that overs condolence and comfort.

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